

**OUT OF THE FOREST AND INTO THE MARKET: SOCIAL AND  
ECONOMIC TRANSFORMATIONS IN A BORNEAN FORAGING  
SOCIETY**

by

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**DEDICATION**

To my grandmothers,

Elise Soobik  
and  
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## ABSTRACT

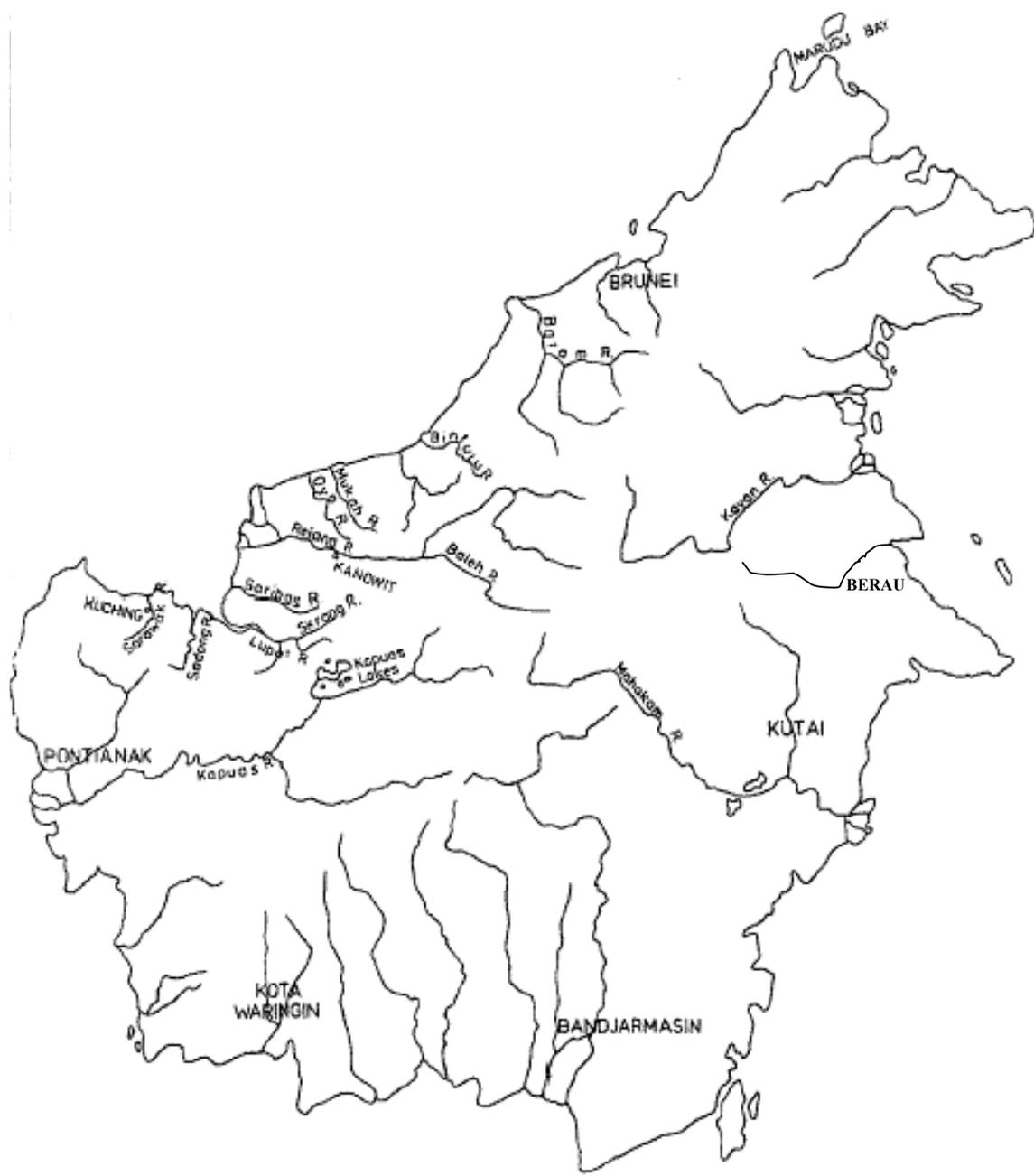
This dissertation is an account of a Bornean hunting and gathering group, the Punan of Long Suluy, as it transitions from an economy based primarily in subsistence foraging to one increasingly oriented to the market and about the accompanying social shifts associated with that transition. It focuses on the period stretching from the mid-1960s until 2004 during which time an Arab Indonesian trader managed to establish and maintain what constituted a one-man monopoly over the Punans' trade in commercialized forest products. The relationship between the Punan and this trader began as one based solely in economics and eventually transformed into a type of patron-client relationship embedded in terms of mutual obligations and quasi-kin relations. As the Punan became increasingly involved in market relations and to adopt values based in material accumulation and an identity referenced outside of their own social group, they became increasingly adversarial with the trader, transitioning from subservient laborers to competitors in the forest product trade. This dissertation investigates both the shifting political economy of the Punan during this time period and their internal social dynamics as they negotiate their increasing participation in the market.

**Keywords:** Punan, Borneo, hunter-gatherers, globalization



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MAP 1: INDONESIA



MAP 2: MAJOR RIVERS AND 'PRE-COLONIAL' STATES (Healy 1985)



**INTRODUCTION**  
**INTO THE FOREST**

“That was it! He had discovered a river!”  
-Joseph Conrad, *Almayer's Folly*'

In late August 1887, a young Joseph Conrad, traveling as first mate on the Arab owned steamer the *Vidar* sailing out of its home port at Singapore, arrived at a place Conrad would later describe as ‘one of the lost, forgotten, unknown places of the earth’, the Berau River on the Northeast Coast of Borneo.<sup>1</sup> Arriving at the Berau’s delta in the sea of Celebes, the *Vidar* carefully made its way around the coral reefs, mud flats and yellow sandbanks that protected the almost hidden entrance to this shallow tropical river. Navigating upstream on that steamy August day the ship passed thick twisted mangrove swamps close to the river’s delta, occasional clearings of Nipa palms and coconut trees and stretches of thick equatorial rainforest – camphor, ironwood, ebony, sandalwood – rising to heights of 220 feet. Conrad, standing on the ship’s deck, caught site of the large-nosed *proboscis* monkeys, easily scampering along precarious branches high above the river, and the giant crocodiles sunning themselves on the river’s edge. He noticed the famed orchids high in the tree tops which were collected by native peoples and sold to visiting traders. And finally, about forty miles upstream, around a bend in the river where the Berau intersects with its two main tributaries, the Sigah and Kelai rivers, Conrad had his first glimpse of the *Vidar*’s principal destination, the small river town of

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<sup>1</sup> *Lord Jim*, p.399

Tanjung Redeb, nothing more than a small clustering of bamboo houses along the river's edge with only one path running behind them (Allen 1965, Sherry 1966).

Enclave to Sulu pirates since the eighteenth century, home to two competing Malay Sultanates, and the unfortunate destination for thousands of slaves captured in piratical raids among the many islands of the archipelago, Tanjung Redeb would provide the setting, and many of the characters, for a number of Conrad's novels including *Almayer's Folly*, *Lord Jim* and *Outcast of the Islands*.<sup>2</sup> Although Conrad addresses themes of interest to a nineteenth century western audience, he situates the unfolding of the human drama in the daily politics and intrigues of the many traders – Malay, Arab, Chinese and European – who made their way to the Berau to seek their fortunes. The objects of their ambitions, efforts, and fantasies were the lucrative forest products of Berau's interior – *gutta percha*, birds' nests, *gaharu*, beeswax, *gum dammar*, gold – collected and controlled by the upriver forest tribes, collectively referred to by the coastal peoples as 'Dayaks'.<sup>3</sup> Although Conrad only spent, in total, a little over three weeks in Berau, his physical descriptions of the river and of the settlement are highly accurate.<sup>4</sup> And while the emotions and motives that he ascribes to his characters arise in great part from his own imagination and cultural background, his evocative descriptions of the struggles

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<sup>2</sup> Conrad uses the fictional names *Patusan*, *Sambir*, *Samburan*, and *Darat-el-Salam* to refer to Tanjung Redeb.

<sup>3</sup> *Gutta Percha* is tree resin generally mixed with latex and used in surgery, as riding whips, as a grinding agent and molded into handles for choppers. Also used as an insulation for telegraph wires or cables in submarines, corks, golf balls and dental floss (Peluso 1983a).

*Gaharu*, also known as Eagles or Aloes wood, is an aromatic wood highly in demand as a fumigatory and incense in the Mideast and Asia as well as for its medicinal properties (see Chapter 2).

*Gum dammar*, commonly referred to as *damar* in Indonesian, is a general term for a variety of tree resins used as boat caulking (water-proofing), torches, varnish and turpentine (see Chapter 2).

<sup>4</sup> The three and a half weeks were spread over several visits over four and a half months (Sherry 1966).

among the many parties to control trade on the river and the dream of wealth emanating from the upriver areas reflects in large part a reality that existed at Conrad's time and still exists today. As Conrad would write in his first novel,

“The coast population of Borneo believes implicitly in diamonds of fabulous value, in gold mines of enormous richness in the interior. And all the imaginings are heightened by the difficulty of penetrating far inland, especially on the north-east coast, where the Malays and the river tribes of Dyaks or Head-hunters are eternally quarrelling.”

*Almayer's Folly* (p.53)

In February 2003, about 116 years or so after Conrad, I arrived in Tanjung Redeb, traveling by air, via Jakarta, rather than by sea from Singapore. Now the capital of the Berau district, the larger urban area of Tanjung Redeb at this time boasts a population of 50,000 inhabitants, a large percentage of them migrants from neighboring islands—Java, Bali, Sulawesi, Flores – who have come to find work in the booming coal and logging industries of Berau.<sup>5</sup> The town itself hums with the sound of steady traffic and new construction. Villages, for the most part, cover the banks of the Berau River almost all the way down to the coast, and most of the forest surrounding Tanjung Redeb has been destroyed. Yet *proboscis* monkeys can still be sighted in the scattering of trees along the river banks and occasional crocodiles still lift their eyes above the river's surface. Unlike Conrad, however, who never ventured into the upriver areas (and wisely so given the presence of head hunters at the time), I took a left turn at Tanjung Redeb, traveling up the Kelai River to the source of the forest products that had drawn traders to Berau in Conrad's day and continues to lure them still. While Conrad came to Borneo seeking a

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<sup>5</sup> The larger urban area of Tanjung Redeb includes the town of Tanjung Redeb itself along with the towns of Gunung Tabor and Sambiliung.

backdrop upon which to set his stories, I came on an anthropological quest, seeking to understand how a specific group of indigenous foraging people – the Punan – were adapting to a changing social and economic environment.

‘Punan’ is the generic name given to the many hunting and gathering peoples of, primarily East Kalimantan, Borneo and probably originally meant something like ‘people who wander in the forest’. Given the lack of research among the Punan, however, it is still unclear how, and to what extent, the many different groups are related. Historically Punan were nomadic hunters and gatherers traveling in small bands in the interior rainforests subsisting primarily on the heart of the wild sago palm and wild pig. Yet they have also been involved in exchange relationships, to varying degrees, with the swidden agricultural peoples of the island possibly since the time when their ancestors first arrived on Borneo.<sup>6</sup> Once Borneo entered into regional and global trade networks in the first millennium A.D., the Punan and other hunter gatherer groups became the primary source of the forest products that entered into the riverine trading networks with the coastal centers. Yet the 1980s witnessed the last of the strictly nomadic Punan, and, by this time, almost all Punan have adopted swidden agriculture, to one extent or another, and are increasingly engaged in the market economy and state structures.

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<sup>6</sup> There is debate among Borneo specialists as to how much interaction there was historically between foraging groups and agricultural groups in Borneo. At the heart of the debate is the question as to whether the tropical rainforest environment was rich enough in carbohydrates to support an exclusively hunting and gathering mode of subsistence. To reference this debate see Bailey (1989), Brosius (1991), Endicott (1991), Headland (1997), Headland (1991)

Although I came to Borneo interested in looking at how the Punan were changing and the impact of the incursion of market capitalism into their lives in the rainforest, I had not yet identified a specific research site and was uncertain what I would find there when I did.<sup>7</sup> One of the most frustrating, and yet often most productive aspects of ethnographic research, is precisely the unwillingness of a research site to accommodate itself to a pre-formulated research design; what one finds in a research site is often much more interesting than what one went looking for. By a serendipitous turn of events that I will not bore the reader with, I was fortunate to arrive finally in Long Suluy, the uppermost village on the Kelai River in the Berau District in northeastern East Kalimantan. I will give a much fuller description of the research site in the pages that follow, but as a graduate student in anthropology I felt that the Borneo rainforest had handed me my dissertation topic on a silver platter. Here was a Punan community that was still heavily dependent on subsistence hunting and gathering in the rainforest and had only adopted swidden rice cultivation, for all practical purposes, in the late 1990s. The Punan of Long Suluy were, and still are, heavily involved in gathering forest products for the market, at this time gold, and, of central ethnographic interest, the Punans' trade in forest products had been heavily controlled by an Arab Indonesian trader, Hajji Jupri, since about the mid 1970s.<sup>8</sup> During my eighteen months in Long Suluy I studied the relationship between the Punan and Jupri in depth, conducting fieldwork both among the Punan and with Jupri's family and workers both in Long Suluy and in the capital city of Tanjung

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<sup>7</sup> I conducted preliminary fieldwork for three months in the fall of 2000.

<sup>8</sup> *Hajji* is the title given to a Muslim man who has made the pilgrimage, the '*haj*', to Mecca in Saudi Arabia. *Hajjia* is the equivalent term for a woman who has made the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Redeb. I was particularly fortunate to have been conducting my research at a key time in the history of that relationship; I arrived at a time when Jupri still exerted strong command over the economy and the psychic lives of the Punan and by the time I left the Punan had largely, and quite dramatically, severed their relationship with him. For some of the community this break in the relationship represented an exciting and liberating victory; for others it was a cause of anxiety, and even fear, as they had come to depend on Jupri and they equated their economic well being with his arrival in the village.

Most of the anthropological literature that examines the incursion of market capitalism into local communities focuses on peasant agricultural populations. Thick ethnographic description of situations in which market capitalism enters into and transforms those groups which still primarily engage in a hunting and gathering mode of production are scarce; those which do exist are mostly confined to the African continent, particularly hunting-gathering groups of the Kalahari – an area with vastly different historical trajectories, environment and social dynamics from the Southeast Asian rainforest.<sup>9</sup> In this dissertation I am less interested, however, in abstract theorizing of global capitalism than I am in the articulation between market based forms and foraging social and economic forms in a particular ethnographic site.

Yet even aside from this particular question of a globalizing market economy, in comparison with many of the other of the world's hunting and gathering peoples there is

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Wilmsen (1989) although he primarily relies on historical data.

relatively little ethnographic information about Borneo's foraging people. In part this reflects anthropology's neglect of South and Southeast Asian foragers in general. As Morrison (2002) notes, hunter-gatherer research has tended to focus on groups in Africa, Australia and North America. This imbalance can be attributed in part to the 'law of increasing returns' in which researchers (or funders) are somewhat loath to stake out new territory and migrate rather to already established research projects, often students following professors. Second, however, is that much hunter-gatherer research has been undertaken by archaeologists, and thus research has tended towards arid areas where the dry hot climates have been generous in their preservation of the human past. The wet tropical climate and acidic soils of the Asian rainforests, on the other hand, are fast to eat away at human material culture and, given that hunter-gatherer material culture is scarce to begin with, relatively little has been found for researchers to work with. Finally, until the 1970s, the primary approach in hunter-gatherer studies was to approach extant foragers as cultural isolates; if not as remnants of the Paleolithic past at least close enough to teach us something about human social, political and economic origins.<sup>10</sup> South and Southeast Asian foragers, however, were long regarded as "corrupted" by close contact with their agricultural neighbors and their involvement in trade networks based in the extraction of forest products and thus posed less interest to anthropologists than those groups appearing, more or less, 'pristine' (Morrison 2002).

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<sup>10</sup> For a review of different theoretical approaches in the history of hunter-gatherer studies see Myers (1988)

I, however, would add another reason why an anthropologist might avoid conducting research with the Punan. It's hard. Consider. If one is conducting research in the Kalahari Desert or in the outback of Australia how might one follow a band of research subjects? By jeep, perhaps. Even in the Alaskan winter tundra one can use a snowmobile or a dog sled to follow Inuit. It's different in the rainforest where one must proceed on foot, preferably barefoot for the best footing. The Punan move quickly, seeming to glide over sharp rocks, gracefully hopping onto fallen trees, crossing rivers with strong balanced movements, seemingly impervious to the thorns that penetrate less calloused feet or the leeches that cling onto ankles and thighs. Even small children as young as three will clamber up precariously slippery rocks over a steep drop into the rapids or jump easily from stone to stone in the river. Attempting to follow the Punan in the upriver forests for even relatively short distances I have been stabbed by sharp thorns, stung by bees and fire ants, gorged on by leeches, have cracked my head on fallen trees, swept against rocks in the rapids (numerous times), fallen so hard on wet rocks that I could not walk for two days, gotten lost and was twice knocked out with malaria – all the while having to act as if I was relaxed and doing fine so that the Punan would not mind having me along.<sup>11</sup>

Moreover, the Punan, in general, have a reputation for disappearing into the forest leaving any unfortunate researcher they have promised to guide to their own resources.

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<sup>11</sup> I have also had close encounters with falling trees, centipedes and scorpions the size of small lobsters. I'm sure other anthropologists working in Borneo could add to this list.

This is not out of malice of any sort, but simply that they cannot imagine why anyone could not get by on their own. I imagine the way we might leave a Punan sitting in a car to run into the grocery store for a minute, although a “minute” to a Punan in the forest might be days for us. A researcher from an international forestry organization told me how their team had been abandoned upriver in the forests for four days by their Punan guides who had, unannounced, gone hunting. I was fortunate in this regard as the Punan of Long Suluy considered me a ‘heavy’ responsibility and were quite concerned about my well being in the forest given that they would be held responsible by the authorities should anything happen to me. They were particularly relieved when they found I could swim and thus was at less risk of drowning if the boat went over.

This dissertation is a story about a hunting and gathering group as it makes the transition from an economy based primarily in subsistence foraging to one increasingly oriented to the market, and about the social shifts associated with that transition. I am particularly interested in the time period stretching from about the mid-1960s until the present. It was during that time that the Arab Indonesian trader, Hajji Jupri, managed to establish and maintain what constituted a one-man monopoly over the Punans’ trade in lucrative forest products. The relationship between Jupri and the Punan, which began as one based solely in economics and which required violence, or the threat of violence, on Jupri’s part to enforce, eventually transformed into a type of patron-client relationship embedded in terms of mutual obligations and quasi-kin relations. Although the relationship continued for nearly thirty years, as the Punan became increasingly involved in market relations and

to adopt values based in material accumulation and an identity referenced outside of their own social group, they became increasingly adversarial with Jupri, transitioning from his subservient laborers to competitors in the forest product trade.

In the following chapters I look specifically at the dynamics of the relationship between Punan and Jupri: how it began, its costs and benefits both real and perceived to the various parties, its emotional and economic intricacies, and how it eventually began to dissolve. Yet although Jupri may have served as an agent of change, the personification of the global/local juncture if you will, the Punans' increasing integration into the market and into state structures would have occurred regardless of Jupri, albeit with a slight alteration to the details. With both the timber industry and an ever-expanding state infrastructure penetrating farther into the Borneo rainforests, the Punan would not have been able to retain their former nomadic or semi-nomadic existence based primarily in subsistence foraging and relatively isolated from the market. Thus, in addition to looking specifically at the relationship between the Punan and Jupri, I also look at internal social dynamics among the Punan as they increasingly adopt a settled lifestyle, negotiate their absorption into the market and construct an identity increasingly referenced outside of their own social group.

In Chapter 1, I provide a historical overview of Borneo, discuss its entrance into regional and global trade networks and explain the role of its indigenous peoples, particularly hunter-gatherers, as the primary producers/suppliers in these larger economic networks.

In Chapter 2, I describe Hajji Jupri's arrival on the Kelai River and the process by which he consolidated control over Long Suluy's trade in forest products. Given that Jupri, in turn, was responding to market demand for particular forest products, I describe how the social organization of production of each of the major forest products on which the Punan focus their efforts— damar, rattan, gaharu and gold – had significant and reverberating consequences for many areas of Punan social and economic life. Chapter 3 focuses on the transformation of the relationship between the Punan and Jupri from its purely economic beginnings to one based in a patron-client relationship. In order to draw out the ties that bind the two parties, I trace the Punans' increasing dependence on consumer items, services and opportunities provided by Jupri which in turn allowed him to exert ever increasing control over their lives. Chapter 4 examines the internal social dynamics of the Punan community as different sub-groups adopt different strategies to negotiate their relationship with the market economy. In this chapter I primarily focus on two groups in the village, who self identify as Kelai or Suluy Punan; the former who struggle to unify and modernize the village while the latter attempt to maintain a way of life embedded, to a greater extent, in the forest. In Chapter 5, I look at how, with the recent adoption of Christianity and a concern with constructing a 'modern' identity, the Punan struggle over the clash between traditional social mores and those they consider 'modern'. The adoption of this new faith also inserts another dimension of conflict between the Punan and Hajji Jupri as they construct and negotiate the opposition between their Christian identity and Islam. In this chapter I also include a discussion of the Punans' changing relationship with downriver Punan groups and their construction of an identity in relation

to these downriver neighbors. Chapter 6 details the decline and, what appears to be, an almost final break with Hajji Jupri. The dramatic events surrounding this break bring forth in high relief the contradictory feelings among the Punan about their relationship with Jupri and the cleavages in the village over strategies for approaching their relationship with him. The decline of the relationship also elucidates Hajji Jupri's personal attachments to Long Suluy once the economic reasons for engaging with the Punan have ceased to be profitable. In the concluding chapter, I reflect on the transitions which occurred in Long Suluy under Hajji Jupri and situate them in a larger historical and political economic perspective.

As a final note in this introduction, although often in the text I adopt a narrative voice in describing what I observed in Long Suluy, I attempt to keep the focus on my own experience to a minimum (although, of course, the entire text reflects 'my experience'). For anyone interested in reading about how the Punan related to me, and I to them, and the process by which I established rapport with my research community, I include a short afterward following the conclusion. Finally, I have changed many of the Punans' names in the text in order to protect their confidentiality.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Some names I have kept the same if I have felt that the information those individuals have provided constitutes general knowledge. The false names I have chosen are, however, actual Punan words.

## CHAPTER 1

### THE PUNAN IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

#### **Borneo: A History**

Borneo, the third largest island in the world, lies almost midway across the equator surrounded by the South China, Java and Celebes Seas. It constitutes one of the important islands of the Sunda Continental Shelf, is tectonically quite stable and with very little recent volcanic activity, unlike some of its smaller Sundanese island neighbors such as Java and Sumatra. It is comprised of 746, 000 square kilometers, roughly equal in size to the area of Texas and Oklahoma combined. The climate is equatorial rainforest with mean temperatures between 25 and 35 C (about 70-95 F) and average rainfall, varying among regions, between 3000 and 4000 mm. It rains all year, particularly in the highlands, but June through August generally marks the drier months of the year with heaviest rainfall around December and January. Borneo is a land of rivers, wide brown curving snakes radiating out from the mountainous center of the island, descending to the flatlands along the coast and emptying into the surrounding seas. The river basins form natural boundaries for the flow of social interaction among Borneo's tribal peoples, as much for ideological reasons as for geographical ones; rivers play a major role in the cosmological systems of many of the island's tribal peoples, "often serving as lines of contact with deities of the upper air and the upstream and with deities, dragons and serpents of the underworld and downstream" (Healy 1985: 11). It is the rapids, rather than the land between rivers, that serve as barriers to travel and impede contact between

highland and coastal peoples, and that allowed the indigenous highland peoples to maintain their political and cultural autonomy from coastal rulers for almost a millennium. The highest point on the island is Mt Kinabalu in the far northeast with a height of 4,170 meters, but some of the peaks in the Muller mountain range in the center of Borneo rise to above 2,000 meters. At present, three nations claim Borneo's land and people: Malaysia, with its provinces of Sarawak and Sabah in the north and northeast, Brunei, a small oil-rich Sultanate wedged in between the Malaysian states' borders, and Indonesia, in the south, occupying almost two thirds of the island's territory with 539,370 sq km. 'Borneo' is a Western corruption of 'Burni', a once powerful Borneo sultanate, and is not a name used by the local peoples (Low 1848). Indonesians rather refer to the island as 'Kalimantan' which apparently derives from the word 'Kalamantan' meaning 'the land of the *lamanta* (raw sago)' (King 1993:18).<sup>13</sup>

The earliest inhabitants of the island are thought to have arrived in Borneo between 35,000-40,000 years ago and were probably part of the first wave of *Homo sapiens* that began radiating out of the African continent 40,000-50,000 years previously (Bellwood 1997). These early Paleolithic hunters-gatherers, now called Australo-Melanesians and theorized to be distant cousins of the Australian Aborigines, would have made their way on foot across the Sunda Continental shelf, in small bands, crossing land bridges that are now covered by shallow seas. Archeological evidence of these early people on Borneo has been found at the well known Niah Caves in Sarawak. However, there is much

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<sup>13</sup> All non-English words in the text are Indonesian (Bahasa Indonesia) unless marked by (BP) which indicates they are Punan Kelai (Bahasa Punan).

debate on how far these early Borneans could have penetrated the interior rainforests of the island given the limited amounts of carbohydrates available in the tropical rainforest at that time (Bailey 1989). It is possible that human subsistence in the interior forests depended on the arrival of horticulture and agriculture which in turn transformed the ecological base opening up the rainforest to human habitation. Proponents of this stance argue that agriculture not only made existence in the tropical rainforest possible due to trade between forager and cultivators, but also because the clearing of the rainforest for swidden resulted in an ecosystem with a much higher biomass of plant and animal species edible by humans (Bailey et al 1989, Headland 1991, Rambo 1988, Sather 1995). It is generally accepted that these first inhabitants probably remained relatively near the coasts surviving largely on shell fish supplemented by wild game (Bellwood 1997). This debate will likely be on-going, since it is unlikely that much archeological evidence of an early occupation will be found in the interior rainforests given the poor preservation conditions.

About 5000 to 6000 BP ( about 3000-4000 BC), the ancestors of the present day populations of the island made their way to Borneo probably out of southern China (Gibbons 2001). The Austronesians, a cultivating and sea-faring people, transformed the cultural and physical landscapes not only of Borneo but of almost the entire Indo-Malaysian archipelago, the Philippines, and the Pacific islands, leaving only Papua and Australia untouched, their influence even reaching as far south as Madagascar. It is generally accepted that population pressures arising from the adoption of cultivation and

the corresponding population growth forced the Austronesians to expand south and east in a search for land (Bellwood 1997). Sather (1995) also proposes that given the Austronesians' seafaring skills they were also likely traders, and it might have been the prospects for exchange that at least partly motivated the expansion. In any case, these early seafarers and farmers in due course either displaced the early populations of the islands, assimilated them, or both. Genetic studies reveal that, not surprisingly, those populations in the western-most areas, closer to the Austronesian homeland, generally exhibit a predominance of Austronesian genetic ancestry while those populations farther east exhibit increasing proportions of genetic inheritance from pre-Austronesian populations (Gibbons 1991, Ballinger *et al* 1992, Capelli *et al.* 2001).

The present day indigenous peoples of Borneo, consisting of hundreds of tribes of swidden agriculturalists speaking different languages and exhibiting a wide variation of cultural practices, often referred to by the all-encompassing Malay term 'Dayak', as well as nomadic hunter-gatherer bands, are the descendents of these early visitors to the island.<sup>14</sup> Interestingly, unlike the foraging tribes of the Malaysian Peninsula or of the Philippines, who are both phenotypically distinct from their agricultural neighbors and speak languages with traces of pre-Austronesian origins, the foragers of Borneo have

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<sup>14</sup> Although "Dayak" was once a derogatory term used by Malays for Borneo's indigenous agricultural peoples, it is now commonly used by the indigenous peoples themselves often as a term of cultural identity and even ethnic pride. Although an individual's primary identification remains a specific tribe (Kenyah, Kayan, Iban, Lun Dayah etc), "Dayak" is used to establish one's identity as an indigenous person, in contrast to usually Moslem Malay peoples or transmigrants. Although some writers include Punan as "Dayaks" and the distinction is disappearing, historically Dayaks constituted only the agricultural peoples. Punan with whom I conducted research held mixed opinions as to whether they were 'Dayaks' or not.

appeared to be of the same Austronesian stock as the agricultural groups on Borneo, and for that matter, as their agricultural neighbors on nearby islands such as Bali, Sulawesi and Java (Bellwood 1997, Reid 1994, Saha *et al.* 1995, Fix 1995). This similarity has given rise to academic debates over how hunters and gatherers might have descended from an agricultural people. Theories for the presence of hunting and gathering people on Borneo tend to congregate around adaptationist strategies in which either 1) the Austronesians themselves arrived with a mixed bag of economic strategies (Sather 1995), or, 2) individuals failing at cultivation and/or marginalized by their groups sought an economic niche in foraging in the interior forests over time as land became more scarce (Blust, personal communication). Preliminary results from a recent Y chromosome study, however, indicates that indeed some Punan are genetically different from their agricultural neighbors (Holmsen/Karafet unpublished 2006). The high incidence of C-M216\* and moderate frequency of K-M9\* haplogroup may indicate that some of Borneo's hunter-gatherers descended from the early Australo-Melanesian inhabitants of the island. Sellato (personal communication) suggests that evidence of pre-Austronesian genetic ancestry likely resulted from the active import of slaves of Australo-Melanesian ancestry from the eastern islands and the Philippines. Interestingly to note, a group of Dayak Kenyah are characterized by high frequency (40%) of O Line haplogroup which is virtually absent in Indonesia but common in southern China and Vietnam (Holmsen and Karafet unpublished 2006).

Little is known about Borneo's indigenous cultures until the later Colonial period when written ethnographic accounts began to appear in the primarily Dutch and British colonial literature. A rough sketch of their history prior to this time, however, is as follows: Given Borneo's sheer size and low population levels, indigenous groups spread out along the coasts and across the hinterland of Borneo developing in relative isolation from one another thus developing the different languages and cultural systems that are still in evidence today (King 1993). Very likely the vast interior of Borneo remained uninhabited up to as recently as 200 years ago, except for small bands of nomads and horticulturalists (Sellato 1994). During the first millennium A.D., Borneo became increasingly involved in Southeast Asian trade networks involving first India and then China. Coastal trading centers – such as Kutai on Borneo's east coast that showed strong Indian influence from around 400 AD and Brunei which rose to prominence in the north in the 7<sup>th</sup> century – developed in response to demand, not for agricultural surplus which was limited in Borneo, but for luxury products found in the interior forests such as camphor, resins, gums, beeswax, aromatic and decorative woods, bezoar stone, rhinoceros horn, hornbill ivory, feathers, rattans, gems, gold and edible birds nests (Healy 1985, Wolters 1967). The primary suppliers were likely the forest nomads. The downriver agricultural tribes, usually but not exclusively stratified societies residing collectively in immense longhouses raised on stilts, acted as intermediaries with coastal traders.<sup>15</sup> However, it has been hypothesized that a few groups might have abandoned

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<sup>15</sup> The Iban are a notable example of a non-stratified agricultural group.

agriculture altogether – and ‘become’ Punan – in order to specialize in the gathering of forest products for trade (Hoffman 1986, King 1993).<sup>16</sup>

Borneo, however, was not a main hub in South East Asian maritime trade networks. The trading centers that developed there remained small in scale, unlike the large Hindu-Buddhist empires that emerged in Java and Sumatra during that same period. Although Borneo was certainly influenced by Hindu-Buddhism, it was likely not through direct contact. Indirect influence instead came through the Sumatran state, Srivijaya, which rose to power in the 7<sup>th</sup> century and to a much greater degree from the Javanese state, Majapahit, in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries (Wolters 1967). Impact on Borneo’s indigenous groups was minimal, with only a few tribes incorporating some of the Hindu-Buddhist cultural practices that had already been greatly transformed in their journey from their Indian homeland before arriving on Borneo’s shores (King 1993). The real impact on Borneo’s indigenous cultures would come with the arrival of Islam and the emergence of the Moslem Malay Sultanates such as Banjarmasin in the southeast, Pontianak in the west, Brunei in the north, Kutai in the east and, the less powerful Berau, in the northeast.

Islam probably first touched Borneo’s shores as early as the 8<sup>th</sup> century AD with early Persian and Arab traders seeking out new commercial opportunities (King 1993). Yet it

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<sup>16</sup> Hoffman’s work that positions the Punan as devolved agriculturalists who took up hunting and gathering with the rise of the trade in forest products has largely been discredited on methodological grounds (see Brosius, Sellato). However, his hypothesis (if not his supporting ‘evidence’), still constitutes grounds for debate as to the origins of a hunting and gathering mode of production among Borneo’s peoples.

was primarily through Indian Moslems that Islam first began to establish a foothold in Southeast Asia (Hall 1968). By the thirteenth century the first Moslem states had risen in Sumatra and by the fifteenth century a Moslem trading state had been established in the Moluccas. The fifteenth century witnessed the expansion of Islam and Malay language and culture along the coast of Borneo with ever-increasing numbers of Moslem merchants and missionaries carrying both their commercial and ideological wares to Borneo's numerous trading ports (King 1993, Healey 1995). Although there is controversy over the exact date, possibly as early as the fifteenth century and certainly by the sixteenth century the most important Borneo state of Brunei had officially adopted Islam, as had Banjarmasin, Kotawaringan, and Kutai as well as numerous smaller states that by this time dotted Borneo's coastal belt. Almost all of Borneo's Moslem states were established at the mouths of major rivers along the coast, with the exception of a number of smaller states that arose along the Kapuas River in West Kalimantan (Healy 1995). Power in Borneo depended not on control of territory but control over people and goods, or, in short, over trade. Agricultural output in Borneo was both inadequate and precarious and thus the emerging states depended on foreign trade for their reproduction. This put the state in a dependent relationship with the tribal peoples of the interior. First, in contrast to Java and Sumatra, the coastal areas of Borneo are comprised of primary swamp forest and heavy peat soils making them inhospitable to wet rice cultivation. Although wet rice cultivation certainly existed in Borneo at that time, it would not have been adequate nor consistent, and thus the state depended on the limited surplus from the tribal swidden cultivators for its very subsistence. Second, the goods that the state used

for foreign exchange were found in the upriver forests and thus the state depended on the tribal peoples to maintain their continual supply. Rivers were the primary route for the flow of forest products down to the coasts and for access to the forest peoples upriver. The ports at a river's mouth served as the entrepôt to foreign traders and thus were the strategic key to a state's success. Sultanates taxed goods flowing in and out of their ports, demanded varying levels of tribute from foreign traders, and attempted to establish tributary relationships with upriver Dayaks. Neighboring sultanates engaged in fierce battles with one another for access to external trade, often relying on piracy to this end, and struggled to establish monopolies over interior tribes. Those smaller and significantly weaker 'states' along the Kapuas river (and sometimes comprised of as few as fifty inhabitants) attempted to gain power as intermediaries in the trade between tribal peoples and the powerful coastal sultanates (Healy1995).

Some indigenous peoples, particularly those along the coasts, adopted Islam, thus losing their ethnic affiliation and lived in more or less harmonious trading and social relations with their Malay neighbors. Others, wishing to retain their cultural independence and to avoid usually exploitive tributary relations with the sultanates, moved inland. In fact, as Hudson (1967) notes, the seventeenth century saw vast migrations of Dayaks in the hinterlands from southern Borneo in response to the expansion of Muslim Banjar Malay culture and settlement. Separated from the sultanates' reach of influence by dangerous rapids, steep mountain ranges and deep forests, the area that Rousseau (1989) labels 'Central Borneo', took on what seems to have been an *almost* separate history from the

coastal areas.<sup>17</sup> While the sultanates taxed and exerted control over the downriver areas, in the remote highlands autonomous tribal groups were forced into ever closer proximity. Iban, Kayan, Kenyah, Murut, Tidung, and a seemingly endless list of others, engaged in an intense and violent competition for land and heads, the latter serving as vital religious capital in Dayak cosmological systems (Healey 1995). This continuing cycle of warfare led to the displacement, absorption, or destruction of conquered tribes, rendering ethnic history in Central Borneo during this time a moving kaleidoscope of cultural fissures, unifications, migrations, and extinctions. Yet despite their relative isolation, the interior tribes continued to supply coastal trading networks with valuable forest products. In return, the Dayak people received such coveted items as salt and tobacco as well as cloth, Chinese ceramic jars, beads and other exotic valuables of strategic significance in internal political relations.

Although no Moslem state ever held any more than the most precarious control over Borneo's interior, this situation changed dramatically under European colonialism. European traders first arrived in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Malaysian archipelago in the fifteenth century, joining in the competition for the exotic spices, silks, gold, gems and other luxury items that flowed among trading ports. For a long time these new arrivals from the West – Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch and British merchants and adventurers – were simply one group of traders among many vying for favor with the islands' native rulers and gatekeepers to riches. In time, however, strengthened by the

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<sup>17</sup> Central Borneo is not a separate political entity, but Rousseau delineates this area for the purpose of historical analysis.

technological advances of the Industrial Revolution at home and increasing manpower, the Europeans, primarily the Dutch and British, gradually established themselves as formidable powers in the region wresting control from local rulers and disrupting long established economic and political networks. But while the Europeans busied themselves with such important trading centers as Java, Sumatra and the Moluccas, their influence in Borneo was relatively minimal until the mid-nineteenth century. For almost three hundred years, Europeans maintained little interest in this large inhospitable island, plagued with piracy, headhunters, and imposing rainforests and lying outside of the main India-China trade routes. In 1839, however, an ambitious young Englishman, James Brookes, arrived and managed to establish himself as the first British Raj on the northern coast of Borneo. He proceeded to expand his power, largely at the expense of the neighboring Sultan of Brunei. Brookes, followed in turn by his nephew Charles, the second Raj Brooks, set about on a zealous, and ultimately successful program to pacify the natives. By manipulating and pitting warring tribes against one another they effectively ended both coastal piracy and intertribal headhunting in the upland forests of north Borneo by the turn of the twentieth century.

The Dutch, in the meantime, after many years managed to gain control of the Malay sultanates on the southern side of the island and established a system of indirect rule. Unlike the British in the north, the Dutch were largely unconcerned with the island's interior, focusing instead on control of the trading ports through which the valuable products harvested from the upriver forests continued to flow. The Dutch approach

changed, however, once they sensed that the Brookes' held expansionist aims. In response they moved quickly into the interior quelling intertribal warfare and building roads, schools, hospitals and, of course, churches, for the native peoples (King 1993).<sup>18</sup> The European powers held a tight grip on Borneo, consolidating control over the vast expanse of territory and its peoples, until World War II when Japan overthrew European rule and occupied the island. Following Japan's defeat, Britain and The Netherlands attempted to reassert their power in the archipelago but, at least on the Dutch side, this effort was short lived. The independent Republic of Indonesia was established on the 27th of December 1949 after five years of revolutionary war. Dutch Borneo was consequently divided into four provinces, South, West, Central and East Kalimantan. Sarawak and Sabah remained as British protectorates until 1963 when they were incorporated into the Malaysian state. The Sultanate of Brunei did not achieve full independence from Britain until 1984.

### **The Punan**

Tucked into the corners of this relationship among swidden tribalists, Moslem sultanates and European colonial powers is the hidden story of Borneo's nomadic foragers. These small bands of forest people inhabited the deepest interior of the island and quietly supplied the Dayak intermediaries with the goods that were so coveted by, and so essential to the very existence of, the Malay states, and which provided the *raison d'être*

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<sup>18</sup> The numbers of roads and public buildings were, however, limited. The Dutch never developed as extensive an infrastructure in Borneo as the British did and, consequently, never achieved either the extent of administrative control over their territory as the British did over theirs.

for early European occupation. Almost nothing is known about the Punan prior to the colonial period when the European explorers, colonial servants, and naturalists (often all three combined in one person) made their way further and further upriver into the heart of Borneo. The first written accounts published in the mid-century were hearsay based on stories told by the coastal peoples and downriver tribes. The ‘Orang Poonan’, they reported, were the quintessential ‘wild men’ of Borneo, purported to be half man/half orangutan, to feed on humans and to sport tails (Bock 1881).<sup>19</sup> The latter trait, in particular, served to catalyze many an enthusiastic explorer off in search of what might prove the missing link in human evolution or, if nothing else, could be used as bait to garner more funding from back home in Europe. By the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century the first eyewitness accounts began to surface. Unfortunately for the study of human evolution, the Punan did not, in fact, have tails. Rather the early colonialists found, what they describe as, small bands of “shy”, and rather “pale”, foraging peoples coming out from the safety of the forest now and again to trade with the stratified Dayak groups. The early writers, including such notable authors as Lubbock, immediately situated the Punan at the bottom of the human evolutionary ladder, “...wild men in the interior of Borneo...they are found living absolutely in a state of nature...the poor creatures are looked on and treated by the other Dayaks as wild beasts” (Lubbock 1889, p. 9). His views echoed into as late as the mid-twentieth century:

“The most interesting fact about human society in Sarawak [Malaysian Borneo] is that much of it has scarcely changed for centuries...Indeed, the simplest among [the indigenous peoples] are not merely like men near the dawn of history: they *are* men near the dawn of history, authentic examples of primitive man. Sarawak is an anthropologist’s

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<sup>19</sup> *Orang*: Lit. People

dream...The lowliest peoples are the Penans and Punans and a few similar tribes...With no other adornment these light-brown Adams and Eves drift through the shadowy places of Sarawak's jungle and the even darker recesses of human history" (MacDonald 1956, p. 14).

Other writers, however, adopted something of a Rousseauian perspective, characterizing the Punan as noble savages: kind, gentle, and, given that headhunting was not included in their repertoire of cultural practices, possibly representing a more advanced stage of human evolution than the swidden tribes. Roth (1896), for example, observed that "[The Punan] are an honest and unselfish people and they alone do not regard the human head as a trophy of war...and once well known they undoubtedly prove to be the best mannered people of any of the savage tribes inhabiting the island" (Roth 1896, p. 16). Hose (1926), later noted that, " [The Punan] in every way come up to the ideal of the 'gentle' or 'noble' savage, and that though nomads and hunters, they show no signs of exposure to the elements...(p.38)." Yet not only were these early accounts limited in number and scope but they only dealt with Punan as they interacted with the stratified Dayak groups. Ethnographic accounts of Punan in their own surroundings did not appear until the mid-twentieth century and these almost exclusively focused on the Penan in Sarawak. Not until the 1980s did Borneo's hunter-gatherers begin to fully enter the ethnographic record, but unfortunately by this time most had already abandoned a nomadic way of life and much information had to be garnered from oral histories rather than direct observation.

‘Punan’ is the name given to the historically nomadic hunting and gathering people found primarily in East Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo and, to a lesser extent, in Sarawak and Brunei.<sup>20</sup> Although there has not been comprehensive research conducted on the many groups of people called ‘Punan’, they do not constitute a homogenous group. Rather the term is used to describe a multitude of nomadic, semi-nomadic and formerly nomadic groups speaking distinct languages and exhibiting differing cultural practices. The origin of the word ‘Punan’ is unknown, but some authors speculate that it originally meant something akin to “upriver” or “headwaters of a river”. It was used to refer to the small bands of mobile rainforest foragers, though not all foragers were called Punan (Harrison 1949). Uruqurt (1959) doubts whether the term Punan originated with the people to whom it refers, contending that it was used by agricultural peoples to refer to the forest dwelling nomads who did, indeed, live upriver. As Sellato (1994) explains:

“Three main ideas emerge in the concept that the farmers have of the nomads: nomads live farther upstream, in the mountainous highlands; they live in the forests; they have no village, but are constantly moving. Hence the most common terms of reference: “upriver people” (olo, ot), in central Kalimantan; “mountain people” (ukit, tau ‘ukit, bukit) in Sarawak and West Kalimantan; “forest people” (tau toan) in West Kalimantan; and the terms *penan*, *pennan*, *punan* (of controversial etymology, but which some authors say may mean “to wander in the forest”), used in Kalimantan, Sarawak and Brunei. The term Basap is also used, referring to the nomads who lie close to the coasts of East Kalimantan” (p. 16).

‘Punan’ is used as a first-order exonym, but the Punan add on a second-order exonym which is usually a toponym indicating the name of the river on which they live. Thus, for

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<sup>20</sup> There has been much confusion over the terms Punan and Penan. A number of authors argue that the two names are interchangeable and that Penan is simply the term used by the Kenyah people to refer to nomads, while Punan is used by the Kayan (Langub 1999, Urquhart 1959).

example, the Punan Tubu are those Punan living on the Tubu River, while the Punan Lisum live on the Lisum River. Moreover, as Punan groups move they often adopt (or are given) the name of the new river or alternate between the names of the new and old rivers. It is a confusing jumble of names but rich in meaning as it conveys a sense of the fluid nature and historic mobility of Punan groups as well as the groups' attempts to affirm their identity both in relation to outsiders and within their own social boundaries.

Punan have historically been nomadic hunter gatherers living in small bands in the interior rainforests hunting wild game, primarily wild bearded pig (*Sus barbatus*), and harvesting the starchy pith of the carbohydrate rich sago palm (primarily *Euglossona utilis*). In fact, Punan are sometimes referred to as 'the sago eaters' to emphasize their dependence on this glutinous starch. Noted for their shyness and their agility in moving silently through the forest, they foraged in the headwaters and upper tributaries of major rivers upstream from their agricultural neighbors.<sup>21</sup> Sellato (1994) notes that Punan territory represents an enclave, an economic niche, hemmed in below by the stratified agricultural tribes and above by the ecological limits of the sago palm which does not grow above 1000 meters or, according to Rousseau (1989), above 1200 meters. Given that the Punan resisted, and even feared, coming into direct sunlight from their permanent

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<sup>21</sup> Describing an entire culture as 'shy' may, I am aware, sound essentializing. However, the Punan are often described as shy in the literature, and given they were often 'head-huntees', rather than head-hunters, their reticence to interact with other groups certainly made sense. But the Punan with whom I worked also often described themselves as 'shy' and 'quiet', either using the Indonesian word, *malu* or the Punan word *se'ai*. As one man described, "We used to spend so long in the forest, and that is why we are quiet. We are like turtle people, but that is changing now." Of all the adjectives the Punan used to describe themselves, 'shy' is the one I heard most often. Granted, there is much diversity among the Punan, but given that as a whole they describe themselves as a group as shy, I have decided to use that adjective here.

home in the dappled light of the deep forest these nomadic foragers were often described as “pale” and even of a “...pale ‘yellow’ or even of a ‘greenish’ shade” (Hose 1926:39). While the latter color schemes seem questionable, they poetically allude to the Punans’ deep connection with their tropical rainforest environment.

Although Borneo nomads tended to occupy the same territory for long periods of time, they were subject to territorial displacement resulting from an influx of cultivators into their area (Rousseau 1989). By the time they entered the colonial record, some Punan groups did build permanent or semi-permanent lodging to which they periodically returned, but most still built only temporary bamboo shelters - sometimes in trees for safety - which they abandoned after a few nights as they moved on. It is important to note that when Bornean foraging groups settled and adopted agriculture they often took on the identity of their agricultural neighbors, erasing their nomadic origins. Sellato (2002), for example, maintains that the Aoheng were once nomadic foragers who, after adopting cultivation, became skilled and avid head-hunters. It has also been theorized that the Kenyah, the largest group of agriculturalists in the center of Borneo, derive from nomadic foragers who were influenced by the stratified Kayan groups (Urquhart 1959). Thus, although at any point in time there may have been ‘pure’ nomads, ideal type hunters and gatherers living self-sufficiently without permanent residence, ‘nomadism’ represents a continuum with varying degrees of settlement and varying levels of reliance on cultivation. Moreover, although the trend appears to be from nomadic foraging to

settled cultivation, there are also instances of groups adopting cultivation and then abandoning it to return to foraging (Urquhart 1959).<sup>22</sup>

Yet, although some Punan bands likely remained relatively isolated in the rainforest for long periods of time during the colonial period, there do not seem to have been any Punan who did not engage in at least some trade with swiddeners.<sup>23</sup> Although nutritionally self-sufficient, Punan have long relied on their settled neighbors to provide them with such valued items as salt, tobacco, and iron tools. Punan, in turn, provided swiddeners with a range of goods for home consumption, including hornbill ivory and feathers for tribal rituals. More important were trade items such as camphor, resins, gums, beeswax, aromatic and decorative woods, bezoar stone, rhinoceros horn, rattans, gold, and edible birds' nests. Punan were valued trading partners and often existed in what can best be termed a patron-client relationship with a neighboring agricultural group such as the Kayan, Kenyah, Iban or Segai. While some Punan groups traded with all members of a tribe, the tribal chief and other high ranking members of the long house community often held trading rights and prohibited other members from participating in exchange with the nomads (Hoffman 1986, Rousseau 1989, Spaan 1903). These trading 'partnerships' could be, and often were, exploitive. The Punan were afraid to come out of the forest or travel far to trade with downriver Malay or Chinese merchants, and so

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<sup>22</sup> Hoffman (1984) claims that Punan are recently devolved agriculturalists who adopted hunting and gathering specifically as an economic strategy to participate in the forest product trade. Although his ideas are often presented in the literature as an example of historicist/revisionist approaches in hunter-gatherer studies (see Myers 1988, Morrison and Junker 2002), his findings have been largely rejected on methodological grounds (see Brosius 1988, Sellato 1988)

<sup>23</sup> Without further archeological evidence it is not possible to know for certain whether hunter-gatherers ever lived fully independent of trade with swiddeners in the central forests of Borneo.

were ignorant of the real value of their forest products and could be taken advantage of by the more knowledgeable swiddeners. But the imbalance could be even more extreme with Dayaks taking Punan as slaves or for human sacrifices (Low 1882). For this reason, Punan often participated in ‘silent exchanges’ in which trade items were left at predetermined spots in the forest rather than meeting in face-to-face exchanges. On the other hand, if terms of trade became unbearable to Punan they could always align with the chief of another tribe who might be more agreeable to work with. Dayak chiefs were very protective of their Punan trading relationships and attempted to guard against intrusion from other tribes. Nor were Punan always as interested in trade as their patrons and often chose to engage in subsistence activities over collecting for exchange, which is consistent with an egalitarian ethos, usually associated with hunters and gatherers, as opposed to one of wealth maximization and accumulation. As Gifford (1919) notes:

“The traders at Belaga are always in competition to obtain rhinoceros horns and gallstones from Punans, and for this reason large advances are given to Kayans to trade with these people. The consequence is that large debts are run up in the bazaar, the Punans are harassed as they cannot procure enough to supply the number who wish to trade with them and very little jungle produce is worked (p. 312)

Rousseau argues although the Punan derived material benefit from trade in forest products, it may have been more important to maintain friendly relationships with neighboring agriculturalists. The swiddener-nomad relationship went beyond economic exchange. In return for protection against attacking Dayak tribes and injunctions against headhunting client Punan on the part of the patron tribe, nomads provided such services as guiding war parties through the forests and joining them in war against enemy tribes.

And although headhunting did not play a part in Punan social practices, they occasionally acted as mercenaries, collecting heads and slaves for swiddeners. Still no matter how valued relations with a Punan band might have been for an agricultural group, Punan always held subordinate status in the relationship.

### **The Research Site**

In his book *The Forest of Taboos* (1999), Valeri describes the opposition between the Hualulu village, on the eastern Indonesian island of Seram, and the dense rainforest surrounding it that both provides sustenance to the Hualulu but also represents the dark and dangerous, the ‘other’ – the wilderness, the unknown, both literally and figuratively, threatening the place of civilization – the known, the human. This is not true for the Punan of Long Suluy as I experienced them for my eighteen months of fieldwork. The Punan move easily between forest and village, one melding into another, or so it would seem. The forest is a place of healing, of coolness and of quiet. Punan often go into the forest when they are sick, fleeing the heat and noise of the village, seeking the roots and leaves that the forest provides as medicine. It is a place of abundance, of ease. From the village one must go far from the forest to find food, but once camped upriver wild pig, fish, porcupine, turtle, mouse deer, bear, monkey, and fruit are within easy reach to fill the stomach. Punan often say how good it is in the forest, how easy life is there. Not like in the city where people need money and can get run over by cars, where it is hot and dusty. Yes, there are ghosts in the forest, but that doesn’t seem to matter to the Punan. And yes, trees fall, snakes bite and flash floods can whisk away a child before one has

time to think twice, but even those Punan who consider themselves ‘village Punan’ will start to yearn for the forest after too long away. Short day trips into the nearby forests will not compensate for leisurely weeks upriver, sleeping with just one’s family or closest relatives under the forest canopy. But then seemingly just as easily, the Punan yearn for the village, the television at Hajji’s, the afternoon volleyball games with the ‘Javanese’ who travel through the village, the easy flow of information and social life that comes with larger congregations of our species.<sup>24</sup> I began in time to label some Punan ‘forest Punan’ and others ‘village Punan’ but it was a continuum, with all Punan moving back and forth and only a few of them constituting extreme outliers on the (imaginary) statistical spreadsheet of time spent in forest or village

When I first arrived in Long Suluy it was nearly empty and would remain that way for several weeks before the Punan slowly filtered into the village family by family. After that the village turned into a constant hub of comings and goings, individuals and families jumping into motorized canoes in the mornings, some on foot, heading upriver and returning in the late afternoon, or perhaps the next day. Some houses seemed almost permanently abandoned, then one day they would jump to life, only to be abandoned again a week or so later. And then, almost overnight, the entire village would empty out again, perhaps a few young people choosing to stay behind, Ibu Selbut staying to tend Hajji’s house, perhaps Pak Semuaing if he had a boat on order, and the village would

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<sup>24</sup> The Punan refer to the gaharu workers who travel through Long Suluy as the “Javanese”. Many of the gaharu workers are indeed either Javanese transmigrants themselves or originate from Javanese communities in Banjarmasin in South Kalimantan. Others, however, hail from other islands, such as Lombok and Flores, or represent native Malay groups.

remain largely empty for weeks, sometimes months. At first I was baffled, even frustrated, by my research population. How on earth was I to document Punan life when I couldn't follow them? How could I get data with no research subjects? But slowly, in time, I came to understand the Punan calendar of comings and goings. I knew when it was 'village time' and the Punan would stay in the village to thresh their newly harvested rice or prepare for a holiday or build the new church (and I knew which Punan would shirk these duties and leave for the forest anyway). During 'village' times I knew that when the Punan did leave the village they were going for only a day or so to hunt pig, to look for rattan, to cut timber for a new house, to pan a bit of gold in the nearby streams, to transport Javanese into the upriver forests, or to check on a sick relative who was camped on a bamboo platform on an upriver stream. I knew when it was time for the Punan to head only a little way upriver to their nearby rice fields to begin clearing or planting or harvesting and who had their rice fields where and who would return to the village to sleep and who would not. I knew when it was time for the Punan to leave the village for months to gorge happily on the wild sweetness of a dazzling array of wild fruit during the annual masting. I knew which families, at this time, would camp on which river, which ones were happier congregating in large groups and which preferred solitude. In time I would come to understand some of the political and social dynamics among these groups as well. And I knew when it was time for the Punan to hunt for gold in the upriver streams, sometimes for months, and that Hajji would be angry to hear of anyone left in the village at these times. I knew which Punan had close relatives elsewhere and had gone for a visit and which young Punan men had left downriver for

work in Hajji's bird nest caves. And as far as research went, I bought my own boat and hired Punan to drive it.

The village of Long Suluy is the uppermost village on the Kelai River lying approximately two hundred and twenty kilometers upstream from Tanjung Redeb. In the past, before motorized boat transport arrived on the river, travel upriver by long boat could take up to a month depending on the water levels. From about the early 1970s the trip to Long Suluy was decreased to two days using an outboard motor with an overnight usually spent sleeping on the side of the river. By 2001 a dirt logging road from Tanjung Redeb to Long Gi, a village located about halfway up the Kelai River, was in steady use and thus transport to Tanjung Redeb could be accomplished in one day with half the trip by motorized vehicle transport. There are twelve villages on the lower part of the Kelai River below Long Gi, with populations of Dayak (Segai, Kenyah, Lebu)<sup>25</sup> and Melayu (mainly Benua, Bugis, as well as some transmigrant groups from neighboring islands).<sup>26</sup> Long Gi is home to Punan, Kenyah and Malay groups. The six villages above Long Gi are all ethnically Punan.

Historically, the Kelai River populations were considered vassals of the Berau kingdom which emerged in the 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup> century (Dewall 1855). The original inhabitants and those governing Berau at that time were most likely descended from local Dayak groups

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<sup>25</sup> Lebu were originally hunter-gatherers, possibly the original nomads of the Berau watershed who moved downriver and adopted agriculture after the Punans' arrival in the watershed.

<sup>26</sup> Transmigration: An Indonesian government program to resettle people from the highly populated islands such as Java, Bali and Flores to islands such as Borneo with low population densities.

that came under the influence of Hinduism through trade contacts. By 1345 Berau was linked to the court at Banjarmasin as a dependency, and thus, in turn, to the Javanese kingdom of Majapahit, which itself was the patron of Banjarmasin kingdom (Obidzinski 2003). Little is known about the following time period but Berau appears to have experienced a time of territorial expansion, and by the 17<sup>th</sup> century had come under the influence of the Moslem Sulu empire, constituting one of its main trading hubs specialized in the export of forest and marine products. It was also an active importer of slaves, primarily coming from the Sulu Empire's center in the Philippine archipelago, many of whom were sold to upriver Dayaks for human sacrifice rituals and the easy procurement of heads (Warren 1981). In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the Dutch led an effort to undermine Sulu influence in the area, which eventually resulted in the division of the Berau into three separate kingdoms: Bulungan, Tidung and Berau (King 1993, Obidzinski 2003, Lopulan 2003). In 1844, as a result of internal rivalries, Berau further subdivided into two competing sultanates, Gunung Tabor and Sambiliung. Gunung Tabor, located on the right side of the Berau River, held control over the Sigah hinterlands, Sambiliung, on the left, controlled the Kelai (Lopulan 2003).

The village of Long Suluy is composed of seventy three families or KK, *kepala keluarga* (heads of households), and a total of approximately 274 persons. It is the largest Punan village on the Kelai River. Unlike many current villages in Kalimantan, which host a mix of indigenous groups, Long Suluy is ethnically homogenous. Aside from the Punan inhabitants of the village, the only other residents during most of my fieldwork consisted

of Jupri's two Malay workers, two Dayak Kenyah teachers who appeared only intermittently in the village, the minister from a downriver Dayak Segai village and myself, an American anthropologist. Long Suluy, sometimes referred to as 'Nahas Sebanong' is situated in a clearing on the right side of the Kelai river if one is traveling upstream at an altitude of approximately 270 meters.<sup>27</sup> Houses are built in an amoeba-like ellipse around a cleared field used for volleyball, badminton and general late afternoon tumbling and playing among the children. Most of the older houses, built by Jupri, are multi-family units; they are long and slightly raised off the ground with two or three front doors opening into separate family compartments. The interiors are mainly simple barren rooms, usually one large front room with perhaps a simple divider constructed to section off a small sleeping room. The kitchen area is in the back, usually flimsily constructed, the walls not quite reaching to the ceiling and large gaps between planks providing plenty of ventilation. There is a slightly raised platform for cooking. Some of the newer houses, built in the downstream end of the village, are single family units built recently by individual Punan families or by *gotong royong*, a village work gathering. These newer houses incorporate designs found in some of the downriver Kenyah and Segai villages, such as L shaped floor plans and trellis work. The chief's house, built by a community work gathering in 2003, looms in size over the rest of the Punan domiciles. Nestled in among the Punan houses overlooking the river is Jupri's house and trading post, larger but similar in design to the older Punan houses. On the far

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<sup>27</sup> This area was originally cleared by a gold company from Jakarta in the late 60s as a landing strip for helicopters. The company went bankrupt after one year. The area was known as Nahas Sebanong and is referred to as such mainly by downriver Malays.

downriver end of the village is a two-room primary school, a small usually unoccupied house for visiting school teachers, and the new church, built by the community for Christmas in 2003. A health center (*puskesmas*) was built by the regional government and opened in January 2004, although the young male nurse was rarely in the village. The only other buildings of note are the *balai desa*, the community meeting house, which is rarely used except for special events such as New Year's celebration, and the head teacher's house, located at the upriver end of the village, which also serves as a small store. Finally, there is a *gaharu mes*, a small house with two bare rooms and a kitchen space built with regional government funds to provide temporary lodging to the many *gaharu* workers who pass through the village on their way into the upriver forests in search of incense wood.<sup>28</sup>

The village is tightly packed, hemmed in by sloping hills to the east and south of the village, the river to the north and marshy wet land in the east. In the mornings, misty clouds cover the hill tops, giving way to hot sun by about eight am, the few monkeys brave enough to venture this close to the village disappearing from the treetops with the clouds. When the Punan are in the village they cluster into small groups in front of people's houses, talking softly and discussing current events: a particularly successful hunting venture, a fight in the village, an anticipated visit from a government official. Often people wander slowly to the entrance of the village, wooden steps descending to a boat landing and marked by a carved totem pole capped with a large wooden Hornbill, a

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<sup>28</sup> *Mes*: lit: a residence used for housing employees

familiar Dayak symbol, which was constructed by a visiting Kenyah workman. Here the Punan crouch smoking, watching the Javanese gaharu workers load their massive packs into Punan boats to be transported upriver for a two month sojourn into the forests of Bulungan to the north or downriver to the gaharu camps in Long Gi, the farthest downriver Punan village, where the Javanese will rest and sell their gaharu to the gaharu bosses there. If no boats are leaving on a particular morning many Punan, more than likely, will be sitting in the main room in Jupri's house, smoking, talking, purchasing supplies and waiting for the daily radio contact between Long Suluy and Jupri's office in Tanjung Redeb. Those Punan men closest to Jupri's people may sit in the kitchen, the back doorway opening onto the river thirty yards in the distance and the lush green forest of the opposite bank. In the kitchen the men exchange news, discuss events with Pak Sabran, Jupri's head worker, and drink coffee. Punan women too will wander through to exchange some words or sit with Ibu Selbut, an elderly Punan widow who was the fourth wife of a downriver Kenyah man and who now cooks and cleans for Sabran. Conversation is inevitably interrupted by loud crowing roosters particularly abundant outside of Jupri's kitchen window, a sound blessedly missing in the forests unless one of the few Punan families who own poultry decides to take their birds along with them.<sup>29</sup> Housed beneath the kitchen floor are Jupri's three sheep and a large deer that was caught when still small.

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<sup>29</sup> Punan raise chickens not for their own consumption but to sell to the gaharu workers who come through the village. Punan do eat chicken when they are in Tanjung Redeb, and say they like it, but they are loathe to kill or eat an animal that they have raised themselves.

If the river is low enough to travel, and it's not Sunday, the village, not to mention Jupri's house, will be almost empty by mid-morning. Walking around the village on these days one may come upon a few Punan crouched behind a house quietly talking and watching as their neighbor planes a new boat or fixes an outboard motor. Perhaps the quiet will be broken by one of the few chainsaws in the village, Pak Musa or Pak Lakai cutting wood for an addition to their house.<sup>30</sup> Or one may come upon Ibu Gupek sitting on a makeshift bamboo platform behind her house with her daughter Tai weaving a rattan mat.

Whatever life is in the village during the day takes place in shady spots behind the houses overlooking the river. By late afternoon Punan begin to filter back into the village from their daily activities and by dusk the village is alive once more. Adults take up a volleyball game, particularly intense if there are Javanese around to join in. Usually a few will play badminton with Jupri's workers if Sabran is in a good mood and will lend out the badminton net and shuttlecocks. Bands of children roll around in the open field, copying martial arts moves they have seen on television at Jupri's, chicken fighting or generally chasing each other and tumbling around while others climb high into the trees in the village's perimeters. Those not joining into the play sit on front porches overlooking all the activity. Before rabies swept through the village in the October of 2004, countless dogs roamed the village and occasionally a sweeping howl would begin on one end of the village rising to a crescendo as it washed over to the other end. At dusk, before The Nature Conservancy installed water pipes into the village in 2004, many Punan would descend to the river to bathe (to bathe in Punan is said *ci dao* – literally 'to

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<sup>30</sup> *Pak (bapak)*: form of address to an older man, father; *Ibu*: form of address to an older woman, mother.

go down to bathe'). By nightfall Punan are generally in their houses or crowded into Jupri's house sitting on the floor and watching television, few actually understanding the fast spoken Indonesian of the characters but all engrossed nonetheless. When Sabran shuts down the generator Punan return to their houses, carrying their sleeping children. The village is usually dark at night although there is electricity provided by a government project and some houses have dim light bulbs outside. At night the sounds of the rainforest take over, the loud whirring of cicadas, the ever flowing river, the frequent crashing thunderstorm.

The Punan say they have "always" been on the Kelai. Although there are many variations to their origin story, all the Punan believe that they emerged from a Durian tree at the headwaters of the Kelai River. According to some accounts, all humanity emerged from the tree, while in others it was only the Punan. As Pak Liu and Pak Gun, two brothers and the two oldest men in the village, recounted to me one afternoon sitting in Jupri's kitchen:

"We come from a Durian tree at the headwaters of the Kelai. All people came from there. It was a very big Durian tree and the first Punan came out of the trunk. His name was Kichiyu. He was our oldest grandfather from the past, long ago. The trunk split open and he came out and all people come from him. Then a bird chopped down the Tree and it collapsed. This bird was a Hornbill (*m'nook n'gang* BP). This caused the people to scatter. All people eat the same but speak different languages because they were separated when the tree fell."

When asked about their history, the Punan are often not clear about the details. It is rare that a Punan can recite his or her genealogy beyond their grandparents and many do not even recount their ancestors that far. If a parent has died young a Punan may not even

remember the deceased parent's name. Some Punan say they "do not know" their histories, that the stories died with their parents and there is no book to help them remember. Furthermore, the Punan Kelai, while still nomadic, would have lived in small bands in the forest, only occasionally meeting or gathering with other bands. Even after they had built permanent camps or villages, the Punan still spent most of their time in the forest, often in single families or in small clusters of families, traveling together for months gathering food and collecting forest products for trade. As Ibu Selbut pointed out to me one day when I asked her how many children her sister Saung had given birth to "I don't know...in the past we stayed in the forest. We didn't see each other. We rarely came into the village to gather. We didn't know what happened to everyone else." As a result of this group fluidity histories and stories would have been scattered and piecemeal as well rather than developing into a strong and coherent tradition. Moreover, in the absence of stratification there was no noble or aristocratic class that needed to trace lineage or construct a historical basis for their dominant position. Even so there are still certain stories and legends that the Punan keep alive referencing historical events. There are, most notably, stories of war. No living Punan has ever been involved in a war but they know from their grandparents that in the old days, "before *merdeka* (independence)" and before the Dayak people "entered religion" that the forest was a dangerous place. In those days you had to be careful of who you met in the forest, not like today when "everyone is a Christian". In these old days the Punan were as large as trees and could fly. They "did not look for war" but joined together with the Dayak Segai when they

were attacked by people “from Bulungan”.<sup>31</sup> Their great hero, Bong Dalai, was a Punan “chief” from the downriver village of Lamjan who fought off 200 people single-handedly protected by a magical “*rantau babi*” – a chain fashioned from pig tusks.

There is very little archival information about the Punan Kelai. They are believed to have originated from the forest areas around the Apo Kayan (the headwaters of the Kayan river) in Central Borneo and to have migrated into the Berau area in the early 1800s, although the Punan themselves have no memory of this migration as evidenced by their creation myth (Guerreiro 1985). The events surrounding this migration were as follows. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century various Kenyah groups (including Lepo Maut, Uma Tau, Uma Kulit and Uma Baka) crossed over from Sarawak and began raiding the Apo Kayan to capture land for settlement and to procure heads. The ensuing warfare resulted in a splintering of the Kayan groups, one of which migrated eastward crossing over the Kayan-Ok River and into the headwaters of the Kelai and Sigah Rivers (Obidzinski 2003). This group became known as the *Segai* or *Segai* once in Berau although Guerreiro gives their autonym as *mngga* (*menggae*). Reputed to be fierce warriors, they became the dominant group in the Berau hinterlands displacing the local *Benua* groups which moved progressively farther down river. The Punan followed in the wake of the Segai migration and became the main hunter-gatherers of the Berau forests. Although the Segai originally inhabited the hinterlands of the Kelai, they moved downriver below Long Gi as a result of attacks by Modang and Kenyah of the Wahau River (Spaan 1903). Kenyah

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<sup>31</sup> Although the Punan might not have “looked for war” themselves, they joined with the Segai not only for defense but for offensive attacks as well.

(Uma Baka) also migrated into the Kelai area before the turn of the last century, and although there was conflict with the Segai the latter remained the dominant group on the river. Although temporarily planting swidden in the upper Kelai, the Kenyah also eventually settled below Maura Lesan. By 1899 when the Dutch resident in Tanjung Redeb A.H. Spaan traveled up the Kelai only Punan were to be found inhabiting the upper reaches of the river (Spaan 1903, see also Spaan 1901, 1902).<sup>32</sup>

It is not clear from the historical data what type of relationship might have existed between the Punan and Segai prior to their arrival in the Kelai; however, it was not unusual for Punan groups to follow a patron Dayak group in their migrations. Guerreiro (1995) notes that the Segai and Punan Kelai belong to the same linguistic group, *modang*, and suggests that the Punan might have migrated originally from between the Kelai and Telen watersheds. In any case, once in the Kelai, it is certain that the Punan became vassals of the Segai chiefs who controlled access to their trade (Spaan 1903). Spaan describes a situation in which the Punan on the Kelai had no chiefs but were ruled by the female paramount Segai Chief Si Balah. Punan, he said, were considered almost a type of kin by the Segai although marriage was not permitted with Punan. As a "...result of this 'kin' feeling (p. 186)" all Segai had a right to trade with Punan except when the Rajah was trading with them and then all others present must refrain. Some Rajahs indeed attempted to monopolize trade with the Punan, such as Ijok Lih Ping who died just before the Dutch Resident's arrival on the river. Not surprisingly, as trade with Punan

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<sup>32</sup> Anthony Hendrick Spaan was married to Charles Olmeijer's daughter. Olmeijer, a Dutch trader in Tanjung Redeb, served as the model for the main character of Conrad's first novel *Almayer's Folly*.

brought high returns to the Segai, they were ‘hated’ by their people for this. One Segai woman quoted by Spaan reports that 30-50 guilders worth of salt traded to the Punan could net a return of 600-700 guilders worth of damar. But while Spaan might describe an economically ‘exploitive’ relationship between the Segai and the Punan, the relationship does not sound particularly oppressive. Rather, he says, Punan had to be ‘familiar’ with the Segai Rajah or else the Punan would leave. Although Spaan is often vague in his descriptions, the implication is that the Rajah had to cultivate his relationship with the Punan and to treat them well so as not to risk the loss of these important trading partners to other Dayak groups.

What else does this early European visitor say about the Punan Kelai? Unfortunately very little. He had only brief meetings with Punan in the forests with most interaction taking apparently place in the Segai village of Muara Lesan. Yet there are a couple of interesting pieces that are relevant for this study. First, although he describes an abandoned Punan hut, a “small low house”, in the forest he does not describe any sort of camps or villages (Spaan 1903 p.183). Although small camps might certainly have been established by the Punan by this time, there were no Punan villages of note as there were in such other areas as Sarawak. Tillema (1989) noted that by the 1930s the Punan along the Kelai had permanent ‘settlements’, consisting of small groups of bamboo huts, to which they returned now and again.<sup>33</sup> Spaan also describes the Punan population as

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<sup>33</sup> These early visitors to the Kelai did not, however, conduct systematic research. Thus we can not know whether all the Punan along the river built such settlements or whether this was confined to some families or a few sub-groups.

sizeable in number, larger he estimates than that of the Segai although he did not collect systematic census data. Spaan guesses the number to be at about 1000. Finally, some Punans who he meets in the upriver area say that to gather the rest of their people together would take two to three months. While even now the Punan have very different estimates of time than that of a researcher, the Punans' response does allude to the dispersed nature of Punan social organization and also to the distances that Punan likely traveled at that time.

The Punan in Long Suluy say they do not remember a time when they did not have a village.<sup>34</sup> The oldest members of the community, Pak Liu, Pak Gun, Ibu Miriam and Ibu Song among others say that when they were small they had a village as did their parents before them. They do not seem to have a memory of a purely nomadic existence or more than a vague understanding that other Punan groups have lived that way. The village that they speak of is now called 'Long Suluy Dulu', the Long Suluy 'of the past' or 'before'. It was located not more than a kilometer upriver from the site of the present village at the confluence of the Suluy and Kelai Rivers<sup>35</sup>, on a spot now overgrown with trees. It is an easy, even leisurely boat ride to the old site; large trees, thick with white and orange flowers overhang and shade the meandering waters of the Kelai. But if there has been a heavy storm the night before the waters are raging and perilous, cutting off access to the old village and the forests beyond – except to those few still willing to make the trip by

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<sup>34</sup> In 1967, according to Simandjuntak, 'The Punan [Kelai] have three kinds of houses: houses in the village, half-temporary shelters built usually near a river, and temporary shelters' (pg.60). This is also true today. Punan usually have half-temporary shelters near their rice fields and build temporary shelters while gathering forest products.

<sup>35</sup> *Long* (*Muara* in Indonesian): the mouth of a river.

foot. Long Suluy Dulu would not have resembled the Long Suluy of today. It was not clear-cut, as at that time trees were felled by hand with machetes or handsaw not using chainsaw or a logging company bulldozer. The early houses, huts really, were raised quite high off the ground and were constructed of bamboo with palm leaf coverings, similar to the rice field shacks Punan build today. Needless to say there was no electricity. It seems that Long Suluy Dulu was built around the 1950s, a previous village was situated on the opposite bank of the Suluy and a bit upstream. And before that the Punan say there were smaller 'villages' that were built for a year or so on the Kelai River and its smaller tributaries such as the Suluy and Twow, and then moved. Not everyone had houses in these settlements of the past. Some groups of families preferred to build their huts along some of the smaller tributaries such as the Talkin River a bit downstream but were still considered members of Long Suluy. (Simandjuntak in 1967 notes that there were small satellite settlements on the Samling and Twow rivers). The Punan say Long Suluy Dulu was large and although there is no census data a downriver trader who visited Long Suluy Dulu in the late 1960s estimated that as many as 450 or 500 people lived there, "much larger than Long Suluy today." This is not unlikely as Long Suluy Dulu separated into three villages in the 1970s. About ten families moved to the Wahau River in the Kutai regency to the south following a Chinese trader named Sinta. Some say those families were in debt to Sinta while others say they just moved to 'cari usaha'—to make a living. About thirty families followed the village chief and moved in the late 1970s to Long Kian, a small village located only about one quarter of a kilometer downstream from Long Suluy today. Some say there was a fight among the people that

caused the break, others that those in Long Kian wanted to farm and the land was better downstream. Even the people in Long Kian are mixed about their reasons. In 1989 the remaining families in Long Suluy Dulu moved to their present site. They say they 'were called' by the *bupati* (regent governor) to move below the rapids where the 'government', including teachers and nurses could reach them. And they say they wanted easier access to the downriver capital.

Even today Long Suluy has the feel of a base camp and this would have been much truer in the past. The Punan on the Kelai did not begin to take up rice cultivation until the 1970s, and the Punan of Long Suluy did not begin growing rice until the 1990s when they moved to their new site, so there was no agricultural cycle to tie the Punan to village life. This is unusual among nomadic groups in Borneo, among whom settlement from a nomadic existence is closely linked both causally and temporally with the adoption of shifting rice cultivation. The Punan of Long Suluy, in contrast, continued to depend entirely on the forest for their sustenance despite their 'semi-settled' status. Most Punan of about forty or older say they did not taste rice as children but ate only sago and wild game. In time they developed a taste for rice and bought it from traders, but sago continued to be the basis of their diet until the 1990s. It is difficult to gauge just how often the Punan came into the villages of the past as there is no observational data and Punan have a sense of time that doesn't translate into measurable data. Some Punan say they spent 'a year' in the forest without coming into the village. Others say they went many months before visiting Long Suluy. When they did arrive at the site they might

stay just ‘a night or two’ or ‘about a week’. As my neighbor Nyow, a woman of about forty, answered when I asked why she couldn’t swim, “We didn’t stay by the river when I was young, we stayed in the forest, in the mountains. Where would I learn to swim? Not like the children today who have the river right here. We rarely came into the village.” Pak Benyon also emphasized, “We were mountain people in the past, not river people.” Nor, as Pak Uyow, an old Punan man who even now is rarely seen in the village, said one afternoon sitting on my front porch, was there a reason for Punan to ‘gather’, “Now we are all Christian so we gather for Christmas and Easter. We gather to build the church. But before we did not. Maybe some Punan gathered to clean the village in the past but not many.” “Why did you come into the village in the past then?” I asked. “To see people. To hear news.” And as more and more merchants made their way into the Kelai seeking commerce, the Punan came to the village to trade bringing in their *hasil* [yield of forest products] from the forest.<sup>36</sup>

Although in the early 1900s the Punan were engaged in forest product trade it is unlikely that they would have had much, if any, direct contact with traders coming upstream from Tanjung Redeb. The Segai acted as the middlemen in the forest product trade and most exchange with traders would have taken place in the downriver Segai villages below the rapids at Long Gi or, less often, in Tanjung Redeb itself. One day I had tea across the river from Tanjung Redeb with the last princess of Gunung Tabur, who is about ninety

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<sup>36</sup> *Hasil[BI]* literally translates as ‘results’ or ‘yield’ and is the word commonly used by the Punan to refer to whatever they have brought in from the forest. Thus, for example, if someone has spent a month in the forest looking for gold without any luck, they will say “I did not get any *hasil*”. I use the Indonesian term throughout the text as it does not have a convenient translation in English.

years old now. She described to me how the Dayak people would come to the palace with gifts for the Sultan and sleep on the lawns. She said she never saw the Punan except once on a trip to the Sigah River. Although the Kelai River was ruled by the competing sultanate of Sambiliung the situation was likely the same. Segai and Kenyah might have made their way down occasionally to pay their respects or to seek favor from the sultans and to engage in trade, but in the early days Punan were unlikely to make such a trip. According to Simandjuntak (1967), the Dutch colonial administrators closed the Kelai River to outside traders from 1922-1942 in order to protect the Punan from exploitation. Trade meetings – with cash exchanges rather than barter – were organized under the supervision of the government.<sup>37</sup> This type of protection of nomadic people is not without precedent as the Brookes's also instituted supervised trade meetings in Sarawak. In any case, certainly by the 1950s Chinese, Malay and Arab traders were making their way into the Kelai at regular intervals to trade directly with the Punan.<sup>38</sup> By this time the Segai would have long lost their monopoly over trading rights with the Punan in large part simply out of loss of any effective means of enforcement. With colonialism and the end of headhunting the hinterlands were open to travel and trade and the Segai had no way to stop it.

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<sup>37</sup> I do not have further information to know how strictly the closure was enforced or the impact of this closure on trade with the Punan.

<sup>38</sup> In 1959 the Indonesian government passed a decree forbidding 'aliens' from trading in upriver areas. As many Chinese were non-Indonesian citizens, the decree resulted in an exodus of Chinese traders from upriver areas. The decree was relaxed in 1961.

## CHAPTER 2

### **THE FOREST PRODUCT TRADE: TRANSITIONS OVER TIME AND SPACE**

It is impossible to talk about the changes that the Punan of Long Suluy experienced over the past thirty years, or, indeed, to understand their situation now, without discussing their relationship with Hajji Jupri, an Arab Indonesian trader who arrived in the upper Kelai in the mid 1960s. During the time that he has held 'trade relations', or however one might want to describe his relationship with the Punan, life in Long Suluy has undergone a tremendous transformation. Since Jupri's arrival on the river, the Punan of Long Suluy have adopted agriculture, replaced their traditional beliefs with Christianity, begun formal schooling, adopted technologies that have transformed their relationship with the forest, and become increasingly integrated into market relations and state structures. Naturally, Jupri is far from responsible for all of these changes. They would have taken place regardless of him, albeit with slight variations in some of the details. I focus on Jupri's relationship with the Punan for several reasons. First, although Jupri is not the first or only point of contact between the Punan and the market, he represents a significant, if not the most significant, link between the two over this recent time period. As such one can use him as a lens for investigating the processes by which the global and local interact among the Punan of Long Suluy. Moreover, as he arrived on the upper Kelai at a time when market pressures and new technologies were making the inner rainforests increasingly accessible to trade and when the state was actively seeking to administer its more remote (and recalcitrant) citizens, Jupri serves as a convenient means

by which to ground one's understanding of these changes by tracing the influence of a single individual on an inherently complex social reality, the economic, political and social life of a Bornean hunting and gathering society. And finally, theoretical reasons aside, one simply cannot recount the recent history of Long Suluy without including Jupri as a leading character, and an interesting one at that. Although he might well serve as a personification of the more abstract global/local juncture, he is also an embodied individual, and sometimes the details really do matter in historical trajectories. In this chapter I trace Jupri's arrival on the Kelai River and the process by which he consolidated control over the Punans' trade in forest products. I also investigate how the nature of each of the major forest products on which the Punan concentrated their efforts and the ways the production for their harvesting impacted the organization of Punan social and economic life.

By the 1960s, life in the Upper Kelai had changed significantly since Spaan wrote his reports at the turn of the century. Dutch rule had long since put an end to Segai monopoly over trade with the upriver Punan by quelling their primary means of enforcement of their monopoly, violence. The Segai, as well as Kenyah who settled for a time in Long Gi, remained the Punans' primary trading partners for many years after Dutch had established control in Berau because of both their established history and their proximity to the Punan.<sup>39</sup> Nonetheless, Malay, Arab, Chinese and European traders began to venture into the upriver areas as well. The Japanese are also said to have briefly

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<sup>39</sup> In addition, as mentioned in the previous chapter, the Dutch had closed the Kelai to trade with coastal traders from 1922-1942. However, it is unclear how strictly this was enforced.

visited the Kelai in search of gold during their war time occupation of the island but were apparently unsuccessful in their efforts. Sometime in the early 1950s, visitors to the upriver Kelai informed the Punan that they were now citizens of the newly independent Republic of Indonesia, but it is unlikely that this announcement would have held much meaning for the Punan at the time given how removed they were from state policies. But as Pak Uyow, an elderly Punan man once informed me, “We were so scared of the Dutch – goodness they were tall and hairy!” So perhaps there was some reassurance, at least, that the forests would be free of these creatures for a time.

By the 1960s there was a host of regular faces on the Kelai – Sinta, Suliman, Inchay, Mancang, Gura Ahmadi – mostly Malay traders but a few ethnic Chinese as well. As Pak Talkin, a Punan man of about fifty years claimed “Traders were not shy to come in those days. They traveled all the way up to the headwaters of Suluy. We didn’t know money back then. They showed it to us. It wasn’t paper like today but silver... We traded in boxes – we gave a box of gaharu for some tobacco.” The traders at that time came primarily in search of damar, a resin, and gaharu, a type of aromatic wood. Although Pak Jelani, a Malay merchant whose uncle had occasionally worked the river, remembers that small amounts of gold were traded, the Punan at that time engaged in relatively little harvesting of what would later become the Kelai’s most important export. The traders in turn brought many of the same items that had been in demand in 1900 – tobacco, salt, and sugar – but also, among other things, tea, coffee, nails, tools and sarongs (which they found more comfortable than their tree bark clothing). Although memory is likely kinder

than reality ever was, the Punan of Long Suluy remember, or romanticize, these early traders as honest, giving fair prices to the Punan and not forcing them into debt.<sup>40</sup>

At the time Jupri arrived in Long Suluy Punan were still living, for the most part, as subsistence hunter gatherers, collecting *relatively* minor amounts of forest products for trade. Jupri claims, as do the Punan, that many of the huts by this time were covered with tin roofing that they had received through trade. (Tin containers were also highly prized as a trade good as they could be used for storing pig fat). No Punan village on the Kelai, not even those groups living much farther downriver, had yet adopted agriculture, and though some individuals had tasted rice the Punan preferred to eat sago. Their technology was simple; a rare individual might have owned a gun, but most people hunted as they still do with blowpipe and spear.<sup>41</sup> They relied heavily on rattan for baskets, carrying bags, and mats which they wove with skill. Their boats were also held together with rattan rather than nails. The few nails that a family might have owned were bent and used as fishing hooks; the only means to fish was to spear dive, since the Punan did not own fishing nets.<sup>42</sup> On downriver trips they tied an oar to the back of a boat and maneuvered as though using a tiller; the arduous return home was accomplished by grabbing the trees on the bank with a hooked pole and pulling from the bow while

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<sup>40</sup> Simandjuntak (1967) notes that the Punan were by 1967 already in exploitive debt relations with traders but does not give any specific names. Although small amounts of credit were extended, traders at that time were unlikely to have risked large amounts of credit with such a highly mobile population and also given the competition among traders

<sup>41</sup> The *Vidar* on which Conrad arrived was probably involved in the illegal gun trade and Olmeijer was reputed to trade in guns with the upriver Dayaks. At the time Jupri arrived most guns on the river were primarily smuggled in from Malaysia.

<sup>42</sup> Historically among the Punan fish was considered a famine food. At this time with decreased populations of other meat sources, particularly wild pig, and the Punans' increasingly settled status along the rivers, fish constitutes one of their primary, although least valued, protein sources.

pushing along the bottom of the river with a straight pole from the stern. More often, however, Punan walked, particularly as their foraging activities tended to keep them in the mountains rather than along rivers. They wore clothes made of pounded tree bark, shaped into a loin cloth for the men and short skirts for the women, and went shirtless although a few had traded for sarongs by this time. They wore leopard teeth in their ears (Spaan 1903) or wore ear weights, but unlike many other Dayak and Punan groups, they did not decorate themselves with tattoos. The Punan had not yet received any formal education. However, in the late 1960s, nine young people were taken as part of a government social service program to be schooled in Muara Lesan, the *kecamatan*<sup>43</sup> seat located on the lower part of the river. They all returned to Long Suluy about eight years later although none now either appear or claim to be literate. Nor had they yet been exposed to Christian missionaries who by that time had begun to convert many of the district's Dayak peoples. The Punan followed their traditional beliefs of animal augury, relying on the forest for, not only subsistence, but for guidance and meaning as well. Many, they say, followed their dreams which they believed prophetic.

**Hajji** Jupri was born in about the year 1925 in the town of Tanjung Selor in the Sultanate turned Regency of Bulungan, just north of Berau.<sup>44</sup> He was the middle child of seven children and his parents were traders in the area. He does not know when his family originally emigrated from Arabia to the archipelago but his grandparents had lived in

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<sup>43</sup> The political unit below the district (*Kabupaten*) level.

<sup>44</sup> According to Sherry (1966) there were thirty three Arab families listed in Tanjung Selor at the time Conrad arrived in East Kalimantan of whom the Jupri family was one.

Palembang in Sumatra and had later been involved in the Singapore Trade, his family gradually settling on the coast of Kalimantan. Jupri first married in Bulungan, an arranged marriage to the daughter of an Arab Indonesian businessman. Jupri, who was never formally educated and remains illiterate, was given work supervising his father-in-law's his bird nest operations.<sup>45</sup> In about 1962 Jupri moved to Tanjung Redeb seeking greater opportunities which he thought might await him in the regency lying to the south. Leaving his wife and children behind in Bulungan, he married again in Tanjung Redeb, this time to a much younger woman from an Arab family in Samarinda, and set up a second household in a small house at the mouth of the Kelai River, just around the corner from Tanjung Redeb's main port. By the mid 1960s Jupri was engaging in small amounts of trade along the lower Kelai and breaking into bird nest operations in the Berau district.<sup>46</sup> As a Malay trader on the lower Kelai described him, "He was poor back then. He showed up in Muara Lesan wearing short pants or a sarong, he wasn't a Hajji yet. He lived in a small house on Jalan Sudarso, next to where he is now. He was an outsider here, from Bulungan, no one knew him."

None of the Punan actually remember Jupri's first visit to Long Suluy in the mid-1960s.

Given the extent of his influence on their lives in the following years it is tempting to

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<sup>45</sup> It is rumored by those who know Jupri that he originally made his own nest egg by stealing birds nests and selling them directly on his own, eventually buying out his father in law's business. Whether or not this is completely accurate (and I certainly never enquired about it with Jupri) such actions might be regarded as a sign of business acumen rather than a taint on one's moral character – one strategy by which younger men maneuver to establish themselves as eventual patriarchs in the family. In any case, as Jupri himself aged many of his scion would repeat the same, or try to, at his expense.

<sup>46</sup> Unlike in other districts such as Kutai and Bulungan where local communities hold rights to bird nest caves, in Berau the caves are owned and leased out by the district government.

imagine that his arrival was a great and historic event akin to Captain Cook's arrival in the Hawaiian Islands. But just as the Europeans were simply one more group of traders among many others in the archipelago when they first arrived, so was Jupri just another trader, and a minor one at that, when he arrived in Long Suluy. Although some Punan do claim to remember his first time in Suluy it's more likely that their memory is rather of one of the first times they happened to meet him, given that the Punan were so rarely in the village in those days. In fact, on his first trip into the upriver Kelai, Jupri actually accompanied the Chinese trader, Sinta. He went along as an assistant scouting out the potential for profit for his own and discovered that, indeed, trade in the upriver Kelai presented many interesting possibilities. Punan, however, do remember his later visits once he had established himself as a force to be reckoned with on the Kelai. As an older Punan man from the downriver village of Long Gi described. "He arrived in two long boats with thirty people and piles of goods. In those days he didn't have a *mesin* (outboard motor), so had to hire people to pole the boats upriver. It took months. There was no road to Long Gi then. He stopped in our village for a few days to trade and looking for replacements to row the longboats to Long Suluy. Back then we knew Long Suluy, we used to go up there on foot, looking for hasil. He was young then and strong not like now. He brought escorts with him, army or police. He never came up here alone, he was too scared. We were scared of people with stripes on their shoulders and carried guns... We weren't Christian yet. We still wore tree bark clothes and lived in the forest."

The details by which Jupri forced his competition out of Long Suluy are still not completely clear to me. Most of the people trading in the upriver Kelai at that time have by now passed away. Yet competition certainly did exist, and it was some years before Jupri was alone in the upriver Kelai. According to the Punan, other traders were scared of Jupri and stopped coming. Sinta, they said, moved his business interests to the Wahau River in the Kutai District to the south taking along with him about ten Punan families who had a debt to him. (Others say those families just moved there on their own; Long Suluy was too crowded and the Wahau had a lot of gaharu back then). But whether Jupri forced out the established competitors in the area through intimidation, as the Punan maintain, or whether they simply faded out following other business opportunities, as Jupri insists, what is clear is that Jupri actively and forcefully discouraged any competitors. Pak Jelani, a Malay trader who still works on the river conducting minor amounts of trade, recounts, "My uncle used to work on the river, carrying trade goods. When I took over the business Jupri tried to force me out. He hired army and police to work for him. They threatened me, told me I had to get out of Suluy. But I stood up to them. 'I am Berau people', I told them, 'Jupri is an outsider, he doesn't belong here'. I told them not to get in my way. After that they left me alone." But Jelani was a minor trader in the area and Jupri was not threatened by the sale of small amounts of goods to the Punan. The Punan were not as inherently interesting to Jupri as a market for consumer items as they were as a source of forest products. What anyone might sell to the Punan, in small amounts anyway, could be tolerated. It was what the traders might

try to buy from the Punan that Jupri wanted to control. By 1980 certainly, Jupri had established his ‘monopoly’ over trade with the Punan.<sup>47</sup>

Jupri, the Punan maintain, was never violent towards them. In fact, most speak of him as fair in that regard. “He never hit us, even when we were *nakal* [misbehaving]. But the police did. We were scared of them.” Even now, it is rare that a Punan will hold Jupri accountable for police brutality, and it does not seem that the Punan were overtly terrorized in any sort of systematic way. Very rarely do they remark on violence when asked about Jupri’s history on the river, and it was some time before I had realized physical force had been used. It was actually downriver groups, who were not under Jupri’s authority, who informed me of it but, when asked, the Suluy people confirmed these instances in matter of fact, rather than traumatized, accounts. Jupri had no interest in alienating the Punan. Rather he wished to forge close relationships with the Punan so that maintaining the trading partnership required minimum amounts of work on his part. Even though Jupri seems to have seldom ordered the use of physical force, he did authorize its use at times to establish the consequences of challenging his authority. The threat of violence was a continual reminder to the Punan to adhere to Jupri’s expectations and, in particular, to avoid trade relationships with traders other than him. The extreme instances of force which were recounted to me were times when the police punished Punan by forcing a Punan to tread water in the river while pointing a gun over his head or

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<sup>47</sup> Although I use the term *monopoly* to refer to Jupri’s economic control over the Punan I do so because of its common usage. However, Jupri actually held a *monopsony* over the Punan, a term referring to one party holding control over the purchase price as opposed to the selling price of a commodity.

by forcing someone to stand for hours in the hot sun for having capsized a boat of rattan. At other times the police shot guns over the Punans' heads to frighten them. One military officer was known for having been particularly cruel and quick to hit the Punan. Jupri, however, seems to have taken the role of patient moderator (in the good cop/bad cop scenario), publicly at least attempting to temper police brutality. As horrible as these accounts sound, as I expect they were, had the violence been intolerable, the Punan could have fled into the forest and refused to come in to trade, which would have undermined Jupri's goals.

Jupri himself never actually spent long periods of time in Suluy; by his own account, a month at the longest. In fact, even though the Punan claim that Jupri speaks Punan he insists that he barely understands a word of it. (I checked this out by using some basic Punan words with Jupri and indeed he had no idea of what I was saying). Yet Jupri could never have maintained control of trade on the upriver Kelai without constant supervision. Shortly after his arrival on the Kelai, by the early to mid 1970s, Jupri established a permanent trading post in Long Suluy manned by his nephew Idrus, later to become a Hajji as well. Idrus and Jupri were known to have been close. Idrus, about twenty-five years Jupri's junior, had lost his parents as a young child and was raised in Jupri's marital home in Bulungan, working in Jupri's businesses in Tanjung Selor and later following him to the Berau. Idrus spent extended periods of time in Long Suluy, up to six months at a stretch, and became fluent in the Punan language. A large heavy man by this time, he was known to have been quite cruel and he himself unashamedly admits to having hit

the Punan if they crossed him or were “lazy” i.e. did not bring in enough hasil. In the mid 1980s, however, Jupri and Idrus came into a rather dramatic conflict with one another. Jupri discovered that Idrus had not been turning over large amounts of gold that he had collected from the Punan. How he discovered this is not clear although one of Jupri’s people maintains that when Idrus was sick for a few months his temporary replacement brought in significantly more profit, which led Jupri to become suspicious. What resulted was an all-out war. Jupri attempted to force Idrus to turn over the gold, and Idrus responded by barricading himself into Long Suluy with armed police officers. Jupri, in response, hired military helicopters to fly into Suluy to forcibly retrieve the gold. The police felt no match for the army and lay down their weapons and Jupri received his gold. The Punan, in the meantime, fled to the forest in terror, more aware than ever of Jupri’s authority. Idrus, not surprisingly, stopped working with Jupri. He moved just half a kilometer downriver and set up his own trading post in Long Kian where about thirty Suluy families had recently set up as a separate village. He became wealthy in his own right, in large part through business ventures in Tanjung Redeb, rather than through Long Kian, but never grew as rich as Jupri. Eventually he closed his business in Long Kian due to low profits. At one point, the Punan there were so scared of him that in protest they disappeared into the forest for six months, leaving him without any trading partners to provide forest products. Idrus still lives in a large house one block away from Jupri on Sudarso Street at the mouth of the Kelai River in Tanjung Redeb, but they are said to never talk.

After Idrus moved to Long Kian, Jupri's business in Long Suluy was temporarily overseen by one of Jupri's *anak buah*<sup>48</sup> of Chinese ethnicity. In 1989, when the Punan of Long Suluy moved their village downriver to its present site, another of Jupri's workers, Pak Sabran, took over supervision of the trading post and business. Sabran, a native of Tanjung Redeb and ethnic Berau, was in his late forties at the time and had already spent twelve years in the forests working in Jupri's bird nest operations. His wife and children, who remained in their small house on the outskirts of Tanjung Redeb, saw little of Sabran. Over the next fifteen years they would see even less of him. Their small house would eventually be replaced with a large, though relatively simple, three-story wooden structure overlooking the Berau River, a stone's throw away from the Sultan of Sambiliung's former residence. Like Jupri's new house, it would be financed by years of profits from buying low from and selling high to the Punan of the upriver Kelai. In addition to Sabran's own children, who would eventually number eleven, several Punan children would come to live there so as to attend school in the city, substituting the light breezes of the wide Berau River, which would waft in over Sabran's veranda and into his spacious sitting room, for the heavy mists of the winding Kelai River high in the mountainous forests.

**For** centuries external desire for forest products had been winding its way up the rivers, weaving its way through the thick forests and scaling over the rugged mountains of Borneo in search of its objects. This almost obsessive hunger for the riches of the

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<sup>48</sup> Anak buah [literally: child of the fruit]. Although *anak buah* is used to refer to a 'member of a group' it often connotes intimacy or quasi-familial alliance.

rainforest, blandly labeled ‘market demand’ by the economists, over the past millennium gradually coaxed Borneo’s forest peoples to alter their lives in response to this desire emanating from distant, and to them, unknown shores. Over the years since the Punan had first migrated into the Kelai, sometime in the 1800s, they had been involved in collecting a variety of forest products – bezoar stone, hornbill ivory, feathers, rhinoceros horn, beeswax, gutta percha, aromatic and decorative woods – in short, whatever had been in demand on the market and available in the forest at any point in time.<sup>49</sup> By the time Jupri arrived in the 1960s, the Punan were concentrating their efforts on four important forest products: damar, rattan, gaharu and gold. Over the years that Jupri would maintain trade relations with Long Suluy, the Punans’ focus would shift from one product to another in response to fluctuations in supply and demand. Forest products often follow a boom and bust cycle, and that has been true of the forest product trade in East Kalimantan over the past century (Gianno 1990). Moreover, Punan in Long Suluy often reference their history in terms of which product they had been actively pursuing at the time: “Oh, that was when we looked for damar” or “That was during the time of gaharu.”

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<sup>49</sup> It is not possible to know for how long and to what extent the Punan might have been involved in forest product trade prior to their arrival in the Kelai in the 1800s. Some writers characterize Borneo’s Punan peoples as professional traders, even to the extent of theorizing that Punan *became* hunters and gatherers so as to occupy an economic niche created by market forces (Hoffman 1986). Thus, one might assume given this position that the Punan were more than likely highly motivated by trade for quite some time. Others emphasize the relative isolation of many Punan groups in the past and argue that Punan relationship with the market, and with non-Punan groups in general, has often been quite minimal (Brosius 1988, Sellato 1988). Punan culture, they argue, is not simply an artifact of contact with other peoples but might have developed, at least for stretches of time, in relative isolation.

Damar, or ‘gum dammar’ in English, is a generic Indonesian word used to refer to resins – the sticky exudates that are derived largely from the family of *Dipterocarpaceae* trees of southern Asia – and to copal, a translucent whitish resin seeping from the genus of trees *Agathis borneensis* (Sellato 2002). Among the indigenous peoples of the area, damar was traditionally combined with a bundle of inflammable wood and leaves to make a torch to light one’s way in the dark forest nights. It was also used for caulking the seams of boats.<sup>50</sup> Damar may well have entered inter-Island trade networks in Southeast Asia as early as 3000 BC, and constituted one of the first products to be included in trade between South East Asia and China as early as the third century and most certainly by the fifth century (Dunn 1975). Early Chinese sea-farers had discovered that damar worked well mixed with bark of the *Melaleuca* as a packing for the seams of their large boats and that a preparation of boiled damar and coconut oil served as an excellent paint for the boat’s surface (Burkill 1966). Some damars have also been used in local trade as incense, medicines, adhesives and in making batik dyes (de Foresta 2004). In the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century these natural resins gained additional commercial value with the emergence of the paint and varnish industries in Europe and the United States. After World War II, however, damars were replaced by artificial, or synthetic, resins and thus lost much of their market in international trade networks, though continued as a trade item for local industries. The development of damar plantations further displaced demand for locally collected supplies. Sellato notes that trade in damar from East Borneo probably began around 1900. *Jelutung*, a latex derived from the tree family *Dyera*, reached peak

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<sup>50</sup> Copal can burn on its own without a packing of leaves

production between 1910 and the 1930s but had practically disappeared from the world market by the 1960s. Copal production increased dramatically in the late 1930s and peaked between 1940 and 1970 but with prices declining sharply in the 1970s, exports also declined (Sellato 2002).

Although the Punan harvested a number of different types of damar over time, copal (*damar matakucing*) probably represented the lion's share of their produce during Jupri's time as it was still high in demand during his early years in Long Suluy. Damar is harvested by cutting slashes in the tree. Sometimes the cuts are made at the base of the trunk, but they are more effective higher up in the tree. The liquid resin oozes out of the wounds and coagulates into a gum that can be collected once it hardens. Damar was a difficult and labor intensive forest product to collect, and one the Punan do not remember fondly. They often describe how they had to stay overnight in the mountains where the trees were located, guarding their harvest of damar until it was ready to be collected. Mostly they complain about the cold: "In those days when Hajji first came we mostly looked for damar. That was the most important then. It was hard work. The trees were high in the mountains and we had to sleep there. It was so cold, probably as cold as where you come from." With the decline of the damar market in the early 1970s, the Punans' efforts turned to other forest products although even now they occasionally collect a brownish lower grade damar, commonly known as *damar tanah* or *damar merah*, used as a latex for boat caulking.

In the late 1960s and into the 1970s another forest product available along the Kelai River and its tributaries rose in demand on the world market: rattan. Also commonly known as ‘cane’ or ‘wicker’, rattan had been used traditionally by Borneo’s forest peoples probably since their ancestors first migrated to the island. The Punan still use this abundant and versatile member of the *Palma* family for making baskets, carriers, mats and rope. In the past when iron was scarce and nails a luxury, rattan was used in the construction of boats and houses. Even now Punan will rely on rattan for hanging their tarps in the forest, throwing up a line between trees for hanging their clothes to dry, for tethering their boats, for hanging a freshly caught turtle on a limb (still bloody and half alive) while they continue gathering, for wrapping around their ankles to aid in shimmying up a tree when collecting fruit and for making balls and other toys, among many other things. It’s a remarkable gift from the forest and one that is well used by the forest’s inhabitants. Rattan was also an important early good in the trade with China, and by the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century it had entered the world market for its use in the furniture and basketry industries. Even with the arrival of synthetics (plastics), rattan continues to be in demand precisely for its ‘natural’ quality (Peluso 1983).

Although Borneo is home to hundreds of species of rattan, those primarily exploited in East Kalimantan are *Calamus caesius*, or ‘rotan sega’, and *Calamus ornatus*, or ‘rotan tebal’. Rattan is a single- or multiple-stemmed spiny plant whose whip-like branches can grow to as high as 100 meters, climbing up into trees in a semi-vine like fashion. As it stores water it is often found on river banks or along small mountain streams. Rattan is

harvested by cutting the mature stems and pulling them down from the crowns of trees. It is unpleasant work due to the plant's spiny covering and can be dangerous as one can accidentally pull down a dead tree branch, or, as in the case of my Punan neighbor, a snake (my neighbor as a result suffered a painful bite to his right foot). After the rattan has been wrangled down, the thorns along the sides of the branches are chopped off or the rattan is pulled around a tree to rub off the prickly leaf sheaths.<sup>51</sup> The rattan is then brought to a clearing and laid out in the sun to dry, and eventually sold either in bundles of coils (*gelong*) or by length (*ikat*).

Approximately 80% of the world's rattan supply comes from Indonesia with one half of these exports coming from Kalimantan, with East Kalimantan in providing the largest share in both wild and cultivated rattans. There was a surge of demand for rattan in Indonesia in the late 1960s with exports increasing 200% between 1968 and 1977. During that time period rattan yielded more foreign exchange for Indonesia than any other forest product except logs (Peluso 1983). Part of the reason for this surge in demand was that the Philippines, the other major supplier of rattan, instituted export restrictions on raw or semi-processed rattan thus shifting the burden for supplying the world's markets to Indonesia's forests. A second reason was that there was a surge of foreign investment in carpeting and matting factories in South Kalimantan thus increasing the demand for local rattan that would be exported as finished products. Part

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<sup>51</sup> According to Burkill (1966), the latter method of 'raut' (paring off) the spines might have given rise to the word 'rattan'

of the reason for increase in rattan exports also lay on the supply side of the equation as increased logging opened up the forests facilitating the harvesting of rattan.

Eventually, following the boom and bust cycles typical of markets for forest products, the rattan industry suffered a set back in 1979 when the Indonesian government, attempting to protect the finished rattan industry in Java, placed limits on exports of raw rattan through restrictions and export taxes. Prices declined because the industry did not have the capacity to absorb all the raw rattan that was being harvested. In the 1980s exploitation of rattan was further complicated when the government instituted licensing for individuals and collectors. In 1988 the government placed a complete ban on the export of raw and semi processed rattan which, though helping the rattan industry in Java, had serious negative consequences for rattan in both Sulawesi and Kalimantan. Although the prohibition of rattan exports was lifted in 1992, high export taxes continued to depress overall demand and thus prices for raw rattan. With the dramatic decline in demand for rattan, Jupri exhorted the Punan to shift their attention to gaharu.

**Gaharu**, also called Aloes or Eagle wood, is an aromatic wood highly in demand as a fumigatory and incense as well as for its medicinal properties in the Mideast and Asia. Gaharu develops as a result of a wound or fungal infection in the genus of trees known as *Aquiliaria*, found in tropical forests from Northeastern India to Hong Kong to New Guinea. Gaharu is first noted as a trade item along the Ganges plains in Sanskrit texts as far back as 600AD where it is referred to as ‘Agaru’ or ‘heavy’ referring to the relatively

high density of the substance (Burkill 1966). Although valued by these early writers of the Sanskrit texts the origins of this highly fragrant wood was probably a mystery to them, as it came to them only by the way of long distance trade. The Chinese, who discovered a high quality source among the local traders of Malaysia, referred to it as “ch’ en hsiang” or ‘incense which sinks in water’ again referring to the heaviness of the wood (Burkill 1966). In the year 1200 a customs official from the Chinese province of Kewangtun provided detailed descriptions of this trade item noting its sources as various ports in the Indo-Malaysian archipelago including those on the island of Borneo. When the Portuguese arrived in the archipelago, they attempted to seize the Chinese trade in gaharu and, although demand never arose for gaharu in Europe, there are accounts of ‘rosary beads’ etc. manufactured from this wood in Gao, a Portuguese colonized island. It was referred to as “pao d’aguila” which was eventually transformed into English as Eagle Wood. Siamese envoys, and possibly others as well, had also brought the wood as royal presents to the French court in the 1700s so its existence was known of in Europe. The term “Aloes’ wood” derives from the Hebrew name of a wood used for incense, although it is unlikely that the Biblical references to Aloes wood in King David’s time referred to the same wood known now as gaharu.

Traditionally collected in Borneo by the nomadic forest peoples, gaharu is found in only about 10% of the sub-canopy trees of *Aquilaria*. Given the patchy nature of the tropical rainforest environment, trees that might be infected are widely distributed over the landscape, harvesting of gaharu thus requires both persistence and knowledge of the

rainforest. One study puts estimates of infected *Aquilairia* trees in Kalimantan at only 3.37 trees per ha (Donovan and Puri 2004). Gaharu is classified into different grades by merchants depending on the color and aroma of the wood. The highest quality woods are black in color and result from the tree's fragrant sap infiltrating wounds or fungal infections in the tree turning them black and hard. Skilled collectors are adept at spotting decaying branches or crooked growth indicating that gaharu is likely to be present. The highest quality gaharu, once it reaches the markets of Southeast Asia, is subjected to a distillation process yielding a highly aromatic essential oil which, in turn, is used as a key perfume ingredient. Lesser grades are used as incense before Moslem prayers, and as fumigatories. Although traditionally only the dead hard odorous wood was removed allowing the tree to live, with increasing demand and the influx of non-local collectors, many of the trees are completely cut down and left to rot, cause for concern both among local peoples and conservationists.

Although the Punan probably collected gaharu consistently throughout the last century, they intensified their efforts with the demise of the damar and rattan trades. The most recent expansion in gaharu was in the late 1970s. By 1980, high quality gaharu in the highlands of central Borneo was selling for \$20 per kilogram and prices in Singapore were 10 to 20 times higher (Jessup and Peluso 1986). Although prices varied during the period I conducted research (with a decisive decline immediately after the US invaded Iraq), they averaged about seven to eight million rupiah per kilogram (~\$820 USD-~\$940 USD) for first class gaharu and three million (~\$350 USD) for second class at the

first level of production.<sup>52 53</sup> Internet prices for gaharu in 2005 ran about \$1650 USD per kilogram. Donovan and Puri (2004) note that much gaharu is smuggled out of Indonesia to avoid tariffs and thus there is insufficient information about the total quantity of gaharu exports. In earlier historical times the best grades were said to come from Cambodia and Annam (Burkill 1966), but given the destruction of so much forest in Asia, by the late 1990s 70% of the gaharu reaching the Singapore market was from Indonesia, the remaining 30% from Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam (Yamada 1995). Given the demand, attempts have been made to artificially infect trees so as to stimulate the production of gaharu, but thus far they have been unsuccessful in producing any of high quality. By the late 1980s most of the gaharu in the Long Suluy area was gone, in part as a result of a large influx of outsiders coming into the area in search of the wood and a lack of governmental restrictions against their entrance.

By the time I arrived in Long Suluy in 2003, the damar, gaharu and rattan trades were pretty much things of the past. Although small amounts of damar were still collected for boat caulking, flashlights and kerosene lamps had replaced damar torches in the forest and electricity had recently arrived in the village. Gaharu, moreover, had never been used traditionally by the Punan and although small amounts could still be found in the area it was mostly a low grade and thus traded for very little. Although many Malay gaharu workers passed through Long Suluy on their way into the Bulungan district to the north, government districting prohibited the Punan from freely crossing over into

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<sup>52</sup> These were the prices paid to the gaharu collectors at the first level of production.

<sup>53</sup> I am using an exchange rate of 8500 rupiah= \$1USD

neighboring regencies to collect where they used to hunt gaharu and where it is still abundant. Although there were possibly ways around this the Punan did not know how to go about acquiring the authorization to work in Bulungan and were afraid to be caught; moreover they really did not want to travel so far anymore. Rattan was still used traditionally but, as a commercial item, the prices were too low to make it worth hauling to Tanjung Redeb, either for the Punan or Jupri. Thus, with either the market or the supply dried up for these products, the Punans' attention, as well as Jupri's, had turned to gold. When I arrived on the scene, the search for gold had been in full swing for more than ten years.

By the late 1980s most of the gaharu in the Long Suluy area had been harvested. Although the Punan had been gradually intensifying their collection of gold during the previous decade – some say Idrus forced them to start looking for gold in about 1982 – 1988 and 1989 mark the beginning of what I call the 'gold period', when gold almost completely replaced gaharu in terms of time invested in its collection. Gold in the Kelai area is found in the Kelai River itself and in its tributaries. Although there are stories of large nuggets of gold being found in the past, now it comes mostly in the form of small kernels, flakes or sand-sized particles. Often it is embedded in what look like small pebbles, the gold intermixed with quartz and requiring separation. The small pieces separately have little value by themselves, but when accumulated over time and stored all the small bits and flakes start to add up to a good price. According to Pak Sabran, in the 1980s an Australian-Canadian gold company sent surveyors into the area assessing the

potential for large scale gold mining and searching for a vein. Finding no vein and determining that the amounts available in the area would not justify the investment, the company went away never to be heard from again and leaving whatever profit might exist in the rivers to the locals – the Punan and their traders, primarily the latter as it would turn out.<sup>54</sup>

Gold collection is cold work. It is also time consuming. It brings the Punan not only to the rivers but actually into them for many hours on end. Prior to the 1990s the Punan mainly panned for gold. Using large concave plates that they carved out of wood, they stood in the shallower rivers and streams patiently scooping sand and water up from the bed. Skillfully swirling the contents along the edges, they allowed the larger stones and most of the sand to drop off the sides. The gold, heavier than other stones or sand would, as though by vortex, be drawn into the middle of the plate. (I unsuccessfully attempted to pan for gold many times and can assure you that it takes practice to allow the ‘flotsam and jetsam’ to gracefully spill off the sides). Although more abundant then than now, there was no guarantee of finding gold in any one spot and hours of sifting through the river beds might well yield nothing at all. On the other hand, one could get very lucky and, as both the Punan and Jupri’s people claim, find a nugget as large as one ounce<sup>55</sup> sitting in one’s wooden plate. Most Punan still pan for gold as one of their methods

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<sup>54</sup> About a year into my research I heard that one group of Punan had gone with their spears to threaten another group of Punan over some issue. When I enquired further, it turned out that I had been the cause of the *demonstrasi*: the attacking group had not yet met me. When they heard that other Punan were bringing an American woman up the Suluy river to the best gold spots they assumed I was surveying for a gold company.

<sup>55</sup> Although Indonesia now uses the metric system, the Punan still sometimes reference the colonial Dutch measurements

particularly the older people who say they ‘don’t know how to look for gold’ which usually means they are not adept in the new ways.

After the gaharu in the Suluy area had for all practical purposes vanished from over-exploitation, and the Punan had turned more seriously to gold, they discovered a new technology to assist them: diving masks. Now rather than limiting themselves to panning, they could dig around with their feet while peering down into the sand for something promising. They could also dive into deeper water, holding their breath while pushing away stones and sand. A few of the Punan were further aided by the arrival of gasoline-operated air compressors at Jupri’s store. Individual Punan rented the air compressors on credit. Compressors allowed them to stay underwater for up to an hour at a time which was particularly helpful in the deeper Kelai waters. Many Punan, however, are scared of the compressors which, if they leak, cause one to breath in gas, and can make one quite sick. Another technology which aided the Punan was the adoption of *ketinting* in place of outboard motors. *Ketinting* are smaller motors than standard outboard motors and less costly. Moreover, the propeller is fixed to the end of a long metal shaft allowing a boat to maneuver more easily in shallow areas as the shaft can be lifted up and down. With regular outboards the entire motor has to be lifted out of shallow water and the boat pushed, lest one risk breaking the expensive outboard propeller on rocks. *Ketinting* propellers are, in contrast, significantly less expensive and considered almost as a disposable item. In addition to maneuvering more easily in shallow water, the *ketinting* propeller can be used to mix up sand while looking for gold.

Tipping the bow of the boat up, and, if possible, resting it on a large river rock, the shaft is extended all the way to the river bed and the motor allowed to run. The spinning of the propeller in the sand consequently is much more efficient for stirring up the bottom than feet. Those Punan, however, who are considered most successful at finding gold, particularly now with supplies dwindling, are those industrious enough to push large rocks aside, scanning for what might lie beneath them.

Punan are not secretive about where they look for gold, at least not from one another. Many families, whether or not they are closely related, will often work in the same area. If someone makes a big find, everyone else nearby will crowd closer to look around at the lucky spot. If once back in the village someone is reported to have had a big find in a certain spot or in a previously unexploited stream, many others will trek out to the reported location on their next trip into the forest. I never heard any jealousy reported over someone's success in finding gold. Others would shrug and say that person had 'luck' or was 'hard working.' Once back in the village the Punan bring their gold to Jupri's store where Sabran measures their find on a small balance scale. The Punan stand back, not understanding the computations Sabran makes with the small copper weights, and (usually) accept Sabran's pronouncements on the gold's final worth. Once out of the store, however, they grumble and admit that they don't believe Sabran's amounts.

Unfortunately, no records were kept of the amounts of forest products coming out of the Suluy area but the amounts must have been substantial. Certainly they allowed Jupri to

accumulate enormous wealth – he was considered the wealthiest man in Tanjung Redeb for many years, owning homes in Tanjung Redeb, Tanjung Selor and Surabaya, although a large portion of that wealth also came from bird nest operations downriver. (A few years before my arrival he built a three story pink mansion-like domicile across the street from his old abode). According to Jupri's people, during the 1970s two shipments of rattan per week came down from Suluy each carrying a ton of the cane. Downriver Punan traveled up to Long Suluy to provide extra labor as there was so much rattan to be harvested and transported. High grade gaharu in the 1980s was so abundant that the Punan did not even bother to collect any of the lesser grades. Record keeping became more exact in the 1990s and, I was told by one source that until 1996, *at least* two kilograms of gold were coming out of the Kelai every nine months and often much more. The Punan, however, saw very little of the profit from these forest products. Even aside from questionable measurements of the goods, the prices Jupri paid were low. It is difficult to collect data on exact prices in the past as neither the Punan nor Jupri quite remember the prices he was paying relative to the true market value at any point in time. During my fieldwork Jupri paid 50.000 rupiah (~\$6 USD) per gram of gold while market prices in Tanjung Redeb ran from 75.000 to 90.000 rupiah. Yet even in recent years when market prices were comparable, the prices paid to the Punan had been much lower.

The shift from one forest product to another was one of emphasis rather than one of exclusion. In other words, at most points in time, Punan were collecting a variety of forest products but shifted their primary focus to whichever was in highest demand on the

market, and, by extension, by Jupri. Gaharu, in particular, was consistently collected for trade until the supply had for all practical purposes vanished. Yet it was not simply a matter of substituting one forest product for another as one might substitute picking apples from a tree and then, metaphorically, going on to pick oranges (or, in this case, durian fruit for *rambutan*). Rather the shift from damar to rattan to gaharu to gold required a very different organization of production for its collection, with significant consequences for Punan social and economic life. Mobility patterns, internal and external social relations, and even the Punans' relationship with the rainforest would be transformed by the nature of the forest product most in demand and the accompanying constellation of technologies and social mechanisms necessary for its harvesting and distribution.

Damar, as the primary forest product that was collected in the 1960s and early 1970s, was amenable to the way of life that the Punan had historically practiced given its patchy and wide distribution over the forest landscape and in the mountains. The Punan of Long Suluy were forest people, spending long periods of time away from the 'village', or other type of permanent or semi-permanent settlement, either as single families or in multi-family groups. Although an anthropologist may be tempted to think in terms of the 'band' as an ideal type, this classic form of political organization did not characterize the situation in the Suluy area in the latter half of the past century. Rather an individual family<sup>56</sup> or small group of families would 'set out' (or more accurately 'return to') the

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<sup>56</sup> The primary social unit among the Punan is the nuclear family

upriver forests to subsistence forage and to collect forest products for trade. As the days passed the group would split up or come together, while other families might join in and then separate once again. It was not a political unit as the small foraging band might have been in the distant past when the Punan were still purely nomadic. Rather, these small Punan groups more closely resembled ad hoc and fluid economic and social configurations, temporary sub-units of the larger political group, although certainly strong personalities would have influenced others' decision making processes. As I was told, "In the past everyone was their own chief."

Damar did not require any new technologies beyond what the Punan already possessed. Moreover, the Punan were not yet enslaved to the market system and did not require a steady supply of income. Although they had already entered into debt relations with traders, the Punan describe their needs in the past as basic, and thus a family might look for damar on a limited basis until they had acquired the market products they desired (such as tobacco, salt, and cloth) returning to subsistence foraging until a need arose again. Given the mobile nature of their lives and their subscription to an egalitarian social norm or 'ethic', material accumulation was impractical and had not yet been adopted as a value.<sup>57</sup> Furthermore, the Punan relied on sago at the time. Their staple food source required a fair amount of labor input and was also compatible with the exploitation of damar as both brought them far into the forest. Given the large population

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<sup>57</sup> Although material accumulation was not valued, certain objects conferred prestige on the owners such as machetes, ceramic jars, beads and shotguns.

of Punan in the upper Kelai, the search for damar and sago necessitated that the Punan range over a wide expanse of territory rather than remain close to a settlement.

The rattan trade changed life in Long Suluy. The organization of production was quite different than what it had been for damar. First of all, it brought the Punan closer into the village and, thus, closer to each other. Although there was hardly a mass migration of Punan in from the forest, certainly the Punan describe the village, and the river, as much more 'lively' during the time in which they were collecting rattan. One did not have to go as far for rattan as for damar, since so much of it was located along the river banks nearby. It brought those who wanted to participate in the trade in from the forests, at least for a while. Given the bulk of rattan as a commodity, Punan worked in ad hoc work groups rather than individually, coordinating harvesting, collection, and transportation. Furthermore, given the quantities of rattan that were being harvested, transportation of the product became a key issue. Whereas there was no choice as to how to carry damar and gaharu in from the deep forests – it had to be accomplished on foot – rattan was conveniently located on Borneo's traditional highways, the rivers. Thus, boats became the mode of transportation of choice in the rattan trade. Not only did Punan use boats to carry the rattan from the upriver forest streams to the village, but they also used them to haul it from the village to Tanjung Redeb. While damar and small quantities of gaharu had been transported by traders' boats to Tanjung Redeb, the sheer amounts of rattan coming down river at that time required both more boats and more labor. To accomplish this Jupri sold Yamaha outboard motors (*tempel*) to the Punan on credit, and assigned the

Punan responsibility, under Idrus' supervision, for transporting the countless tons of rattan to the Kabupaten capital.<sup>58</sup>

The extent to which the introduction of outboard motors altered the Punans' way of life can not be overemphasized. As Polly Weissner (personal communication) remarked, "It's like if you gave the Kung jeeps." Not only did the use of motorized boats facilitate a shift in economic and mobility patterns, but it changed patterns of association as well.

As a Punan man described to me,

"In the past before we had motors we used to walk. Some people used boats but mostly we walked. Back then we could go far - to Wahau, to Bulungan - not like today. Now we have gotten lazy and don't like to walk too far and it's too expensive to travel to those places by car... In the past we used to run into other people in the forest, Punan from Lamjan and Long Duhung. They used to come up here looking for hasil and we would meet in the forest. We knew them then. We would stop and talk. Now we don't know them. We pass their villages in the boat but we don't stop and talk... That's why we used to marry with other Punan, because we knew them. But now we don't know them very well."

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<sup>58</sup> Putting the Punans' case in historical context of motorized river transport: Even before World War II, powered river boat travel had been changing how trade was carried out in East Kalimantan. Steamships, a technology that arrived in the Dutch East Indies in the late nineteenth century, replaced sailing vessels and were used to pick up large shipments of goods at forest product bulking points. However, these ships were confined to the larger rivers, such as the Mahakam and the Berau, as they were unable to make it past sandbars, rapids or to clear the bottom in shallow rivers. Thus, forest products from the interior were ferried down in canoes or guided down in rafts. Motorized boats (*kapal motor*) began to replace steamships on many of Kalimantan's rivers in the 1950s and 60s although they still remained relatively few in number. Yet although these might have been more efficient than steamships at hauling cargo, they still were not able to navigate into the shallow interior waters such as that of the Kelai River. By the 1960s, however, small motorized canoes began to appear on East Kalimantan's rivers (Peluso 1983). Outboard motors from 15 to 40 HP were attached to the end of locally made wooden canoes which varied in size depending on the size of the motor. Although Peluso notes that these canoes included ketinting, the Punan on the Kelai were only familiar with tempel until the 1990s. Although Jupri made his early visits to Long Suluy by traditional longboats, soon thereafter he switched to outboard motors for accomplishing this daunting trip and in addition, brought them along as a coveted trade good.

By 2002 when I arrived in Long Suluy nearly every family owned a boat and motor, either a ketinting or tempel, some even two or three. Those few who did not were simply 'between motors' – the last motor had broken and they had not yet found the funds to purchase a new one. Moreover, a significant amount of time was spent maintaining the boats and motors. The Kelai River and its tributaries are hard on boats and machines. The everyday wear and tear on technology, of dragging boats over rapids, knocking the engine against boulders, or cracking propellers on river rocks, requires constant maintenance and repair. As a result, one often comes across Punan, both in the forest and village, disassembling motors, re-caulking boats, pounding bent propellers with rocks or hammers or occupied with a variety of similar tasks. New boats are usually built every few years. Adult men doing most of the construction but women often help out, planing boards or caulking seams. Most of the older Punan never learned to make boats and rely on the younger generation to either transport them or provide them with boats. During my research, boat problems figured heavily into my life:

Field notes: May 2003: We came downriver last week from up on the Suluy. We were stuck up there for a few days while Benyon repaired the motor. Finally, Yos, and Nos and I came down – came down fast...coming around a bend in the shallow river... didn't quite make the turn and slammed the front of the boat into the rocky bank – the boat flooded and we all jumped out, pushing the boat to the shore and grabbing our things from the boat...I was too sick with malaria to pay much attention but somehow Yos pounded the boat more or less together. The rest of the trip down I sat in front – my head down on my knees scooping water out of the boat with a plate as it came in feeling like a very sick Sisyphus...

November 2004: We sunk my boat yesterday...Nel and Saleng ....We were headed up the Kelai after giving up on the Suluy, the rapids were too fast and they weren't used to that river. At Gua Besar we had already unloaded all our things but pulling the boat was too small to make it over the rapids – the boat completely flooded and started to sink, they managed to pull the boat onto the rocks after it

almost completely went under, the motor was flooded... scooped the water out and paddled back here – I need to get a bigger boat

May 2004: We found Pak Yunas [the minister] in the woods on the side of the river this morning wearing nothing but his underwear. He'd left Long Kian alone early this morning and his boat went over right below Lamjan...his boat was lodged in between some boulders, capsized underwater...August and (what was his name again? from Long Gi?) tried to pull the boat up but the bank was steep and awkward to get a footing on...he wanted to save his motor...another boat finally came up from Long Gi, and all together managed to get the motor. I gave Pak Yunas some of my [extra] clothes, he was pretty cold and looked in shock. He went back up to Long Kian with the other boat.

With the new trend in transportation, the rattan trade vis à vis Jupri also had the effect of bringing Punan from Long Suluy into Tanjung Redeb. Before this time, only a very few Punan had ever visited Tanjung Redeb and most had rarely even traveled as far as Long Gi. Now there was a constant flow of Punan up and down river into Tanjung Redeb, not only those who happened to be ferrying the rattan, but anyone who wanted to hop a ride. Punan all along the river comment on how easy it was to travel in those days, as one man from Long Gi said "...there were so many boats going up and down during the rattan days – and we could get on a boat and we didn't have to pay. We often went to Long Suluy in those days. Not like today when you have to pay and the river is quiet." In Tanjung Redeb, the Punan were given lodging at Jupri's house. They would stay, they say, just a few nights, maybe a week, but this was enough time to start to become familiar with this new world. Tanjung Redeb was still just a small farming and coastal town at the time, the forest still coming up to its edges and occasional bears wandering in. Yet it still housed a culture vastly different from what the Punan were accustomed to. As one Punan man said about this time, "I first went to Tanjung Redeb with Jupri, working

rattan, everybody went down then. I was about Saleng's age [late teens]...we tried different foods there, saw things like cars and *becak* [bicycle taxi]...everything was different." Shy and reticent in this new world, most tended to stay close to Jupri's house and world, but it was a first introduction to a town many would come to know well in the future.

With the collapse of the rattan market in the late 1970s, the Punan returned full time to the forest in search of gaharu. Although gaharu had been an important trade product throughout the 1900s and the Punan continued to collect it along with damar and rattan, an increase in world prices for this aromatic wood, accompanied by the loss of markets for the other products, intensified gaharu collecting. Unlike rattan which is found close to the rivers and highly concentrated, the Punan were forced to spread out and travel far for gaharu, apparently even farther than for damar. Although there is a popular stereotype that imagines hunters and gatherers as 'wandering' far and wide over an unbounded landscape, most recent research indicates that even nomadic foragers have intentional foraging patterns within a semi-restricted territory (Cashdan 1983, Dyson-Hudson 1978, Richardson 1982, Thomas 1981). All the older Punan with whom I spoke insisted that prior to their 'gaharu days', they did not travel very far from the Kelai. In fact, they comment particularly on Pak Uyow, an older and exceptionally open and friendly Punan, as he was the only one of them who used to 'go walking far' and meeting other tribes (*suku-suku*). As Pak Talkin, a Punan in his fifties commented, "Traders came into the area when I was young but we didn't really know other Dayak people. Rarely

did we meet them and they didn't stay long. Only Uyow went far meeting other people.” Gaharu, on the other hand, brought them as far as the Wahau River to the South and to the Kayan River in the West and North. Moreover, if collecting at some distance from Long Suluy many Punan hired out to other gaharu bosses who provided them with supplies and bought their hasil. At such distances Jupri had little control over the Punan. The majority, who continued to sell to Jupri, stored the gaharu at collection points eventually transporting their yields into Long Suluy. Given the large amounts of gaharu collected during this period, the Punan, as with rattan, transported the gaharu themselves into the capital using their own boats and increasing their knowledge of the downriver areas.

By 1989, when the Punan had begun their move to their new village at its present site, the gaharu in the Suluy area was mostly gone, and the Punan shifted their attention to gold. Gold, like rattan, brought the Punan to the rivers and “out of” the forest, or at least not so far in as they used to go. There was no reason to seek for gold in far away rivers when this mineral was so abundant in the Kelai area. Moreover, new government rules and restrictions barred them from collecting forest products in other districts. As a result, it brought them closer together. Even now a Punan family can go off far enough to be alone for long stretches of time if they want to, but moving about on the rivers in search of gold is more likely to bring them into frequent contact with others. Life along some of the upriver streams can be almost as social as life in the village though on a smaller scale. Punan often camp out near other families, not necessarily their closest kin but whoever

else happens to be looking for gold in that particular spot on that particular river. And if returns are poor at one location for long enough they will move on to other places, passing other families along the way.

The gold trade not only brought the Punan closer to each other in their non-subsistence foraging activities, but it also brought them closer to the village. As such it encouraged a more settled life style in which the Punan began to spend longer periods of time in the village than they previously had. As a result, it also facilitated the adoption of swidden rice cultivation, or *ladang*.<sup>59</sup> Jupri insists that he supported the Punan in adopting agriculture. Church officials, however, maintain that Jupri had discouraged, even prohibited, the Punan from engaging in agriculture as it interfered with their forest activities; not to mention that by this time the Punan, who had developed a taste for rice, were buying the grain from him at inflated prices. Agriculture, however, did not to any significant extent interfere with collecting gold, as it had with gaharu, as the swiddens are located by the rivers near the village and a settled life is consistent with both activities. Thus although Kenyah agricultural agents first introduced the Punan to swidden probably in the early 1980s, the Punan in Long Suluy did not adopt rice cultivation until the mid 1990s.

Another consequence of harvesting gold is that it did not require bulk transport, so that the steady flow of boats between Long Suluy and Tanjung Redeb came to a halt.

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<sup>59</sup> *Mu* (BP)

When I first arrived in Long Suluy I was under the impression that there was consistent travel between Long Suluy and the capital, as it seemed that every time I traveled down river I would meet up with Punan at Jupri's house or the Kelai guest house next door to Jupri's. Yet when I conducted a survey among the Punan, I realized that although there was a small coterie of Punan who regularly made the trip to Tanjung Redeb, most of the village had not been there for years, usually not since they ceased "carrying gaharu" or "carrying rattan". Nor had many teenagers ever made the trip all the way downriver, something which would have been unheard of in the 1980s. Thus, even though by 2000 a logging road had been constructed from Tanjung Redeb to Long Gi reducing the travel time from two full days to one day, the Punan as a whole were less familiar with the downriver areas than they had been in the 1980s.

Another outcome of shifting to gold collection, and of settling down in general, was that the Punan became easier to supervise. In the 1970s the Indonesian state instituted policies to encourage the settlement of its nomadic populations, ostensibly for their own good and to modernize the national image, but also because nomadic populations are simply difficult to administer. No government likes having nomads within their national borders as they fly in the face of administrative structures. Similarly, although Jupri was happy to have the Punan off in the forest when it was profitable to have them there, there was no way to ensure that they were not selling their hasil to other bosses, particularly in the case of gaharu. With their mobility curtailed it was easier both to supervise exchange relationships – he could monitor other traders coming into the area – and to keep track of

Punan productivity, reprimanding those who were 'lazy' and exhorting them to work harder. Furthermore, as they were less likely to travel to other locations or to Tanjung Redeb, they were ostensibly cut off from other sources of supplies for commercial products; forced to frequent Jupri's post in the village, Jupri could ensure that their gold was sold only to his people. If a Punan, by any chance, had shown up one day in the village with a new market product bought elsewhere, Sabran would have immediately realized that person was selling his or her gold elsewhere and would have reported it to Jupri. Jupri would then have notified his hired authorities who would have either intimidated the Punan in question, the merchant involved in the transaction, or both.

Yet the reverse side of gold, when it came to the issue of supervision, was as it is valuable in small quantities, it can be hidden and easily smuggled. In time, as the Punan became, as they say, "braver", they would begin to transport the gold directly down to Tanjung Redeb themselves or to sell it to other merchants, such as Pak Kaleb, the head teacher. This secret commerce would never have been possible with the other forest products given their bulk. Thus, in time, gold would allow the Punan to ease themselves out of their relationship with Jupri, resisting his absolute control in a much less direct manner until the time when they could be in a position where direct confrontation would be possible.

### CHAPTER 3

#### THE RISE OF A PATRON-CLIENT RELATIONSHIP

I first met Hajji in March of 2003, about one month after I had arrived in Long Suluy. I had heard of him of course, even before I had ever arrived at the site. The relationship between him and the Punan of Long Suluy was well known in Tanjung Redeb and in the development community which had begun recently to work on the Kelai after a discovery of a large population of orangutan in the lower parts of the river. One American development worker said to me in exasperation, “Those Punan have *really* got to break free of Jupri,” with the implication that it was a matter of simple psychological will and courage that was needed rather than any indication of complex social and economic ties that were binding the relationship. After all, none of the other six Punan villages on the Kelai River were subservient to an outsider and there was a sense that Long Suluy was both set apart from, and “behind”, the downriver villages, walled off from progress and contact by Hajji’s presence and control. Moreover, Punan in the downriver villages reinforced this perception of their upriver neighbors as left behind in time, describing the Punan of Long Suluy as “still primitive” and “chained” by Jupri. In this chapter I attempt to elucidate some of the ties that bind Jupri and the Punan. I begin by tracing the Punans’ increasing dependency on specific commodities provided by Jupri. It is through the history of these commodities in Long Suluy that I attempt to illustrate the larger process of transformation by which Jupri becomes embedded in the lives of the Punan and by which the structures of interdependency replace the need for external policing of

the exchange relationship. I then go on to describe the extra-market incentives that Jupri provides to the Punan which further bond the two parties in a patron-client relationship. Finally, through Jupri's provision of employment opportunities to the Punan outside of Long Suluy, I discuss how Jupri's role in lowering transaction costs of entrance into the market is slowly undermined.

**On** my first visit to Long Suluy I accompanied an Indonesian team from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and an American doctor working as a consultant to the conservancy. We visited all the Punan villages on the upper Kelai River before arriving at Long Suluy. I was surprised by how large the village was in comparison with the downriver villages and by how it was, in a sense, 'modern'. The houses, in general, were larger than those in the downriver villages, there was electricity, and one house even boasted a satellite dish, although this house turned out to be Jupri's. The village was almost deserted when we arrived; it was the harvest time and the Punan were upriver at their rice fields. It was mid-day, the sun full and glaring overhead, and we immediately headed for Jupri's house. We were met inside by Pak Sabran, a sprightly man of about fifty-five, warm and friendly and whom I later found was of ethnic Berau and Bajau descent, and Bakri, a small young man in his twenties from Sulawesi who was clearly pleased to have guests brighten up an otherwise dull day.<sup>60</sup> We sat in the main room of Jupri's 'company store', as I came to call it, about thirty feet long by fifteen feet wide, a television on one end, a bench on the far opposite side. On the north and east walls floor to ceiling shelves,

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<sup>60</sup> The Bajau were infamous nomadic sea pirates

enclosed by chicken wire, were stocked full with soda, cookies, clothes, perfume, paint, nails, toys, rope, wire, flip-flops, batteries, outboard motors – a seemingly endless supply of both necessary and absolutely useless supplies for life upriver. Sabran and Bakri, who would become good, though wary, friends of mine, offered us soda, and we sat and waited for some of the Punan to be called in from upriver. At the edges of the room an older Punan woman, lovely but with what appeared some sort of slight tumor on the side of her face, looked on shyly at us. Ibu Selbut would also become one of my best informants, although it would take me much longer to realize that she liked me than with Sabran and Bakri. I would soon discover that Punan are hard for an American to read, and I remained shy and cautious of Selbut far longer than I would have needed to. After a little while, a few Punan men arrived, most notably Pak Lura, the kepala desa (elected village chief), a stocky black haired man of about forty-five, with black hair built like a solid barrel with wide chest and strong legs. TNC wanted to collect some information for a potential health program and, as one of their staff had already made contact with the village the previous month, introductions and explanation were minimal. I find it amusing now that I attempted to sit as far from Sabran and Bakri as possible, concerned that the Punan would perceive me as being on Hajji's side. Although throughout my fieldwork I had to continually monitor and negotiate my relationship with Jupri's camp, the 'sides' were never clearly defined and were often shifting.

After this initial brief visit that lasted only a few hours, I spent about three weeks in Tanjung Redeb securing all the necessary documents establishing my research site in

Long Suluy. When I returned to the village I found myself lodging at Jupri's house despite my reluctance. Pak Lura did not seem to know what to do with me but after a few days finally broke the lock on the one empty house in the village, despite the fact that the owner was up in the forest. Frankly, no one seemed to understand why I did not want to stay at Jupri's, equipped as it was with a large kitchen, pumped-in water, television, toilet and enclosed bathing area. Although at that time I was not intending to focus my research on the relationship with Jupri I was certainly curious about it. Despite my initial caution with Sabran and Bakri it became apparent quite quickly that distancing myself from them was not going to be the most effective research technique. As outsiders themselves they were thrilled to have new company in the village and insisted that I eat with them as often as possible. They were also forthcoming, if rather biased, informants. Sabran had lived in the village for twelve years and was full of information that he was more than willing to share. Unfortunately he spoke with a thick Berau accent mixed in with Bajau and I often struggled to understand him. But it was not uncommon for a Punan when asked a question about their history, particularly about dates, to respond with "Ask Sabran, he'll know." Bakri, a distant relative of Jupri through marriage, had only been in Long Suluy for two years but was also eager to share information although neither of them spoke Punan. But more importantly, I could not avoid Jupri's people simply because Jupri's house is where the Punan gathered. It was the village's public space. I had at first assumed this was simply the lack of any other quarters large enough to accommodate large numbers of people combined with the utility functions of the store, radio and television. But later, after Pak Lura had a large house built and bought a

television, I realized that political divisions among the Punan actually rendered Sabran's house<sup>61</sup> neutral territory. The number of Punan who gathered on whose front porch in the mornings was an indicator of an individual's influence in the village, and it was not uncommon to hear such statements as "more people gather on my porch than on Lura's". Much later in my stay after Jupri's house burned down, Punan would come to gather on *my* front porch.

The day I finally met Hajji was a pretty exciting event. For days before he arrived Sabran, Bakri and Ibu Selbut were hard at work scrubbing the floors of the house, cleaning out every nook and cranny, and scolding Punan children who dragged dirt in on their feet. Pak Taran, a Punan man who often worked as Jupri's boat driver, traveled upriver, calling the Punan who were up in the forest back to the village. Other Punan men went out hunting at night so Hajji would have fresh venison. When Hajji finally arrived a couple of days later than expected in the early afternoon, he arrived in a long boat covered with a leaf awning – lending it a Cleopatra's-barge-like look – and powered by two outboard motors. He was accompanied by a small entourage – his second wife, Sabran's wife who had come for her yearly visit, a younger servant woman from Flores, and a small passel of various other workers and relatives who I would come to know well over the next eighteen months. I did not know how the Punan would receive him but the village flocked to the boat landing when he arrived, many of them scrambling down to the water's edge to carry an endless stream of goods up into Sabran's house. Those not

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<sup>61</sup> The Punan alternate between calling the store 'Hajji's house' and 'Sabran's house' – I do the same.

involved in unloading the boat gathered in small groups to watch all the action. Pak Benyon and Pak Palis, the two Punan men who had been sent to fetch Jupri downriver, helped this solidly built grey haired man down from the boat. Tired but smiling he greeted the Punan, calling out orders all the while. I watched from a distance but later in the afternoon once Jupri had rested, I wandered over to the house for introductions. I was actually a little concerned that he would consider it impolite that I had not sought his permission beforehand to conduct research in the village, but this was not to be the case. When I entered Sabran's house the front room had been transformed. The floor was covered with mounds of clothing, jewelry, tarpaulins, rope, umbrellas, toys, flip flops, and boxes of candy, among many other things. Sabran and Bakri were busily stocking the shelves, which had been almost empty by then, with batteries, flashlights, boat propellers, bottled water, ramen noodles, cigarettes, soda, and lighters. Another of Jupri's workers was hanging pants, jackets and umbrellas from the ceiling rafters. Jupri's wife sat on a blanket in the middle of these mounds of consumer items showing pairs of expensive gold earrings to three Punan women who, to my surprise, each rapidly bought a pair at 300.000 rupiah each without a word of haggling. Punan men, women and children filled the room, sitting on the floor and benches as well as on the window sills and front porch. In the middle of it all, on a large rattan arm chair, sat Hajji Jupri, smoking and surveying the scene around him.

I quickly learned that I, like the Punan, would be ordered around by Hajji. He was thrilled to meet me. "Sabran!" he yelled "Bring a chair!" "Sit!" I did. "Sabran! Coffee

for nona!” (My name to Hajji from that moment on would be the Indonesian word for ‘Miss’.) Sabran brought tea knowing I did not drink coffee in the afternoon. “Sabran!” he demanded loudly, “I said coffee!” “Katherine drinks tea.” “Drink nona!” I drank. “Smoke?!” “No thank you Hajji.” He spoke with a thick accent and a bit of a slur almost as though he had had a stroke. His hearing was poor and when I asked a question he would turn to his wife or Bakri and ask, “*What’d she say?*” It turned out that although the Punan insisted Hajji spoke Punan, in fact he did not. He fully admitted to this, always impressed with my grasp of the language. He told me the Punan were lazy. “All they want to do is hunt! They don’t want to work (*cari usaha*: lit *look for business*)! They look for gold for a few days and then they go into the forest. They’re lazy! They won’t get ahead this way!” By this time it was early evening and the room had emptied of most Punan but Pak Lura and old Pak Liu sat nearby, expressionless faces staring forward. I was embarrassed, but it turned out that the Punan were used to hearing this from Jupri. He, on the other hand, they said, was greedy. “And they are dirty” Hajjia added quietly sitting in the kitchen later, a look of disgust on her face. She spoke of some Punan children living in the city with Hajji’s son describing them as “clean and so white!” But I would also learn from Hajji that the Punan were ‘honest’, and that he would not work with anyone else because others, particularly the “Javanese”, cheated him. And I would learn that later, when he appeared close to death, he would call out Punans’ names in his delirium. I would find out that he once tried to take a Punan girl as his wife and that even when his operations in Long Suluy were barely covering costs his children indulged his commerce there as an old man’s fancy. It would still take me some time to understand

how the Punan felt about Hajji, but on one day during that week long visit I asked Hajji a question while he sat eating soup but he did not hear me. A young Punan woman sitting next to me said “If you want him to hear you should hit him on the back so his face falls in the soup.”

**In** the years since Hajji first arrived in Long Suluy the Punan have become more and more integrated into the market and ever more dependent on the supplies that Jupri transports up to Long Suluy on a regular basis. Although Jupri only visited the Punan about four to five times a year at this point in his life, his workers in Tanjung Redeb regularly transport goods by lorry up to *kilo enam pulu*, a logging camp just upriver from the village of Long Gi from where hired Punan then transport them the rest of the way by boat. Sabran and Bakri keep in daily radio contact with Tanjung Redeb both calling in the debt so it can be recorded in Tanjung Redeb as well as ordering supplies. The Punan still pride themselves on their ability to live self sufficiently in the forest *if need be*, but it is not a way of life they would any longer actively choose. Not only do they find life, they say, ‘easier’ now than in the past when they lived without electricity, television, or outboard motors, but they have become increasingly self conscious of their status as ‘forest peoples’ and the perception that downriver people hold of them as ‘primitive’. In a survey that The Nature Conservancy conducted among the Punan of Long Suluy in 2003, among a list of categories that included ‘hunters’ and ‘traders’, the Punan chose

‘farmers’ as their primary occupation. Their time investment in or income<sup>62</sup> from rice agriculture, however, is minor compared to their hunting and gathering or market activities. To be a farmer, however, is regarded by the Punan as having taken a step forward, and, as the last village on the Kelai River to have adopted agriculture, their self-identification as farmers indexes their concern to establish a more ‘modern’ identity in relation to other groups on the river and to the ‘outside world’ in general. Although I do not want to reduce the relationship between Jupri and the Punan to a simple cost-benefit analysis, I think it is helpful to map out some of the economic bonds between the two parties so as to disrupt the construction of the Punan as simply psychologically managed by Jupri. In addition, in order to give some insight into the process by which Jupri and, by extension, the market have reached into Long Suluy (and how the Punan have reached out to the market) I think it is useful to look at how particular commodities have come to be considered increasingly indispensable by the Punan and, by association, have rendered Jupri almost indispensable as well.

**Behind** Sabran’s house on a wooden platform stand a row of five or six large black-painted metal drums, two hundred liters each. These drums constitute Long Suluy’s primary source of gasoline, or *bensin*, and have become the new life-source for activity up on the Kelai. On any given day when the Punan are in the village, a flow of individuals visit these drums carrying with them ten- or twenty-liter plastic containers imported from Tanjung Redeb. Sabran or Bakri lift the lid of an open container and,

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<sup>62</sup> I use the term ‘income’ to refer to caloric income as the Punan generally do not have enough surplus rice to sell sell.

sucking briefly on a rubber tube inserted into the reservoir of bensin, allow the gasoline to flow into its new receptacle. Gas prices at Sabran's are 5000 rupiah per liter, as opposed to 2000 rupiah in Tanjung Redeb and 3000 in Long Gi; in fact, prices are even a bit higher at Sabran's given that he doesn't usually fill the containers completely.<sup>63</sup> Since the time outboard motors first arrived in Long Suluy with Hajji Jupri, this colorless liquid has gradually replaced food calories as the primary fuel needed for the Punans' mobility up and down the Kelai River. A trip upriver into the Kelai can use as much as forty liters using a ketinting, or eighty liters in a tempel depending on how far one travels ; the trip from Long Gi to Long Suluy uses twenty liters, and forty-five liters respectively. Transportation in the rainforest, in other words, has become expensive. Punan thus often limit their trips into the forest, choosing instead to travel upriver when they can stay for at least several weeks rather than waste gas on short trips, although this does not include short daily trips up to their rice fields and gardens or nearby fishing trips. While many Punan say they could live without Hajji, they admit that getting *bensin* "would be difficult without him". On average, the community in Long Suluy uses ten drums of gasoline or two thousand liters per month. According to Jupri's people, in the late eighties when the gaharu trade necessitated frequent trips into Tanjung Redeb and there was no road from Tanjung Redeb to Long Gi consumption was even higher at forty drums a month. Although a few other individuals also occasionally sell gasoline, such as the minister, the head teacher or the kepala desa, if they have recently made a trip

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<sup>63</sup> I discovered this on a trip to Tanjung Redeb when I transported two sick Punan to the Hospital. On the way out of Tanjung Redeb we stopped at a gas station to buy gasoline for the boat trip back upriver. When the attendant filled the container full one of the Punan men looked at the jug in disbelief and said "It's supposed to be *full*?"

downriver, the amounts are minimal and can not possibly keep up with the demand. The Punan are not inherently dependent on Jupri, *per se*, as a source of gasoline, but they *are* dependent on an external supplier as the Punan themselves lack the means to transport the large quantities necessary by road from Tanjung Redeb and then by river from Long Gi.

Occasionally, when there have been long delays in shipments of supplies from Tanjung Redeb, Sabran has run out of gasoline. At these times, Punan might travel down to the village of Lamjan where there is sometimes a reserve of gasoline. Usually, however, there is a steady supply as Jupri, as well as Sabran, are heavily invested in preparing the Punan for trips into the forest. Although Jupri certainly makes a handsome profit on the sale of commodities in Long Suluy, his real wealth is garnered from the profits on forest products, at this time gold. His store does not exist simply for retail purposes; its primary *raison d'être* is for outfitting the Punan for their trips into the forest, to serve as a point for collecting the products when they return, and for ensuring a continuing debt cycle so as to force the Punan back into the forest once again. In the past, the Punan spent almost all their time in the forest. Now with the adoption of agriculture, religious holidays, and with state mandated responsibilities (elections, official visits etc.), the Punans' schedule is more restricted. Thus, just prior to a time when the village is expected to disperse into the forest, such as after planting their rice fields or after the national elections, there is a flurry of radio communication between Sabran's house and Tanjung Redeb as orders are placed and arrangements made for supply shipments.

Another commodity for which the Punan have depended on Jupri and which they rank almost on par, and sometimes above, gasoline in importance is tobacco. As one Punan man who does not have a boat says, “You can always walk but you can’t not smoke. Life is so much better when you don’t have to pay for gasoline and all you need to buy is tobacco and lighters.” Almost all adults in Long Suluy smoke. Children often start to smoke in their early teens and sometimes earlier. In the past, tobacco was a rare but highly coveted trade item in the inner rain forests of Borneo. When the early merchants made their way upriver, tobacco constituted one of the primary trade items along with salt, cloth and sugar. In the mid 1960s on the Kelai River, four rupiah worth of tobacco could be traded for ninety thousand rupiah worth of gaharu (Simandjuntak 1967).

Tobacco makes an ideal trade item, not simply because of its high profit margin, but because of its symbolic value as well. It is an item, like food, that is easily shared, and smoking, like eating, is a means by which to make introductions or reinforce relationships. Jupri encouraged his workers over time, first Idrus and eventually Sabran and Bakri, to give gifts to the Punan to encourage their loyalty. These gifts often took the form of salt or tobacco. And Sabran often emphasized, “You don’t have to pay the Punan much to work for you. Just make sure they’re fed and have enough tobacco. Then they don’t complain but don’t be stingy with food and tobacco.” Tobacco is also an important social lubricant between Punan and Moslems. As wild pig is the Punans’ main protein source and the sharing of pig meat is rich in symbolic value as a means by which to encourage social cohesion, tobacco serves as an important substitute for food sharing

between Moslems and the Punan.<sup>64</sup> When I first began my research I was reluctant to offer tobacco or cigarettes given my background in public health, but the Punan let me know that it would be easier for them to talk with tobacco.<sup>65</sup>

Shag tobacco at Sabran's sells for 200.000 rupiah per 2.5 kilograms, considered a month's supply for a married couple, or 80.000 rupiah per kilogram; prices in Tanjung Redeb run about 60.000 rupiah per kilogram. Although many Punan by now prefer commercial cigarettes (only Indonesian brands are sold in Long Suluy although American brands are available in Tanjung Redeb), prices are often prohibitive. Rolling paper is available at Sabran's but is not highly in demand as Punan use any paper that is available (including my field notes) or forest leaves for rolling cigarettes, which, I can attest, results in a very strong smoke. Although prices for some commodities were beginning to come down at Sabran's around the time I arrived in Long Suluy as the Punan were becoming more aware of prices in Tanjung Redeb, tobacco was probably one of the commodities that had been kept relatively inexpensive by Jupri simply as nicotine creates better workers. The one commodity, or the lack of, which can bring Punan out of the forest and away from their labor prematurely is tobacco. It also reduces feelings of hunger. With tobacco Punan can work for longer periods collecting products for the market before interrupting their work to look for food, although in general Punan will not do this for long particularly with children along with them. By the time I arrived in Long

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<sup>64</sup> Smoking also helps to keep small biting flies (*kat BP*) away when up in the forests. As one young mother told me, she was 'learning to smoke' to keep the flies away from her baby, "In the village you don't need to smoke but in the forest you have to."

<sup>65</sup> The Punan also include 'lighters' on their list of important items for which they depend on Jupri.

Suluy there were multiple sources for tobacco, including the head teacher's store. However, in the 1970s and 1980s, when the Punan still lived farther upriver and Jupri represented probably the sole reliable source for acquiring this precious commodity, physical dependence would have been a powerful motivator for returning to the forest to collect products for Jupri. Even now, when Punan maintain that they no longer need Jupri, they often cite as evidence the fact that now they are able to go to Tanjung Redeb to buy tobacco on their own thus indicating that this substance was perceived as a key commodity binding them to him in the past.

Rice, the grain that more than half the world's population depends on for its daily sustenance, is also a highly important commodity in Long Suluy for which the Punan have, more recently, come to depend on Jupri. When Jupri first arrived in Long Suluy, none of the Punan villages on the Kelai had yet started rice cultivation. In Long Suluy many of the Punan say they had not even tasted rice, while others claim to have eaten small amounts received through trade with merchants from Tanjung Redeb or from Kenyah neighbors who had migrated into the area from Bulungan.<sup>66</sup> In Long Suluy, the Punans' main carbohydrate remained the heart of the sago palm until the 1990s when rice finally overtook this indigenous food source as the Punans' staple starch. Agricultural extension agents employed by the regional government, mainly of Dayak Kenyah ethnicity, first began visiting the Punan villages on the upper Kelai in about the early

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<sup>66</sup> These Kenyah spent several years planting rice on the Twow River in the early 1970s before migrating down to Muara Lesan below Long Gi.

1970s. Instructing the Punan in farming techniques went part and parcel with state policies to settle 'nomadic' peoples and those Punan villages upriver – Long Duhung, Long Lamjan, Long Keluh and Long Suluy – were encouraged, or pressured, to move to the area surrounding Long Gi where they would be given land for planting. Only Long Duhung bowed to state pressure to resettle downriver, but in the early 1980s, unhappy with their new location, moved back upriver again although albeit not so far as their earlier site. In any case, by the mid 1980s all the other Punan villages on the Kelai – even Long Suluy's 'sister' village at Long Kian – had adopted ongoing rice cultivation.

Why did Long Suluy lag behind the downriver villages in adopting agriculture? There is usually a constellation of interacting reasons for why any hunting and gathering group either resists or, conversely, adopts agriculture at any point in time and it may not be possible to tease out the weight of any one cause relative to the others. One answer that the Punan give when asked is simply that they did not have 'a taste' for rice back then but now they 'have grown accustomed to it.' It's a very reasonable answer. The downriver Punan villages had much more contact with outsiders traveling from Tanjung Redeb, as well as with the Dayak groups living in villages on the lower Kelai River, all of whom were rice producers. Also, given the easier access to the Punan villages below Long Suluy, which at that time was located above a set of dangerous rapids and in a stretch of the river that was narrower and harder to maneuver in general, government officials, including teachers, and then missionaries were in more regular contact with the downriver Punan. Very simply, there would have been more contact between Punan and

“rice eaters” and, likely, the downriver Punan became accustomed to supplementing their diet with rice earlier than Punan in Long Suluy. In addition, earlier adoption of Christianity and more consistent schooling, both of which promote a settled lifestyle, would have provided incentive for adopting agriculture and minimizing foraging, although it is difficult to ascertain in which direction lay the causality (i.e. did the Punan settle in order to adopt agriculture or did they adopt agriculture because it was more compatible with settling?) There were also economic reasons for downriver Punan to settle earlier than upriver Punan, which, in turn, facilitated the adoption of rice cultivation. The downriver areas were less rich in the forest products so much in demand on the market. In fact, many Punan from downriver often traveled into the Suluy area to search for forest products, in the early days by foot and later catching rides on the many boats involved in the rattan and gaharu trade. Although merchants, including one of Jupri’s relatives, tried to control trade in the downriver villages, they did not last long. This might have been simply due to a lack of profits in these villages or perhaps their relative accessibility did not allow the traders the same types of control Jupri was able to exert in the more remote Suluy. The sheer sizes of the populations of these downriver villages, in addition, were significantly smaller than in Suluy, which, again, would have kept profits low. In any case, agriculture would have been more attractive to Punan downriver as they would have, at that time, been forced to travel farther and farther into the forests. It’s also possible that sago was being depleted due to increased population pressure in the Berau area, which certainly would have rendered rice cultivation a necessity.

Even though the early agricultural agents may have visited Long Suluy in the 1970s, it's unlikely they would have met up with many Punan. The Punan spent little time in the village at that time and were shy of outsiders. Moreover, Hajji Jupri was notorious for keeping the Punan as far away as possible from state officials and missionaries. At any hint that officials were on their way from Tanjung Redeb, notice was sent up to Idrus to send the Punan into the forest. One official working in the cultural sector claimed he wanted to visit Suluy in the 1970s primarily for educational purposes and described how Jupri rapidly rented all the available longboats in Tanjung Redeb to stop him from visiting and sent the Punan into the forest. A minister in the area also claims that Jupri made similar efforts to keep the Punan from adopting Christianity. Jupri, it is said, wanted the Punan in the forest collecting the products that brought him his wealth, not wasting time in government training and certainly not adopting agriculture or attending school. Given how intimidating state officials found the trip to Long Suluy, and given Jupri's influence in Tanjung Redeb, the agricultural agents were unlikely to have been highly motivated to reach the Punan in Long Suluy. Even if they had, they would likely not have found the Punan enthusiastic recipients of the information they brought given how firmly rooted they were in the forest and given their lack of taste for rice.<sup>67</sup> Many say they did not like rice at first. In the early to mid 1980s, Sabran claims that a few of the Punan tried planting swiddens for a few years but then stopped as it interfered with their forest activities. Only after they moved the village to its present site below the

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<sup>67</sup> Some Punan were indifferent to the taste of rice, but others say they did not like it.

rapids in 1989, and only after their attention shifted to gold, did the Punan begin to adopt rice cultivation in earnest.

For anyone new to the Borneo rainforest, the first sight of swidden rice fields is really quite impressive. Unlike the neat patchwork of cultivated wet rice terraces associated with Bali or Vietnam, dry rice fields in Borneo rise up dangerously from the edges of rivers sometimes at slopes up to forty-five degrees. The contrast between these golden fields ready for harvest and the dark green forest that rises around them offers a visual meditation on human relations with the environment the environment. The tamed, the environment that has been at least temporarily altered by human activity, meeting the environment that continually wants to encroach on and reclaim the humanly managed. While Valeri (1999) describes the tropical forest in threatening terms – as an ongoing struggle between humans and nature – in swidden agriculture, the forest is, rather, invited back in an ongoing regenerative dance by the humans who rely on it for their survival. In the tropical rainforest, the soil is highly acidic with ninety percent of the nutrients found in the very top layer of soil and in the forest vegetation. Swidden agriculture is based on first cutting and then burning the undergrowth; the ashes serving to fertilize the soil. Trees are traditionally felled with adzes and axes, but since the time Punan Suluy first adopted agriculture they have always had access to chainsaws. The soil is not tilled but minimally disturbed, with planting accomplished using a stick to poke holes into the ground and into which seeds are thrown. Dry rice fields have a haphazard appearance; with half-burned trees and logs strewn throughout the field (these come in handy as

walking paths when the rice is high), and with rice planted seemingly randomly rather than in neat rows. Cucumbers, cassava and squash planted amidst the rice serve as the Punans' only gardens. Agricultural agents who hail from other islands, particularly Java and Bali, often encounter aesthetic culture shock when faced with the wildness of Dayak rice fields.

The Punan harvest rice by hand using a small blade inserted into a wooden holder to gently slash the stem. Individual families work as a unit throughout the agricultural cycle with little gender differentiation in their activities, except for the felling of trees which is mainly accomplished by men. Only in the clearing and burning of fields and harvesting do groups of families come together to assist each other in their fields. The harvested rice is dried on rattan mats, usually in the village where there is so much flat open space, before threshing. Fields are planted for only one or two seasons and then left to lie fallow, allowing the forest vegetation to return and replenish the soil. Swidden agriculture is, thus, based not on crop rotation but on land rotation. If fields are not left fallow but cultivated continuously not only are the nutrients depleted, but, given the steep slopes and heavy rainfalls, the land is left at risk of erosion, as well as life-threatening land slides. Moreover, with no forest vegetation to protect the land and the leeching of the soil, thick rooted grasses will begin to take over rendering cultivation increasingly labor intensive. Although swidden agriculture, sometimes called shifting or slash and burn agriculture, has acquired a reputation for environmental destruction, it is actually highly sustainable at low population densities. Part of its ill-deserved reputation is that swidden agriculture

is associated with mobile populations which governments have difficulty administering. In addition, swidden agriculture is a handy scapegoat for the environmental destruction caused by state sponsored activities such as logging and large scale plantation agriculture.

The Punans' fields in Long Suluy are relatively small compared with those of their downriver neighbors, particularly those of Dayak groups such as the Segai and Kenyah. The Punan of Long Suluy plant only one field per year that measures on average between a quarter and half a hectare, and some are even smaller. In comparison, downriver Segai and Kenyah fields measure at least one hectare. Harvests in Long Suluy vary widely from year to year depending on such factors as amount of rainfall and pest infestations.<sup>68</sup> In years when there is no fruit masting, wild pig and deer, which would otherwise feed on the wild fruit, descend upon the rice fields resulting in especially poor harvests. Even in good years many families in Long Suluy do not harvest enough rice to last for the year, and a few months after the harvest are forced to buy rice or rely on sago depending on their means. These small rice harvests are not just a result of field size but also due to Punan agricultural practices. Quite simply, Punan have better things to do than tend to their fields after planting, and, in Long Suluy, activities such as weeding and protecting fields from predators are almost non-existent. Weeding is back-breaking work. It is also time consuming and would thus interfere with hunting and looking for gold, activities which men and women engage in together. Protecting the fields from predators such as birds, deer and pig would similarly interfere with these other activities as they would tie

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<sup>68</sup> Good yields for a half hectare field are about 600-800 kg of unmilled rice.

the Punan to one spot for long periods of time. Moreover, the months after planting, which takes place in August or September, are fruit season on the Kelai. Almost every year in about mid-October extending into early December a large variety of wild fruits come into season. It's a wonderful time. The Punan leave *en masse* for the forest where they spend those months gorging on kilo after kilo of wild fruit – *gu tam-hais, gu klen, gu gin, gu kelmau, gu taut* (BP) - and hunting wild pig. It's a particularly convenient time of year to have such an abundance of fruit available as by this time many Punan have long since run out of rice from the previous year's crop. Whereas Punan in Long Suluy usually eat rice three times a day, during fruit season they depend on it for just one meal. Finally, irrespective of the Punans' agricultural practices, pest infestations and erratic rainfalls can also result in small harvests, both on the individual and community level.<sup>69</sup>

Given that the Punan usually do not harvest enough rice to be self-sufficient, rice has become a commodity for which they depend on Jupri and, like tobacco rice is a commodity that can bring Punan out of the forest when they have run out. Punan still harvest sago both as a 'famine' food, when rice is temporarily unavailable, as well as simply because they like the taste of it and miss it. However, many claim that they are no longer used to sago, that their bodies have 'changed' and they can only eat it occasionally or they will get 'sick stomachs'. Reliance on sago has also recently becomes a means by which to stigmatize Punan within the group who are considered 'less modern'. Although

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<sup>69</sup> Punan groups all over East Kalimantan are often made fun of by other Dayak groups for their agricultural 'idiosyncrasies'. Even the Punan often say matter of factly "Kami tidak pintar bikin ladang (BI)." "We are not very 'smart' at ladang.

even without Hajji Jupri the Punan certainly would have transitioned to rice from sago, rice was one of the trade items that Jupri transported into the Suluy area in increasingly larger quantities after his arrival in the upriver Kelai. Not only did Jupri garner profits on the sale of rice, but, by supplying the Punan with this important carbohydrate, he left them free to look for forest products rather than having to invest their time in the harvesting of sago. Rice at Sabran's sells for \$110,000 rupiah per 25 kilos as opposed to \$70,000 rupiah in Tanjung Redeb. Ironically, a certain percentage of the rice that the Punan purchase from Jupri at such inflated prices is their own crop. In 2001, Hajji Jupri placed a threshing machine in Long Suluy. He owns similar machines in two of the lower Kelai Dayak villages, but says that he resisted putting one in Long Suluy as the Punan have always been "lazy" at planting and it would not be profitable to him. He gave in ostensibly because the Punan leaders badgered him about the machine but perhaps he realized that harvests were increasing. In any case, for every *kaleng* (12 kg) of rice that the Punan bring for threshing, Hajji takes two liters of rice for payment.<sup>70</sup> However, as in the case of gold, the Punan are unsure whether measurements are correct. The few times that I watched, Bakri moved so quickly and counted out the rice for payment at such erratic intervals that I had no way of knowing whether he had taken a fair amount or not.

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<sup>70</sup> A *kaleng* in Indonesian refers to a tin can. The Punan use the word *kaleng* to refer to large sacks for storing rice. Bakri uses a large tin can for measuring out the rice payment. I am not certain that the can was one liter, but I think it is a close guess.

Although gasoline, tobacco and lighters, and rice are the items Jupri sells that the Punan maintain are those most vital to their present way of life, it is also the sheer range of items that Jupri provides that makes his store, although not necessarily indispensable, at least highly convenient for the Punan. For example, the store is stocked with a wide variety of nails, screws, bolts, paint, rope, propellers, razor blades and small tools; items that carry a low profit margin and may only erratically be in demand, but the unavailability of which would certainly inconvenience, if not disrupt, an individual's activities such as building a new house or fixing a boat. Moreover, any item not available can be special-ordered through Sabran, which certainly made my life easier when my last ketinting propeller had broken on the river rocks. In addition, before I arrived<sup>71</sup> and until a *puskesmas* (village health post) was built in the village in January 2004, Sabran was the sole consistent source of both medicine and information on its dosages. Even with the *puskesmas*, which is often closed, Punan often prefer to simply purchase medicine from Sabran thereby avoiding the examination associated with the health center. Although some Punan travel to Tanjung Redeb in cases of severe illness, it is a costly trip and thus unlikely to be undertaken for minor items.

**More** important, however, than the commodities that Jupri delivers to Long Suluy is the

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<sup>71</sup> I often treated Punan and provided medicine. Interestingly, I had been told by researchers working with other Punan groups in East Kalimantan that Punan can be notorious for 'demand sharing' continually asking researchers for gifts etc. Kaskija (1998) refers to this in his work among the Punan Tubu in Bulungan. The Punan in Long Suluy, however, were reluctant and embarrassed to ask for things. Even though I treated people and provided medicine (ethically I did not feel given my health care background that I could not assist them), Punan were often still shy to ask, often waiting until a condition was quite severe. Almost the only time Punan asked me directly for my belongings was when I would leave the forest to return downriver to the village. At that point it was clearly acceptable to them to request that I leave not only extra food with them but also such things as my tarpaulin or extra ketinting propellers.

credit that he extends. Although the Punan first entered into an ongoing debt cycle with Jupri perhaps unknowingly, and certainly naively, by the time I arrived in Long Suluy access to credit had become a way of life for them. The Punan are both known for, and openly admit to, poorly managing finances and to ‘not planning for the future’. Certainly in the anthropological literature there are questions about whether hunters and gatherers, who are accustomed to opportunistically responding to that which their environment offers, are challenged by the cognitive leap required for future planning and the demands of delayed gratification that are inherent to success in the agricultural and capitalist modes of production (Sahlins 1968 but see Woodburn 1980). While I am reluctant to speculate about the Punans’ cognitive processes, the easy access to credit that Jupri extends certainly appears to reinforce any tendencies toward immediate gratification and to discourage attempts at financial planning, or more precisely, at saving. The Punan are not poor people by local standards. Although gold reserves appear to be dwindling by this time, Punan still claim that 300 grams of gold (about \$1500 USD) for about a month of searching is considered average.<sup>72</sup> As Ibu Erni, a Punan woman told me, “Money is not hard here. If we want something we can have it – we just have to work really hard for a month.” The accessibility that the Punan have to a dependable cash flow destabilizes, even if only temporarily, the framework in which those populations farthest from the core – those areas where wealth and power are most centralized – are the most impoverished. In fact, though the Punan Suluy are considered the most ‘primitive’ by downriver Punan, and by the administrative bureaucracy in Tanjung Redeb as well, they are, for the time

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<sup>72</sup> The Punan, however, rarely receive this amount of money as a portion of it is kept by Sabran to ‘pay on the debt’.

being, also the wealthiest of the Punan on the Kelai River, which results in conflicted feelings of superiority and jealousy towards the Punan Suluy and the part of the downriver groups. Yet consistent with prevailing world systems theory in which resources in the periphery are exploited to the benefit of the core, as the resources of the forests are depleted, it seems certain that the economic boom that the Punan have been experiencing will come to an end in the not far-distant future.

Unless Punan are intent on buying a specific item, such as a new outboard motor or chainsaw, they usually stop looking for gold after they have found enough to pay their installment on the debt and whatever is necessary for everyday commodities. As one of my neighbors explained, “We don’t like to work too hard. Once we get enough – about 300 grams – then we can stop. We’re Christians so we shouldn’t be greedy. We don’t come back to the village because everyone is in the forest and it’s too quiet in the village so we stay in the forest and hunt. If we didn’t have a debt we wouldn’t work so hard but Hajji forces us to.” “What about Pak Boi?” I asked about a Punan man who I had noticed recently had been continually up in the forest even during ‘village times’, “He has been up in Samling for months now looking for gold.” My neighbor responded, “He must be after something. Maybe he wants a new motor.” It is interesting that my neighbor draws on newly adopted Christian values that she has heard in Church to justify what Hajji Jupri, a Moslem, refers to as ‘laziness’. She offers an example of how the Punan are mediating their way into the market, holding on to activities and values that are central to a hunting and gathering mode of production and that are being challenged by the

incursion of market capitalism. Accumulation and productivity for the market are values that are controversial and challenge an egalitarian ethic that still holds sway over Punan ideology. In this example, Christian exhortations against ‘greed’ can be used to reinforce resistance against an ideology that encourages production for the market. She also situates the opposition between Islam and Christianity that serves as a central ideological, *and practical*, dividing line between the Punan and Hajji and, by extension, between the Punan and the coastal peoples who are primarily Moslem. In another example, Pak Lura draws on modern environmentalist discourse that he has been exposed to through The Nature Conservancy and World Education to justify what Sahlins refers to as the ‘Zen economics’ of a hunting and gathering mode of production, “I do not allow people to use machines to look for gold. If people use machines then the gold will be used up too quickly. We should not be greedy but only take as much as we need. We have to save the gold for future generations to use. We have to think of our grandchildren.” Although hunter-gatherers have been romanticized as environmental conservationists, empirical research has often revealed that environmentally sustainable practices among hunter gatherers has been an artifact of low population densities and simple technologies rather than active intentions to forego present gain for conservation goals. Consideration of ‘future generations’ is not a discourse that I heard from Punan who were more removed from interaction with environmental organizations.

For most of the time that the Punan have been involved in the money economy they have received very low prices for their products. Thus, even if they had been inclined to

accumulate wealth this was not in fact possible until very recently as the Punan become “braver” in negotiating with Jupri. Furthermore, when the Punan have extra money they usually spend it almost right away. At the same time that they bring their gold to Sabran, they purchase consumer items from Jupri’s store and with every transaction end up in a little more debt. As one young woman exclaimed after a community meeting in which the minister was attempting to raise money for a Christmas celebration, “That’s the problem here, money comes in quickly but goes out quickly. That’s our character, if we have money we spend it.” And as a downriver trader who came to sell things at a Christmas gathering said, “The people in Suluy are not careful and don’t control what they want – if they want something, they buy it. I have made three million rupiah a day here – in just three days I have made 10 million. Punan are stupid – they don’t think, they just spend and spend.”<sup>73</sup> Jupri is certainly aware of the Punans’ penchant for spending their money. On his trips to Surabaya Java, which serves as a distribution hub for birds’ nests and where Jupri had a third wife until a recent divorce, he returns with loads of low cost consumer items that he sells for inflated prices in Suluy. As he bragged to me upon a recent return from one of these trips “I brought a lot of things back from Surabaya, a lot of goods. I’m not going to sell them here in Tanjung Redeb, oh no, in *Suluy!*”<sup>74</sup> By the time I arrived in Suluy the debt according to Jupri’s people totaled

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<sup>73</sup> The trader is referring to a Christmas gathering that included Punan from downriver villages as well. However, I was also told by traders that downriver Punan, particularly in Long Gi, were much more careful about going into debt than Punan in Long Suluy. Of course, rather than regarding this as simply ‘reckless’ behavior, the Punan in Long Suluy have more access to forest products than downriver Punan and thus are more confident of paying their debt if they want to.

<sup>74</sup> Punan are not the only customers at Jupri’s store in Long Suluy. Each month an average of 200 gaharu workers pass through the village on their way into the next district. They often spend at least one overnight in the village and sometimes multiple nights and purchase items in Long Suluy.

between 250 or 350 million juta, (~\$29,000 - \$40,000USD), depending on who I asked and, it seemed, on the day I happened to ask.<sup>75</sup> The Punan were never clear about the total amount of debt and often not even about their own. All the Punan families had debt although no one was sure how much of it was valid and how much had been written in by Sabran. Individual debts ranged from below one million rupiah to as high as eighteen million rupiah (~\$2100 USD). As the Punan are required to repay the debt in gold, they have been tied to Jupri's prices as they could not bypass Jupri and sell directly to the buyers in Tanjung Redeb and then repay the debt in cash

Yet aside from, or in addition to, providing the Punan with a means to engage in increasing and immediate consumerism, to participate with the actors they continually view on the television screen at Hajji's – that technology that allows the Punan glimpses into lives so drastically different from their own – access to credit provides the Punan with something they probably never experienced before – a safety net. Contrary to the romanticized image of hunter gatherers as relaxed and peacefully trusting that their environment will provide them with their next meal, Polly Weissner in her work with the Kung has described hunter gatherers as continually anxious, never able to count on or prepare for their immediate future. Whereas the Borneo rainforest may be more generous than the Kalahari Desert, I also experienced the Punan as often anxious about the immediate future. As one man described the recent adoption of agriculture, “Planting swidden is hard work but it was harder before when we only ate sago. With swidden we

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<sup>75</sup> This debt includes most of the houses that Jupri built.

work hard but then we can rest. Before we were always working. Harvesting sago is hard work and after we ate the sago we were back in the forest having to look for more. After we finish a pig, next week we are out looking for more. There was never any rest.” By extending credit to the Punan, and carrying the debt for years at a time, the Punan are assured that things they really need in the immediate future, are available to them. The debt certainly weighs heavily on their psyches, and it gives Jupri control over their time. Nonetheless, the Punan are assured that, in the short run anyway, they can acquire what they need for their immediate survival and, increasingly, to purchase the accoutrements of a more ‘modern’ lifestyle. This allows them to participate in an increasingly wider social world – one from which they had historically been excluded as ‘primitives.’

In addition to the credit that Jupri extends – a double-edged sword which also mires the Punan deeper into debt and under his control – he provides them with important ‘services’. For example, during a year of poor harvests, Jupri provides the transportation to deliver government rice aid to the village (although it is a local army official who makes the actual bureaucratic arrangements). He provides lodging, and in some instances pays for medical care, for sick Punan in Tanjung Redeb. Along with his grown children he provides for the schooling of five Punan children who reside at his son’s house in Samarinda and for several children who, at times, have attempted education in Tanjung Redeb.<sup>76</sup> If a Punan runs out of money while in Tanjung Redeb he or she can always eat

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<sup>76</sup> Any parents who want a child to be schooled in Tanjung Redeb can send them to live with Jupri or Sabran’s wife. The child is simply sent down with Hajji when he visits, no prior preparations are required. At the time of my fieldwork, two children were living with Sabran’s wife. They were both about 11 or 12 years old and doing extremely well in school. Their parents went to fetch them occasionally and although

at Hajji's or go ask him for a small gift of money. When the Punan still lived at their old site at Long Suluy Dulu, many young Punan went with Jupri to work with him in Tanjung Redeb and 'gain experience', often as boat drivers. At that same time, several Punan girls who had lost their mothers chose to live for several years with Jupri's family in Tanjung Redeb where they "learned to cook" and "gained experience". And many elderly Punan credit Jupri with many of the changes in the village, such as electricity and schooling (which actually are provided by the government but which they somehow believe Jupri arranged for), and with making the village more 'modern'. Whether the changes were precipitated by Jupri or not, the time before Jupri was considered both literally and figuratively 'dark'. Many of the older Punan also fondly remember how Jupri, their 'boss' brought them to other cities such as Tarakan and Tanjung Selor. Other Punan have turned to Jupri for emergency loans in the case of sudden hospitalizations. The provision of such favors and services to the Punan has created a web of emotional debt obligations, positioned Jupri as the Punans' mediator and advocate in the complex world of Tanjung Redeb and constructed Jupri as a necessary, although costly, safety net in an uncertain world.

In sum, Jupri crosses over the border between 'trader' and 'patron' which, moving beyond a relationship based only in economic exchange and into one embedded in fictive kinship roles and the responsibilities associated with those roles. Jupri himself actively and enthusiastically embraces his role as patron, regarding himself as the firm but patient

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still comfortable upriver, they moved a bit more slowly in the forest. There was no contact between the families and the children living with Jupri's son in the provincial capital of Samarinda.

father who has encouraged and enabled the Punan to become ‘maju’ (modern) and takes pleasure in the ‘intimacy’ he enjoys in his relationship with the Punan. From an economic perspective, the extra market services that Jupri provides in his role as patron serve as incentives to the Punan to remain loyal in their trade relationship with him thus lowering the costs of policing the Punan. On the Punans’ side, there is a sense that they can always turn to Hajji and attempt to solicit help even though, as one Punan man close to Hajji assured me, “There is always a cost.”

Another important function that Jupri has served in transforming the lives of the Punan, in part in his economic role as trader and in part in his role as patron, has been to open access to Tanjung Redeb. Prior to Jupri’s arrival on the Kelai, only a very few Punan had ever visited the coastal capital. In the 1970s and 1980s, when Tanjung Redeb was still a small river town, Punan regularly traveled downriver with the rattan and gaharu trade. A number of Punan, as already mentioned, also worked for Jupri or his extended family for varying amounts of time. Since the fall of the rattan and gaharu trade, however, the flow of Punan traveling downstream has diminished significantly. There is an important exception however. In the 1990s, young Punan men began to migrate downriver to work as wage laborers in Jupri’s bird nest caves. The edible nests of the Black Swiftlet (*Collocalia maximus*) and the White Rumped Swiftlet (*Collocalia fuciphagus*) found in Southeast Asia and the Indian subcontinent are used as broth thickener in Chinese bird nest soup. The nest is composed of saliva which the bird regurgitates in long glutinous strands and then winds into a half cup that, when dry, adheres to the wall of limestone

caves. These small nests, which can be held in the palm of the hand, have the appearance of white or black rice vermicelli.<sup>77</sup> Although the swiftlet nest once processed has little actual nutritional value, the Chinese have valued it for its health benefits, particularly to the aging, as well as an aphrodisiac for probably over 1000 years (McKay 2005, Hobbs 2004). The nests appear to have entered as an export item in Indo-Malaysian trade with China about 400 years ago (Dunn 1975, Earl of Cranbrook 1984, Hobbs 2004). Although mainland China was historically the primary importer of this ‘caviar of the east’, birds’ nests were considered a bourgeois luxury under the communist regime and thus demand for nests declined. With the recent easing of restrictions in communist China, coupled with decreasing supplies due to unsustainable exploitation, demand, along with prices, have risen drastically in recent years. In 1990 a price per kilo of white nests was between \$200 USD and \$450 USD while by 1996 the same nests were valued between \$1300 and \$1800 per kilo. As a result birds’ nests have become big business in Indonesia. Hong Kong is the largest buyer at this time importing up to 100 tons of nests per year at a cost of 25 million USD with Indonesia as the primary source (Hobbs 2004).

Although some bird nest caves are located in coastal areas, they are primarily found far inland. The four caves, which Jupri rents from the local government at approximately 450 million rupiah each (\$50,000 USD) for three year concessions, lie at the end of a treacherous three day trek through rocky mountainous terrain from downriver roads.

Given the remote location of the caves and the rise in value of the nests, collecting nests

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<sup>77</sup> White nests are more valuable as they consist almost solely of the saliva; black nests are mixed with feathers and require more cleaning in their processing

has become increasingly dangerous. In recent years, two young Punan men from Long Suluy have been attacked by thieves. One whom Jupri had medically evacuated by helicopter to Tarakan was injured quite severely. Actual collection of the nests is usually assigned to experienced collectors hailing from other parts of the island and to migrants from Flores and Lombok, although a few Punan who have been working the caves for years have also worked collecting. For the most part the Punan are charged with guarding the caves and with transporting supplies by foot back and forth from Tanjung Redeb. Given their strength and agility moving in the forest, the Punan are particularly valued for their ability to transport large amounts of supplies relatively quickly. The salaries are relatively low. Collectors receive about 20.000 rupiah per kilo of nests; guards receive 500.000/month and carriers receive about 300.000/month/trip. But the Punan insist that they do not work birds' nests for the money; rather it has become a right of passage for young Punan men in order to gain experience outside of the village. As one young man said, "We don't go for the money, Hajji pays too little and it was even less in the past before we got smart. We go for the experience, to see animals we haven't seen before, to meet other *suku* (ethnic groups)." Once downriver, the Punan rarely venture away from Hajji Jupri to seek other employment opportunities as they say they don't like to be tied (*terikat*) by work. In working birds' nests for Jupri they are free to come and go, working for as long as they like before returning to the village. Moreover, working for Jupri is guaranteed. They are his "*anak buah*", his 'family', and thus do not have to compete with other ethnic groups for work, and, they say, Hajji 'understands our character'. Working for Hajji in birds' nests is a safe intermediary step between Long

Suluy and full participation in the downriver economy where the Punan know they don't have the experience, education or the negotiating skills to compete with other groups. Although Jupri might exploit them, at least they are familiar with the playing field and how to maneuver in that territory to get what they want.

Work at the bird nest caves is universally considered a temporary occupation by the Punan. Punan earn little compared to what they can potentially make looking for gold, and bird nest money disappears quickly. Yos, a young father who worked in birds' nests for six years before marrying, explained, "Bird nest money is 'hot', there's never any left over. Not like gold money where there is always extra. In Tanjung Redeb there's so much to buy and we have to pay for food so no one ever comes back with any." Some Punan even go into debt buying consumer products. Some young men also spend their money on alcohol and sometimes on drugs, both of which are prohibited in Long Suluy and which incur large fines if brought into the village. Furthermore, although there were a few young Punan men I never met because they were working the caves throughout my fieldwork, most came back and forth. There are a number, as well, who tried bird nest's work and thought it too dangerous and too hard so returned after a few months. It is rare for a Punan man once married to leave the village to work. As they say, "We can not endure far from our wives." Nor have any Punan men failed to return from working birds' nests. There is heavy pressure on Punan to return to Long Suluy and marry in the village, and given that Long Suluy is an economic frontier in East Kalimantan, there is usually no financial incentive to permanently migrate to the coasts. Most men are

content to return to their lives upriver, although I know two young men who express resentment that their friends and family pressured or ‘tricked’ them into returning to the village and marry. As one young father of two said, “It’s boring here in the village. I like the business of the cities and meeting other cultures. But my friends talked me into coming back. They said it was time to marry and when I came to visit they pressured me. Maybe when my children are older they can go to live with the minister’s family in Long Lanuk and go to school, and I can go to the city.”

More important than the money or the tape players that they bring to impress their friends and families, from an economic perspective the most important thing young Punan men bring back to the village is the knowledge they acquire about the market. They return not only with information about prices and new technologies but also with experience with how to navigate the market – where to sell, who to buy from, how to network and negotiate. Like migrant laborers throughout the world, they are instilled with a new found confidence of their ability to operate outside of the confines of their own village and community. They also return with an increased awareness of the ways in which Jupri has taken advantage of them and ‘kept them tied’. Thus the opportunities that Jupri opens to them in creating employment for the Punan outside of Long Suluy also works to undermine his control of them. In earlier years, Jupri reduced the ‘transaction’ costs for Punans’ entrance into the market by providing transportation into, and assistance and information about, a world still alien to them. Yet in recent years the Punan have begun to understand how to negotiate that world and many individuals having had experience in

Tanjung Redeb can provide information and assistance to the community, thereby obviating Jupri's role. Moreover, as Punan shift from their life in the forest to one increasingly embedded in the market and increasingly referenced by external social norms, simply having a steady supply of tobacco is no longer enough to satisfy them. Along with an increased desire to participate in the market and in a wider social sphere, they begin to adopt new values regarding consumption and accumulation and thus Jupri becomes not a benefactor, but a competitor, an obstacle to a new life style rather than a facilitator.

**CHAPTER 4**  
**DIVERGING STRATEGIES:**  
**THE PUNAN SULUY AND PUNAN KELAI**

**On** March 7, 2004, Pak Labong died. He died lying on a bamboo platform built for him overlooking the river on the downstream end of the village, a village that he visited, a couple of times a year at most. Sitting on the platform with him were his wife and four of his six children, ranging in age from about two years to late adolescence. Many members of the village sat on rattan mats on the ground facing the platform. For three nights those not afraid of offending the minister had come to participate in the shamanic (*dukun*) healing ritual, chanting rhythmically while the dream healers (*jupe-jupe* BP) swayed in trance mystically attempting to extract the unknown illness from his body. When the dream healers were finally proven unsuccessful, the Suluy people built a wooden coffin and buried him in a cemetery downriver from the village, not in the official cemetery across the river where Kelai people are buried.

When I first arrived in Long Suluy, the social reality that surrounded me appeared as a foggy undifferentiated haze in my unacclimated brain. Faces and names flowed together as people around me came and went to places I could not yet imagine or figure out. I remember feeling confused that every time I would become accustomed to a certain ‘modern’ image of Punan – savvy teenagers with Marlboro tee shirts, Punan men hauling their Yamaha outboard motors down to the river banks, well groomed Punan women in

long skirts making their way to church – I would turn around suddenly and see a Punan man in tattered shorts shyly squatting on the edge of the village, a woman with unkempt hair and no shirt sitting by the river, a small group of children who just somehow *looked forest* playing downstream rather than entering into the generalized play of the children in the village's open field. Yet because these images, these realities, presented themselves to me so rarely at first, so fleetingly, I did not know how to classify them and at first thought perhaps these were Punan visiting from elsewhere or even Punan who had just come in from a few months in the forest and hadn't adopted their village demeanor just yet. But then I started to notice that although there was much coming and going in the village and houses were often empty and locked up, that there was a row of five houses on the downstream bank of the village which remained almost constantly empty. Finally, one morning as I accompanied my neighbor Ibu Ripka back from church I saw a few women sitting on the ground beside one of those houses. One of the women wore no shirt, something I almost never saw the Punan women do, and I asked Ripka who she was. "Punan *Suluy*" she responded and a few minutes later, laughing told some other women what I had asked her.

**In** late January, around the time of the harvest and just prior to Pak Labong's death, I had traveled up into the Suluy River hoping to spend some time with Pak Labong and his family. The Kelai people referred to Labong jokingly as "the chief of the Suluy people", a group of about thirteen families who remain for long periods in the forests of the Suluy River, infrequently coming into the village. Although I knew many of the Suluy people

quite well by this time, I had seen Labong just once or twice briefly in the village and, though I had camped overnight once with him and other Suluy families in the forest a few months earlier, he had departed the group the following morning so I had not spoken with him for long. When we arrived at the Suluy peoples' fields that day, their camp was abandoned except for one family from Long Kian who told us everyone had gone to look for Pak Labong who was late coming to harvest. A few days later it was discovered that Pak Labong had fallen sick in the forest and his teenage son, who was with him, had attempted to carry him on his back until the other Suluy people arrived. Labong refused to come into the village so was moved to a lean-to on the confluence of the Talkin River close to Long Suluy. The village nurse traveled up twice to Talking to treat him but his son pulled out the IV's after the nurse left, refusing to believe they were medicine, and treated him with forest medicine instead. I traveled up to Talkin to tell his family I would take Labong to the hospital. In typical Punan decision-making fashion, much discussion ensued over the following week among the Suluy people, with different family members arguing over whether he should go, and who might go with him. They decided finally to wait until Labong's nephew Jeprey, who had a lot of experience in Tanjung Redeb, came in from the forest. In the meantime, they moved him into Long Suluy, but within a few days his time had passed. In the weeks following his death there was an eruption of explosive, nearly physical, conflicts among the Suluy people, some having to do directly with the circumstances surrounding Labong's death but some apparently having to do with old disagreements that Labong, as the respected elder, helped keep in tow. The Kelai people looked on from the edges of the village speculating on what might be

happening, the leaders attempting hesitantly to intervene and mediate the conflict, but mainly they shook their heads and said ironically, “We’ll only know what happens when the police arrive to tell us”. No one really expected the police but were commenting on the Suluy people’s unwillingness to ‘be a part of’ the village’, and their unwillingness to submit to the official village hierarchy.

**The** Kelai river, on which the present village of Long Suluy is situated, is a wide, deep, rapidly flowing river, in some parts as many as fifty meters across. Given the strength of the current, it is easiest to travel upriver using a tempel, or outboard motor, rather than the lighter weight ketinting. The depth of the river makes it more easily navigable, in general, than some its smaller tributaries. Unless it is the dry season, one can travel straight upriver seldom having to jump out to pull the boat over low river rocks. At *gua kecil* and *gua besar*, however, the rapids are so fierce that it is usually safer to unload the contents of the boat onto the banks and, through a combination of pulling on a lead line and gunning the motor, force the boat over the rocky churning waters. Depending on the strength of the current, some Punan will forgo the inconvenience of unloading their things and head the boat directly over the rapids – sometimes with fatal consequences. Pak Po, who is known for his ‘hot’ character, is said to have drowned several Javanese gaharu workers in the past at *gua besar*. Another boat flipped bow over stern in the same spot during my field work, losing sinking the boat but with all the Punan fortunately swimming to safety. After these two rocky spots, however, the river calms, and it is smooth sailing into the uninhabited upper reaches of the Kelai and into its tributaries.

During the fruit season, the Kelai Punan gather in two large groups at the confluence of the Manuo River and farther upstream just below Twow. The two groups divide among fuzzy political and kinship lines – those Punan who ally with the kepala desa (village chief) and those who, more or less, don't. Outside of fruit season, small groups of families will venture further into the Twow, Manuo and Samling Rivers in search of gold, while others will try their luck in the few shallow spots along the Kelai. But gold has been getting harder to find in these areas recently and success in the deeper waters depends on renting an oxygen *compressor* from Jupri. Some have had good luck just recently on the Samling but, given the large boulders in this upper tributary, a good day of steep trekking is required to reach its upper waters. With large windfalls of gold becoming increasingly rarer along the Kelai, Punan Kelai have begun recently to make their way into the Suluy River where gold is still more abundant.

The vast openness of the Kelai River, the hot sun dancing on its rocky sprays, stands in direct contrast to the green, shady waters of the Suluy River. The opening to the Suluy, a tributary of the Kelai, lies well below the dangerous rapids at *gua besar* and *gua kecil* and thus can be reached easily from present day Long Suluy with either type of motor.

Entering the Suluy, however, is another matter. The Suluy is extremely narrow, with steep walls of rocks rendering this deceptively innocuous river a death trap in case of flash flooding. (A child from Long Kian drowned during my time there as the family attempted to pull the boat onto the banks during heavy flooding – they say a tree trunk snapped the line as the father hurried to pull the boat to shore). Even in normal

conditions, the shallow rocky waters require expert knowledge of the river bottom to avoid hitting submerged rocks. Particularly when traveling downriver, the twists and turns are so sharp and unexpected a Punan must understand the rivers currents and moods. Even then it's not unusual to crash the boat into the side rocks if one underestimates a turn, consequently flooding the boat and possibly damaging the motor. Although, with some effort and out of the dry season, it is possible to haltingly make one's way upriver with an outboard motor, the Suluy people use ketinting that are both lighter and more maneuverable in shallow rocky waters. Moreover, along the Suluy there are numerous spots where one has to pull the boat or navigate obstacles. The narrow rapids at *utau besar* and *utau kecil* are flanked by steep slick rocks and require a 'jump' up a steep incline in the river. It's often necessary to cut large poles to serve as a leverage to hoist the boat up and over these imposing spots. As the motor usually needs to be carried manually up the rapids, the heavier tempel is particularly inconvenient in these situations (although sometimes a tempel with enough people pulling the boat from the bow does have enough power to push the boat up and over the inclines). In addition to these two particularly hazardous spots, all along the river one must constantly jump in and out of the boat, pulling and pushing the boat in tight narrow spots through strong currents, something which I, for one, found exhausting. In addition to these daily obstacles, trees which fall into this narrow river can completely block passage, and I have spent up to an hour with the Punan pushing and pulling a boat over a fallen trunk. As the Punan Kelai say of the Suluy "We don't like the Suluy. We are lazy to pull our boats."

The Punan Suluy, on the other hand, don't like the Kelai, "We are not used to having to unload and carry our things. We're not used to the Kelai rapids."

In order to understand some of the present day dynamics between the Punan Suluy and the Punan Kelai it's important to understand how the geographic topography maps onto the social topography. The Punan Kelai traditionally had their foraging grounds in the upper areas of the Kelai, above the rapids at *utau besar* and small groups likely moved all along the upper reaches of the river. The Punan Suluy marked their territory in the Suluy River, but they apparently came into the Kelai River below the rapids as well. Although Punan Kelai and Punan Suluy all subscribe to an origin story in which they emerged from a durian fruit at the headwaters of the Kelai, some Punan Suluy maintain that the Kelai are 'new comers' to the Kelai River. Granted, historical narratives are strategic and contextual, and Punan Suluy would alternate between maintaining that Suluy and Kelai were one group and saying that they constituted two different ethnicities. When holding to the latter opinion, they claim kinship with all the downriver Punan as the original inhabitants of the River.<sup>78</sup> The Kelai Punan, who are both politically dominant in the village and invested in unifying it, acknowledge the historical separation between the two groups regarding their respective foraging grounds but claim they are 'all one group' and *ethnically* indistinct. In any case, in the middle of the last century, the Punan Kelai and

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<sup>78</sup> The Punan Suluy and Punan Kelai speak the same dialect but with slightly different accents. This drove me crazy when I first arrived as I was constantly being corrected and couldn't figure out why. For example, 'morning' in Suluy Punan is pronounced *mabo* while the Kelai Punan say *mabu*. The Punan in the villages downriver, particularly below Lamjan, speak with a different accent and also have many borrowings from Dayak Segai such as using the word 'dah' to mean pig, while the Punan in Long Suluy use 'awui.' Aside from Geurriero's word lists collected in downriver Punan villages, I do not know of any western researcher who has studied the Punan Kelai language (the Punan all along the river themselves say I am the first). I would be thrilled if a linguist ever decided to conduct research in the upriver area.

the Punan Suluy settled together in a village at the confluence of the Suluy and Kelai Rivers but maintained their separate foraging grounds. In the past, they say, it was dangerous to enter into the other's foraging grounds because territorial boundaries were strictly enforced. Even recently Punan Suluy have been extremely protective of their territorial rights to the Suluy River, although certain individuals in good relationship with the Suluy were tolerated if they came in quickly and did not stay for long. But with a recent windfall of gold on the Nol, a small stream running into the Suluy, even those Kelai Punan who had never been into the Suluy have begun to venture in. As a Kelai man said about the Suluy Punans' resistance, "Pak Lalan [a Suluy elder] has gotten angry and tried to stop us before, but we told him that God gives us the gold, it does not belong to anyone."

Although the Suluy Punan in the present village number only thirteen families, they represented a significant percentage of the population in Long Suluy Dulu. In the 1970s about thirty families, mostly Suluy and including the kepala desa at the time, moved downriver and established the village of Long Kian. Administratively Long Kian is part of Long Suluy and is subject to the official leadership in Long Suluy with one representative to that council, although Long Kian has petitioned the regional government to be considered as its own political unit. While the Punan Suluy maintain strong ties with Long Kian, with a few members residing alternately in both villages, the Kelai Punan have almost no interaction with Long Kian. Many younger Kelai people are only vaguely aware that Long Kian and Long Suluy were united as one village in the past and

despite its proximity have never visited their smaller neighbor. Although the Suluy Punan maintain strong kinship ties with the Punan in Long Kian (who consider themselves both “Kian Punan” and ‘Suluy Punan’), the Suluy Punan in Long Suluy choose to remain in the larger village, in great part they say, because of the economic opportunities presented by Jupri (Kian is much poorer) and because Long Suluy is more ‘lively’ (Kian has no television or electricity). Kian Punan resent the control that Long Suluy has over government funds and there have been very aggressive confrontations in the past between Kian Punan and the leadership in Long Suluy. Kian Punan rarely visit Long Suluy. There has been some intermarriage between Kian Punan and Suluy Punan but these few marriages are confined to individuals who at one time lived in the other village. Thus, they have actually been instances of someone marrying ‘back in their hometown.’ Young people in both villages have grimaced and shaken their heads in the negative when I have asked if they would consider marrying someone from the other village.<sup>79</sup>

Field Notes May 2004: Collecting genealogy may seem a cold archaic practice of circles and triangles, of crosses marking death but the geometric shapes, the circles and lines tell a story, akin to a mnemonic device of the Greek storytellers, each triangle, each circle a face, each line a relationship. I sit on my front porch and watch a child run by and I know pieces of his story, his mother who died in second childbirth, the grandmothers that he runs to now, the aunts and uncles...his mother who I never knew marked by a cross. I wonder about her face and know stories of her death – malaria some say. “I had just returned from Tanjung Redeb...” “Why didn’t he come for help for medicine, she was my

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<sup>79</sup> Not surprisingly, Kian Punan are more heavily invested in the differences between Suluy and Kelai Punan, considering themselves more ‘like’ the Punan in the downriver villages, than those Suluy Punan residing in Long Suluy. Moreover, although Kian Punan also forage in the Suluy River, very seldom does one encounter Kian and Long Suluy Punan camping together in the forest, except for a couple of individuals closely related by marriage. I would be thrilled if an anthropologist chose to study Long Kian as a comparison of very different trajectories taken by the two villages after their split.

cousin...” This diagram on paper like a cryptic language, hinting at stories of a past-trailing off to triangles and circles with un-remembered names, the anger and longing over those who married elsewhere and never returned, it’s proclamation of its identity, the community’s identity that marries itself over and over and over...”

**The** Punan Kelai, as I collected their genealogies, frequently reminded me that, “We are all family, everyone here is family” and fill me in on the histories and families of their relatives and neighbors. They were almost always correct.<sup>80</sup> But when I asked, for example, “And how about Pak Paloi? Is *he* family?” “*La-in!*” my neighbor Nyow would exclaim vigorously shaking her head and frowning, “*Oth-ER!*” “Who are his brothers and sisters?” “*Ha in,*” she shrugged, “*se Suluy, (BP)*” “*I don’t know, he’s Suluy.*” Not only are the Suluy not *family*, they are *different*. The Punan Kelai consider the Punan Suluy to be “primitive”, “like we used to be”, they say. The Punan Kelai, particularly those members who have had extensive experience in Tanjung Redeb and who increasingly reference their identity in relation to the external social environment, look down at the Punan Suluy who continue to engage in practices that reflect back to the Punan Kelai their recent past. While all the Punan spend extensive amounts of time in the forest, not only do the Punan Suluy spend significantly longer in the forest, the forest, not the village, seems to serve as the cognitive center of their world. While the Punan Kelai *go into* the forest and *return* to the village, the Punan Suluy *go into* the village and *return to* the forest where they confess to feeling more at home. It is the Suluy’s embeddedness in the forest environment, the sense that they are part of the forest rather than visitors to it, which is offensive to the Kelai people. And it is not just the amount of

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<sup>80</sup> In other words, I always double checked.

time spent in the forest, but what they are actually doing there. As one older Kelai man said critically, “The longest Punan Suluy stay in the village is five days, maybe one week – then they return to the forest. But they return to the forest not to do any other business than to look for food. If one day they get pig or fish they eat it there and then sleep. When they finish the food they move and then look for food again.” While many Punan Kelai also prefer the quiet of the forest over the hustle and bustle of the village, there is a sense that they are ‘recreating’ there, it is the ‘escape’ from the noise and social dynamics of a communal life to which they are increasingly adapting. In addition, the Punan Kelai maintain that they mostly go to the forest to ‘look for business’ i.e. to search for gold in order to get ahead and so they are able to purchase the necessary accoutrements of a modern lifestyle. To go to the forest to look only for food, and particularly to subsist on sago, threatens the Kelai’s sense of themselves as modern people who are actively engaging in a wider experience of the world than the one they knew in the past.

The Punan Kelai voice a whole litany of criticisms about the Suluy people: they are dirty, they eat sago *continually*, they don’t take care of their children and they steal from the Javanese gaharu workers up in the forests (and from anthropologists, I came to find out), and so on. The Kelai people claim that Suluy people don’t use mosquito nets because “...their bodies are different from ours and can tolerate the cold,” and because ‘...their children’s bodies are used to gnats’. Thus, the personal body serves as a metaphor to understand wider social dynamics and power relations in the social body. The Suluy people, on the other hand, regard the Kelai people as ‘arrogant’ and ‘unfair’. The Suluy

people say they don't want to come into the village because the Kelai people look down on them and village resources, such as government funding, are hoarded by the Kelai leadership. Moreover, food is "difficult" in the village. Although the Suluy people plant swidden, for most of them their harvests are comparatively small to non-existent, and they do indeed depend heavily on sago, which many of them say they prefer.<sup>81</sup> The hunting and fishing near the village is no good, and, thus, without a store of rice to maintain them in the village they are forced to buy food on credit from Sabran or to rely on support from those few members of their group who, in fact, have surplus rice, a situation that creates social tension. A new criticism of the Kelai Punan is that they exclude the Punan Suluy from transporting Javanese gaharu workers which has become lucrative business in Long Suluy.<sup>82</sup> Thus, the Punan Suluy prefer not only the physical environment of the forests but the social environment as well. In the forest they operate independently and are free from the lower-class status to which they are subjected in the village. As for mosquito nets, some say they can't afford them, others say they are scared to use mosquito nets because if a tree falls they can not get out quickly enough and might be killed – a serious danger in the rainforest.

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<sup>81</sup> As one older Kelai man said, "Semuang said to me that he didn't know why but he didn't get any rice this harvest. I said, 'That's because you *never* get any rice!' Suluy people are lazy to plant *ladang*!" One of the Kelai leaders maintained that when the village was given seed rice by the government the year following a particularly poor harvest, the Suluy Punan ate theirs rather than saved it for planting.

<sup>82</sup> In part the Punan Suluy do not transport gaharu workers because they do not have tempel and they have smaller boats – both of which are not adequate for heavy loads or for going up the Kelai River. But also, as there is no system for transporting gaharu workers. It is somewhat of a free for all, and those Punan who are most aggressive are most successful. Also, some Punan establish on-going relationships with gaharu workers and a few under-charge for transport in order to secure clients. The Punan Suluy are not in the village enough to establish those relationships.

I do not wish to portray the two groups as altogether diametrically opposed; there is in fact a continuum of time spent in the forests and of associated behaviors. Some Suluy people are seen in the village more often than others, plant larger swiddens, and are more industrious searching for gold. Similarly, some Kelai people are rarely seen in the village, although, in general, those members are considered “rebellious” or “selfish” rather than “primitive” or “different”. Moreover, there is indeed marriage between the two groups. Traditionally, one member of the couple “becomes” Suluy or Kelai as they accompany their spouse and in-laws into the other’s foraging area. Some people take on the identity of their adopted group, such as Pak Musa, a Suluy man who has become thoroughly embedded in the Kelai group and primarily stays on the Kelai River (and, as my neighbor claims, has become “clean” since he married a Kelai woman), or Santi, a Kelai woman who married into Suluy. Others maintain a more liminal position after marrying into the opposite group. These latter couples are more opportunistic about their economic strategies, aligning solidly with neither group and forming their own political and economic unit with various in-laws. Ibu Rika, a woman of about forty-five, who was the first to point out the Suluy group to me, is also originally Suluy from Kian. Her first husband died several years prior to our first meeting, and she moved to Suluy to marry Palis, a widower. Although Palis, too, was originally Suluy, his first wife was Kelai and this is why the Kelai people say he is “different” from Suluy people. Ripka, sitting with her husband one afternoon, explained the difference between Suluy and Kelai to me, “Kelai people have already changed while Suluy people have not – they just want to go into the forest. Kelai people follow the ways of the city. Hopefully God will change the

Suluy people... Suluy people want to follow the traditions of the ancestors but Kelai people don't." Moreover, as the Kelai river becomes increasingly depleted of gold reserves and, as I will explain later, marriage opportunities outside the village become increasingly threatening to the social body of Long Suluy, the geographic, social and economic boundaries that reinforce separate identities between Punan Suluy and Kelai and are becoming less marked.

**Almost** from the beginning, from the time when I first realized they existed as a group, I was curious about the Suluy Punan. I was shy with all the Punan at first, often reading their reticence as lack of interest or even hostility (which turned out *not* to be the case), but I was particularly unsure of the Punan Suluy who separated themselves from the larger village, rarely gathering on front porches or at Sabran's house when in the village. But finally, when I ventured over to them one afternoon, leaning into their doorways, I was gratefully surprised by their friendliness and willingness to talk. Although, as it turned out, almost all of the Punan were more welcoming when I met them in the forest, as though the lack of audience made the social pressure less threatening, many of the Punan Suluy were particularly conversational. I was almost dumbfounded one evening when Pak Jep and Pak Talkin, who I had never spoken with before, sat with me one evening in the forest and said, "Okay Katrin, let's talk and get to know each other." I had become so used to being careful with too many direct questions that I almost did not know what to ask them about! And though when I entered their houses in the village they were almost empty of belongings, unlike those of the Kelai's, it would be unfair to

say that the Punan Suluy were resisting the market. We have tended to imagine the market as a monolithic force barreling into local communities, plowing through and over traditional systems of values and practices, with local cultures either fighting against or succumbing to new systems of values and relationships. Anthropology has attempted to destabilize this easy opposition by examining how cultures negotiate the complex interaction between local systems and the system of networks that comprise the global 'market' systems. Rather than thinking about the Punan Suluy (or the Punan Kelai for that matter) as resisting capitalism, it is more useful to think in terms of the forms of friction that arise at the intersection of local institutions and the market; the market not as a 'thing' but as a metaphor for the ordering of categories. If society is a dense network of relationships, not just of human actors but of material resources as well, then at that intersection there is a confusing and complex renegotiation of relationships as everything is pulled in different directions.

Because many of the Punan Suluy are more 'forest' oriented, they also possess, in some ways, a greater degree of economic flexibility. On one hand, as they are less subservient to an identity influenced by external sources, they are able to live in the forest *relatively* free from the pressure of the consumption patterns which the Kelai have adopted. While not owning a clean shirt may deter them from coming into the village, it is an unnecessary item in the forest, even for the Kelai for that matter. One Punan Suluy couple who are rare visitors to the village even choose not to smoke as it frees them from dependence on tobacco and on lighters which can be preserved for making cooking fires.

A few Suluy Punan families often walk into the Suluy area, sometimes hopping a ride as far as the Talkin River on someone else's boat and then making the trek into the Suluy. While there are some Kelai families who do not own motors, those families only travel upriver with extended family as they are "unaccustomed to walking far." Yet this cannot be the sole reason, as the Kelai Punan sometimes walk for days when hunting, although admittedly they are relatively unencumbered then by belongings. Rather, to walk into the forest quite simply 'looks bad' for the Kelai, and people who do so are often the butt of jokes and derision – a powerful strategy that groups employ to encourage adherence to social norms. The Punan Suluy, thus, have relatively more freedom in their mobility than the Punan Kelai. This has also translated into their being able to maintain social and economic networks outside the village. A few years earlier a Suluy widower married a Punan woman on the Sigah river and now Punan Suluy families occasionally travel by foot over into the Sigah, both, I am told, to look for gold and to seek assistance from that man who is said to have done quite well. Another Suluy-Kelai couple who has adopted a largely forest existence and, who as I mentioned above inhabit a more liminal position with respect to the village's major political groupings, often travel into the Sigah where they have social and economic contacts and where one child has even been semi-adopted by a local family there that provides for her schooling. In contrast, most Kelai Punan have never even visited the Sigah River. And as Punan Suluy are willing to subsist on sago for extended amounts of time, they have a greater amount of flexibility regarding their engagement with, and time commitment to, agriculture than the Punan Kelai for

whom it is both socially unacceptable and by this time, they say, physically uncomfortable to frequently eat the heavy sago starch.

While one response to the introduction of new institutions and practices may be a certain level of inertia, choosing to remain on the track one is more or less already on, the Punan Suluy have also demonstrated a proactive, even entrepreneurial approach to the new economic structures. Although the Punan Suluy may avoid the village, and, more specifically, avoid the Kelai Punan, I was surprised when collecting oral histories to find that a number of the Punan Suluy had, indeed, spent fairly long amounts of time in Tanjung Redeb in the past. A few of them worked with Jupri and his family, one of the oldest Punan Suluy men affectionately referring to Jupri as “our boss”. Others had actually worked as laborers or ‘houseboys’ for families unrelated to Jupri. The Punan Suluy, who are status-conscious in relation to the Punan Kelai, adopt a more easily deferential manner to powerful outsiders, including Jupri and Sabran, without any threat to their own identity. While the Kelai Punan struggle with the client role they must adopt to supplicate for assistance, regarding it as demeaning, many of the Suluy Punan adopt it as an economic strategy that does not threaten their sense of self in relation to an externally imposed hierarchy. I was reminded of this one morning when Pak Talkin, an older Suluy man, followed Sabran around the store as Sabran railed angrily over Talkin’s request for credit. Talkin, he maintained, sold his gold to others and refused to remember his debt with Sabran. Talkin, hoping that Sabran would relent, followed him around patiently, and appearing to me almost embarrassingly humble. Later, when I visited at

Talkin's house, he was undisturbed by Sabran's outbursts. Sitting patiently weaving a rattan bag he noted only that Sabran was angry and that he, Talkin, would have to wait around in the village until Sabran changed his mind. Further, although many of the Punan Suluy feel particularly unsure of navigating institutions such as the hospital in Tanjung Redeb, there is a sense that with the Punan Suluy it is a lack of knowledge that will deter them from achieving their goals that bothers them rather than a fear of how strangers will regard them. This is not to say that the Punan Suluy are completely insensitive to outsiders' perceptions and judgments. However, they can seemingly more easily shrug off and maneuver around outsiders' judgments than can the Kelai. Thus, while the Punan Suluy may lack the types of 'experience' some of the Punan Kelai are gaining through their increasing interactions with market and state structures, they are able to operate more as free agents who are looking out for themselves. In this case, the people who are more embedded in the forest are less subject to the constraints of modernity and capitalism. Integration into the market requires subjugation to a particular set of categories and norms. Traditionalism creates a space where the Punan Suluy are free from the symbolic and structural constraints of capitalism, opening up a range of options to acquire resources.

### **Mempersatukan: Unification**

“Why was the village building a house for Pak Labong?”

“Because he is always in the forest.”

“But why do you want him to stay in the village?”

“Because he is always in the forest.”

“Yes, but why do you think it’s better for him to be in the village than the forest?”

(long pause)

“Because he is alone there and we worry about him.”

At the time of Pak Labong’s death the village was nearing the completion of a house for him. According to the Kelai leadership, Pak Labong had said that he didn’t come into the village more often because he did not have a house. Punan, in general, do not like to share houses with other families saying it leads to conflict even over such quotidian issues as cooking. Life, in short, has fewer problems when one has more privacy. Yet with only five houses to thirteen families, the Suluy found themselves crowded in too tightly if they happened to all be in the village at once and the Punan Kelai sympathized with the Punan Suluy’s situation. As Pak Labong was considered the leader of the Suluy people they hoped that by luring him into the village, the others in turn would follow. Thus, a village work group was set to work on Labong’s house, cutting and carrying planks in from the forest and using some of the government allotment of aluminum roofing to finish off the job. I never perceived hostility on the part of the Punan Kelai toward the Punan Suluy. They expressed frustration, concern, deprecation, even disgust, but not hostility. The Punan Kelai did not want to marginalize the Punan Suluy; rather they wanted to bring them into their own group and into a village or ‘modern’ lifestyle. The Kelai leadership was heavily invested in uniting the village and often reflected on the

challenges to ‘mempersatukan’ (*unify*) its many members. The Punan Suluy, in contrast, resisted the Punan Kelai’s attempts to control them and indeed, in discussions of the village leadership, often expressed hostility and resentment. This was not surprising given that the Suluy’s way of life was under attack.

Prior to settlement, the political organization of the Punan resembled, more or less, the ideal type described for hunters and gatherers in anthropology textbooks. There was little, if any, formal hierarchy and leadership was achieved and transitory. The Punan traveled in small family groups with fluid membership. Very rarely was there any need for them to come together into large associative gatherings or engage in large scale collective projects so there was no need for a strong central authority. Although the Punan speak of charismatic individuals among them in the past, they were not considered ‘chiefs’ but simply well known individuals with strong personalities. The well known figures they discuss, such as Bong Dalai, were not Punan from Long Suluy but hailed from the downriver Punan groups. Historically, when the Punan were largely nomadic, there was much more interaction among the various Punan groups on the Kelai River and group boundaries were more fluid. The fact that the Punan in Long Suluy refer to downriver Punan as their ‘leaders’ indicates an identity based in a membership in a wider network of Punan groups in the past. As described earlier, the Punan were involved in client patron relationships with Dayak groups. Although politically egalitarian among themselves, they submitted to the Dayak Rajah in a regional inter-tribal political hierarchy. It’s not clear when the Suluy Punan and Kelai Punan began to think of

themselves as ‘Long Suluy Punan’, differentiating themselves from downriver groups and identifying with one another, but the process was likely gradual after they settled into their collective village at Long Suluy. Sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s, the Punan began to slowly align their political organization in accordance with Indonesian state policy.

After independence in 1949, the state instituted a uniform administrative structure for all of Indonesia attempting to both manage and unify a diverse and widely spread out population. At the village level, traditional hereditary leadership was replaced by an elected kepala desa (lit: head of village) whose role it was to interface with and carry out state initiatives. Traditional leadership was shifted into the position of *kepala adat* (lit: head of traditional law) which basically was, and remains, a symbolic and loose category for honorary leaders who are not elected. The Punan say they have had five kepala desa although it is unclear how formal any sort of election procedure was in the past and there was probably little differentiation, if any, between the roles of kepala desa and *kepala adat*. In fact, although many Punan as well as Hajji Jupri speak highly of the previous kepala desa Jing Kooling, some insist that he was officially the village’s ‘secretary’ and not the elected kepala desa. There is no known documentation to verify who was officially ‘in charge’, but the confusion speaks to the informal nature of leadership that prevailed until recently. More recently, however, with the Punans’ increasingly sedentary lifestyle and their increasing interaction with the state that often takes the form

of funding for community projects, the kepala desa role has become more formalized, more highly visible as well as, admittedly, more lucrative.

The present kepala desa, Pak Lakai, is about forty-five years old and had been in office for eight years when I arrived. Referred to as Pak Lura, a title held over from Dutch colonial times, his leadership is controversial even among Kelai Punan but, as he is said to have the largest kin network, he would be difficult to challenge in elections. One evening, sitting in the front room of the new large house he had built, he explained the difficulties with attempting to unify the village, “People here are not used to leadership. Everyone is used to going off into the forest and being their own chief. It’s hard to unify the village....What can we do with the Suluy people if they don’t want to come into the village? We can’t fine them because they don’t have any money. We can’t be too strict, we can’t shame them or they will stop coming to the village altogether and will break away.” In Long Suluy, the tension between individual autonomy and the formation and strengthening of the collectivity that is the leadership’s project becomes most clearly manifest when it comes to community work projects referred to as *gotong royong*. *Gotong royong* arose in national parlance during the Sukarno era as a poor nation attempted to mobilize its people to engage in communal work projects. In Long Suluy, it takes the form of such projects as building new houses or a new church, preparation for and participation in Christmas, Easter and harvest celebrations, and cleaning the village in preparation for official visits. While some projects, such as a village cleaning, may take only one or two days, others, such as a new church, may extend off and on over

several months. At these latter times the Punan are prohibited from traveling into the forest for any extent of time and are fined an average of 50.000 rupiah per three days for non-participation. Some Punan request permission to be excused from gotong royong, particularly if there is a lucrative economic opportunity available such as transporting gaharu workers, and directly pay the fine “so people won’t be mad”. Although there are a number of individuals among the Kelai who shirk gotong royong, the Suluy people are particularly noted for their non-participation and for not paying any fines. As one older Kelai man explained, “Suluy people do not follow gotong royong. They are like another village. Many times they have been talked to but it doesn’t matter. They are fined but many don’t pay. Pak Dalai’s [the kepala adat] work is heavy as he is responsible for fining them.” People who don’t participate in gotong royong, including those Kelai individuals, are said not to want to be “one village” and to want to be “independent”.

If Punan Suluy happen to be in the village when there is a gotong royong, many of them will, indeed, participate for a short time. A few others who are ‘closer’ to the Kelai will also heed the call to participate. Others, however, are afraid to be ‘trapped’ in the village by an on-going project and often seek to avoid the village at those times when there is an extensive project underway. It is easier just to not come into the village than it is to directly flaunt the leadership by leaving in the middle of a work project or on a day that gotong royong is announced. Moreover, as mentioned above, there are practical reasons for the Punan Suluy’s lack of participation in village projects. As Pak Taran, a Kelai man of about forty who is particularly sympathetic to the Punan Suluy explained, “Labong,

Selah, Semuang, Johan...they don't follow gotong royong. They don't understand time. If you tell them to come in from the forest in thirty days, they come three months later. They are embarrassed to come in because they don't have a good shirt and there's no food here... They plant rice fields but they are not extensive and they don't really look for gold." Pak Anton, another Kelai man, explained the Suluy people's absence during the construction of the new church, "The problem is that there is no food here now so they cannot come to help with the Church. Suluy people don't have rice and so they cannot survive long in the village and must stay in the forest where they can look for sago. They also don't have access to gaharu workers." Pak Semuang, a Suluy man of about forty commented angrily on the interference of gotong royong activities with subsistence activities when I met him in the forest at the beginning of fruit season, at a time when most Kelai Punan were still in the village finishing the new church, "I don't know if I will have to pay for not working on the church. I don't have any money so I can't pay. They'll have to put me in jail. There are other times to work in the village. This is the only time to collect fruit."

And yet the Punan Suluy's resistance to gotong royong is not *simply* a matter of practicalities. Collective work projects can best be understood as the boundary object that denotes a point of friction between two contradictory systems. The Punan Suluy not only depend to a greater extent on subsistence foraging but adhere to a more 'flat' structure of social networks where, as in the past, relationships between small groups were negotiated directly by individuals. There was and is little centralization and almost

no hierarchy. But whereas in the past there was structural equality in the system of relations among Punan, there is now an increasing drive toward centralization. With structural asymmetry in the community, relationships between individuals are increasingly being mediated by emerging institutions. Whereas the making of community constitutes a meta project of village institutions, the Punan Suluy are resisting integration into, what Foucault would refer to as modernist rationalities. Gotong royong is one of the places where the networks meet and struggle over power. As Pak Taran, a Kelai man, lucidly explained, “The village government wants to bring people in from the forest, it wants to gather and unify the people. It is easier to arrange control over people if they are in the village. I used to be responsible for calling people in from the forest. I used to bring Labong gifts to bring him into the village. Labong didn’t necessarily hate the village but he wanted to be free, not having to ask permission from the kepala desa to come and go.” In not participating in gotong royong, the Punan Suluy are resisting submission to central authority in general not just on the issue of collective work projects. In our conversations Punan Suluy often expressed contempt at the leadership for trying to control their time and movements. As one Punan Suluy man said waiting for the national elections, “We sit and sit and can’t go into the forest. We don’t like being told what to do but missing the elections is ‘heavy’ and the police will be called in.”<sup>83</sup> The Punan

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<sup>83</sup> I was almost fined by the village for not participating in national elections. When the census workers came up from Tanjung Redeb to register the village for the upcoming elections, the officials failed to realize that non-Indonesian citizens could not vote in Indonesian elections. Thus my name was included on the list of voters and I was assigned a voting card. When I tried to explain to the *kepala adat* that I could not vote, he replied, “Well now, if your name is not on the list like the Javanese who come through the village then you are free to go into the forest and not participate. But if your name is on the list you must participate or you will be fined.” I enjoyed a few days with everyone asking which party I would follow (and concerned that my Fulbright would be revoked) until the head school teacher (who was also curious

leadership, and those who follow the leadership more closely, have begun, to a greater extent, the process of internalizing modernist norms such as social hierarchy and regulation of time. The Punan Suluy, have done so to a much lesser extent, perhaps in part because of their greater isolation in the forest but also because of the perception that they will only lose power and autonomy in the new village system where access to leadership depends on the extent of one's kin networks and they constitute a minority.

**Pak** Labong's death, however, accomplished what the new house built for him might never have done. With his death, many of the Suluy Punan began to spend more time in the village. His eldest daughter Dol married Se, a young Kelai man, soon after her father's death and they spent the first months of their marriage hard at work finishing Labong's house for them. Labong's wife, eldest son and young children kept close to Dol and her new husband, remaining for long periods in the village. Although Se will start to go into the Suluy river, he will not 'become Suluy' as his entire extended Kelai family will also move into the Suluy in search of gold. As Ibu Bot, a young Kelai woman, observed, "Suluy people used to go to the forest, but since Labong died there is no boss. He did not force people to go there, but it was like a village there." And according to Pak Lura, "Suluy people since the death of Labong have often been here and will be here more often. Only three families will stay long in the forest – Pak Lalan, Pak Markus and Pak Sliman. The others, before they wanted to join Labong but now they will be here more often." Lest I misrepresent the situation, no one was happy about

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about my party affiliation) finally realized that I might be right about my eligibility and got me out of the fine.

Labong's death. Many of the Kelai Punan were quite angry at the Suluy Punan for not seeking help more quickly or requesting financial assistance from the leadership to bring him to the hospital. And yet there was a real sense that his passing marked the end of an era. Unification will continue to be actively negotiated both between the Suluy and Kelai people as well as among the various factions of the Kelai, but the strongest resistance to mempersatukan seemed to pass away with Labong.

## CHAPTER 5

### RELIGION AND MODERNITY: NEGOTIATING THE MORAL DOMAIN

One afternoon in December 2003 I returned to my house after visiting in the downstream part of the village (my house, or half house, was on the upstream, forest side of the village). I was surprised to see that there were almost fifteen pairs of flip flops on the front porch across the way at Pak Welgung's house and the door was closed. I was particularly surprised as Pak Welgung had been sick for almost two months and lay on a bamboo platform on the very edge of the village, refusing to go to the hospital. I asked my neighbor, Pak Wulun, what was happening. Although a Kelai Punan and Welgung's younger brother, Wulun was politically marginal in the village, inhabiting his own liminal space between the many political factions, and did not know what was happening in Welgung's house. After about thirty minutes or so, a group of Kelai men, including Pak Yohannes, the village secretary, and Pak Bau, another member of the village council, funneled out the front door. This group, or at least the leaders who emerged through the door, represented the political faction of the village most intent on breaking from Hajji Jupri, most intent on 'modernizing' the village, and most critical of the kepala desa.

By this time I knew better than to go about seeking information on what transpired at this private meeting and waited patiently for someone to come by and quietly inform me, knowing it might take even a day or two. The next morning when I emerged from my house, I noticed that there were many more small groups than usual gathered around the

village talking seriously. A little while later I wandered over to Sabran's house to sit and drink tea in the kitchen with Ibu Selbut. Selbut had worked at Sabran's for nine years cooking and keeping house. Selbut had been the fourth wife in a polygamous marriage with a Dayak Kenyah chief whom she had met as a teenager when the Kenyah had migrated through the area from Bulungan. There had been a shortage of young Punan men at the time, and she had followed him downriver living in Merasa for nearly twenty years until her husband's death. I had asked her once whether her parents had arranged the marriage, "No, I chose him myself," she had answered. As an older woman accustomed to outsiders, fluent in Indonesian and inhabiting the socially ambiguous space as Sabran's employee, she was one of my best informants and provided easy company when I was tired (although she also enjoyed stealing my sandals from my front porch and hiding them).

When I arrived in the kitchen that morning Selbut was particularly agitated and when the kitchen had cleared whispered, "They are trying to force my niece to marry." "Which niece?" I asked. "*Kas*". Kas was Pak Welgung's eldest daughter and, according to the village, well beyond the age necessary to marry. Looking about twenty years old, but perhaps older, she was known for having boyfriends in the downriver villages of Long Gi and Merasa. Welgung was Selbut's younger brother and, as she was never able to have any of her own children, Selbut was very close to her niece. But the meeting at Welgung's had, as it turned out, not only been about arranging a marriage for Kas but for several young Kelai women in the village who had already reached their mid-teens. The

Kelai men who had met wanted Kas to marry Dar, the Lura's wife's younger brother.

Kas was adamantly opposed to a forced marriage and particularly to Dar who she claimed liked another girl in the village.

I had often been impressed with the freedom young people enjoyed in the village and with the restraint Punan display in disciplining or controlling the younger members of their community. Young children were rarely scolded. I watched once as a father and mother spent almost fifteen minutes quietly talking their angry five year old out of throwing a large stick at them, even though they could easily have yanked it away from him. (The child had wanted candy, and I myself had been quite concerned over the size of the stick as I sat next to his parents). I had similarly been surprised when some parents had relented and let their two year old retain a sharp knife because, they said, "She cries when we take it from her". I had been almost perplexed really by the Punans' helplessness over the problem of some young boys who broke into kitchens and stole things when the Punan were up in the forest. Everyone knew who the culprits were but no one acted to address the delinquency except to secure their belongings more safely. Teenagers were more or less free to come and go, accompanying their parents into the forest as they chose, remaining in the village if they preferred or even traveling downriver into Tanjung Redeb if they had the means and opportunity to do so. As Imah, Wulun and Nyow's sixteen year old daughter told me, "Kids are mostly free to go to Tanjung Redeb or Long Gi to look for work. My parents just think it's up to me. I think it's the same for my friends. We're just not allowed to move away." Another older

woman told me, “Women are not ordered by husbands. If a wife wants to go somewhere or do something she is free to do so. It’s the same with young people. It’s rare that they can’t go somewhere. It must be really important for them not to be allowed.”

Gender relations among the Punan, as is typical among hunting and gathering groups, are highly egalitarian.<sup>84</sup> There is little differentiation in economic roles as husband and wives partner together as the primary economic unit.<sup>85</sup> Families gather forest products together and, in fact, women are often considered the more industrious. Husbands and wives hunt both together and separately, although women usually will not hunt overnight and if they hunt alone will only do so with dogs. (Nor do women use blowpipes as they say they do not have the strength of breath for them). When the husband of Selbut’s older sister, Saung, died I asked a Punan man what she would do, “What do you mean ‘what will she do?’” he answered, “She can hunt.” Money made from collecting forest products is also managed together by a couple with each family deciding for itself how to make decisions around finances. And the Punan stress that it is very important to treat children ‘the same.’ As a Punan Suluy man said to me, “If you give money to one child you must give the same amount to your other children. If you school one child, you must school the others – both boys and girls.” Although the Punan say that only men build boats and only women weave rattan mats, I often saw couples working on these tasks

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<sup>84</sup> Highly egalitarian gender relations are common among foragers but not universal. Australian aborigines, for example, represent an exception.

<sup>85</sup> According to Simandjuntak (1967) the Punan Kelai practiced uxori-locality. At this time there is still what I would describe as ‘informal’ uxori-locality. When a widowed man, Pak Ot, married a woman on the Sigah I was told by an elder in the village, “Of course one has to go where the woman is.” Most Punan at this time marry in the village and new couples move in with whichever in-laws have the most space in their house.

together. And while Punan women are free to come and go as they please, one of my neighbors Pak Herman said he wanted to go work in logging but his wife would not allow him to leave.

Punan parents may at times attempt to encourage a match between two young people, but marriage partners are a personal choice rather than an institutional arrangement. The Punan say that in the past parents could ‘force’ marriage, but I never spoke with anyone for whom that actually ever happened. In fact, marriage ‘in the past’ was much less formal even than today in Long Suluy. Today, with the permanent presence of a minister in the village, Punan marry in the church and divorce is considered ‘heavy’, and I was a bit incredulous at first when I heard there had never been a divorce in the village. Yet Pak Yunas is only the second minister to have actually lived in Long Suluy and he arrived six months prior to me. The previous minister, Pak Usat, of Kenyah ethnicity, lived in Long Suluy for only two years but, unlike Yunas, did not have the authority to marry people.<sup>86</sup> A Christian marriage, thus, was extremely expensive as a minister from Tanjung Redeb had to be brought up to the village with all expenses paid. In short, there have been few church marriages altogether in Long Suluy and thus little actual opportunity for ‘divorce’. Partnerships that took place outside of a Christian ceremony are referred to by the Indonesian term *kawin adat* (lit: customary marriage) and involved little, if any, ceremony. Two people simply moved in together although ‘traditionally’, a Punan man was expected to provide a new sarong and a rattan mat. In the past marital

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<sup>86</sup> Yunas was not superior to Usat but prior to Yunas’ tenure, the main church in Tanjung Redeb had not empowered the village ministers to perform marriage ceremonies.

partnerships were not especially stable and Punan often changed partners, again with very little ceremony involved.<sup>87</sup> A Punan man might return from traveling downriver to find that his wife had a new husband. As Punan often say, “Marriage in the past was ‘not certain’.” The Punan also practiced polygamy, including sororal polyandry, and levirate (marrying a brother’s widowed spouse), institutions that persisted even into the 1990s.

When Punan speak of these traditional marriage practices they often refer to them as having taken place a “long time ago” or “in our grandparents time”, yet even Punan in their thirties will have been ‘kawin adat’ multiple times. It is, however, very difficult to get them to talk about it as the Punan are invested in an image of themselves as Christian. I do not sense that they feel ‘ashamed’, as they have not internalized Christian values to that extent, but rather feel invested in constructing a Christian, and hence ‘modern’, image that their marital history contradicts. Only a few informants were open about multiple marriages or polygamy, although when I discreetly checked out their claims others always confirmed their stories. Not surprisingly, collecting genealogies was a bit of a challenge. For example, I spent weeks confused as to why no one could remember the name of Ibu Alon’s late husband (she had since remarried to Uyow) and the father of her adult son Yos. Finally, Pak Welgung, after his recovery, revealed the secret smiling, “Oh, Yos is *my* son. When Uyow’s wife died I gave him Alon because I had two. I was the naughtiest in the village!” His current wife Gupek was sitting next to us but only smiled quietly. When I asked if she had had other husbands Welgung said, “Yes”. When

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<sup>87</sup> ‘Traditionally’ here means a practice in recent memory. The Punan did not start to wear sarongs until the 1950s or 1960s when traders brought them up.

Gupek remained silent he stopped talking. As it turned out, Welgung had a number of children in the village by former wives although he maintains no familial relationship with those children at all. Thus, while I feel confident in much of my genealogical data I am sure there are many errors regarding paternity. Furthermore, despite the adoption of Christianity Punan still express very permissive attitudes towards pre-marital and extramarital sexual relationships, practices for which they are derided by other Dayak groups.

A few months prior to the meeting at Pak Welgung's house the Punan had found themselves confronted with a situation in which traditional mores of sexual freedom and newly adopted Christian values, which proscribe non-marital sexual relationships with an emphasis on controlling female sexuality, collided. Tai, Pak Lura's fifteen year old and only daughter, had gotten pregnant with Bakri, Hajji's worker in Long Suluy and a relative through his second marriage. Although the whole village had known that Tai and Bakri were 'girlfriend and boyfriend', it was mainly considered an innocent and passing childhood flirtation. Unbeknownst to Tai's parents, she had been climbing out of her window and into Bakri's for many months. Although a few young Punan women had become pregnant before marriage in recent years, even after the ministers had come to reside in the village, it was relatively unproblematic as they simply married their Punan lovers without much ado. But as Pak Uyow, one of the Punan elders, commented when hearing of the situation, "Other girls get pregnant but that's no problem," he said shrugging, belying the lack of concern or judgment about pre-marital sex, "but you can't

marry a Muslim". Tai's pre-marital pregnancy could not be easily tucked away in a quick marriage, and as the daughter of the kepala desa her situation was particularly visible and news quickly traveled downriver to other Punan villages, serving to reinforce their already negative stereotypes of Long Suluy people. Those Kelai Punan who already politically opposed the kepala desa added this embarrassment to their list of grievances and anyone angry with Hajji Jupri added it to theirs.

After the disclosure of Tai's pregnancy, a certain air of tension hung in the village. Bakri, who previously had often been seen playing badminton with Pak Lura in the village field in the late afternoons, locked himself in his room rarely coming out even to work or eat. Tai too disappeared into her parents' house. Pak Lura, who had at first flown at Bakri in a rage, also turned inward, keeping to himself, angry and sullen. It seemed as though everyone was watching and wondering what would happen. Eventually things began to thaw. Bakri had a 12hp and 10hp ketinting delivered to Lura as *denda* (fine) and promised a television as well. A few days later Pak Lura invited Bakri to play badminton and eventually Tai emerged from her isolation, a bit more subdued from her usual outgoing character. And over the following months, and even after the birth of the child in Tanjung Redeb, all parties, including Hajji Jupri, debated how to handle the question of marriage, religion, residence and pig meat.

**While** the Republic of Indonesia constitutes the most populous Muslim country in the world, Indonesia is not an Islamic State. Rather the state recognizes five official

religions: Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Christianity (Protestantism) and Catholicism (which it distinguishes from Christianity).<sup>88</sup> In the early years of the republic Islamic parties attempted to gain political control, but they were marginalized from power, particularly under President Suharto, and Indonesia developed a reputation as a nation moderate in its adherence to Islam. As a nation with a history of fear of Communism, with an agenda to modernize the national image, and with a need to unify its diverse cultures in the project of nation building, all individuals have been required to ascribe to one of the major religions which is officially imprinted on their state identity card.

Christian Missionaries first began penetrating the inner rainforests of Borneo in their quest for souls and as agents of colonial control and pacification as early as 1830. In the late 1950's an evangelical mission originating in New York State, The Christian and Missionary Alliance, arrived in the Berau River area, and began to proselytize the downriver Dayak groups (Lewis 1995). Slowly, over many years, the missionaries made their way up into the Kelai and Sigah River areas. As the mission's news magazine reported in 1958, converts were easy to find among the downriver peoples:

The Berau District lies to the south of the lower Kajan and is separated from it by a mountain range. The heretofore unevangelized Berau District is considered the special missionary project of the lower Kajan Church. Two young Bible school graduates were sent there in late 1956 and were the first Gospel witnesses ever to enter the district. Although the beginning was difficult, yet by the end of this year the two young men

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<sup>88</sup> Although since 9/11 Indonesia has been developing a reputation for extremism as a result of a few isolated incidences of terrorism, the overall population is still relatively moderate. People I met on the streets and taxi drivers continually engaged me in discussions of religion and proudly told me of Indonesia's five religions and of their religious tolerance. In the seat back compartment on an Indonesian airline where safety instructions are usually found, I was not all that comforted to find a laminated airline card with prayers in all five official religions for keeping the plane from crashing.

could report 80 believers, about half of whom could be baptized. Thus once again a strategic beachhead has been wrested from the Enemy of the Souls.....

*From The Pioneer: the News Magazine of The Indonesia Mission of the Christian and Missionary Alliance: Bandung, Java, June 1958 p.5*

Recently converted Dayak Kenyah and Dayak Segai missionaries reached Long Suluy as early as the late 1960's, but the upriver Punan were reluctant converts. Punan resistance to adoption of the new religious ideology seems to have stemmed more from lack of regular contact, shyness, and general disinterest than from fierce ideological conviction. As Sellato (1994) notes, Punan groups, once settled, tend to acculturate quite quickly to the practices and ideologies of their agricultural neighbors. Although their traditional belief system posits a God or Gods, they are primarily, he argues, 'secular' in their orientation. The Punan thus stand in contrast to other independent foraging tribes, such as the Kung of southern Africa or the Huaulu of Seram, who tenaciously resisted new religions. The Punan of Long Suluy are officially registered as having adopted Christianity in 1972, but conversion to Christian norms was a slow process which accelerated in the 1990's with their increasingly settled lifestyle and adoption of agriculture.

The Punan say that life has been easier since adopting Christianity than it was when following their traditional rules. As Pak Dion explained,

“Christianity is a lot easier than our traditional rules (*adat*). We don't have to work on Sundays and we aren't allowed to bother other men's wives so there is less fighting, the village is safer. And under *adat* if we walked into the forest and we saw a sign [an animal or bird omen], it was so hard. We had to sit there alone and think and think about what the sign meant. There was never getting anything done!”

The Punan have adopted the discourse of ‘modernity equaling religion’ and refer to their days before adopting Christianity as ‘primitive.’ Both young and old people will laugh about their taboos in the past such as when a snake entering a marriage hut could end a relationship. As Erni, a woman of about thirty, laughingly commented when her father told us about beliefs in the past, “Our old people in the past were *the most stupid!*” And as another man said, “It used to be so difficult. There were so many adat to follow in the past but most are gone now.” It is difficult to say how much of a previous cosmological orientation lingers on underneath, or alongside, Christianity as there was almost no research prior to my arrival. It would be an interesting topic for further work. Certainly the Punan continue to believe in ghosts and many attend shaman ceremonies (and those who don’t say they will seek out shaman outside of Long Suluy so the minister won’t know). Even though these beliefs and practices may irritate the minister, they do not signal an adherence to their previous cosmology, Indonesians at all levels of society believe in ghosts and supernatural phenomena. And while the ministers based at the main church in Tanjung Redeb carry a much stricter Christian vision, Pak Yunas, who is himself a village Dayak, is quite lenient and unobtrusive.<sup>89</sup> The minister keeps a distance from Hajji Jupri and Sabran, as do the teachers who are Christian, but that is due less to religious discrimination than to their belief that Jupri exploitive and ‘chains’ the Punan.

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<sup>89</sup> Pak Yunas was very accepting of and curious about my Buddhism. The first time I attended Sunday services he welcomed me publicly and announced to the very small congregation of members that actually attends church that, “although Katherine is a Buddhist this is not important and she is welcome here.” The Ministers at the main church at Tanjung Redeb simply informed me that I was ‘wrong’ in believing there was more than one true path,

The Punans' opposition to Islam does not tend to be so much ideological as practical. In fact, according to the Punan it is perfectly acceptable to adopt Islam 'temporarily'. The problem is one of pig. Pig consumption is prohibited under Islam but meat from wild pig constitutes the Punans' most important, or at least most highly valued, protein source. The hunting and consumption of wild bearded pig is also central to Punan identity. To be Punan is to eat pig and the Punan were surprised and delighted that I too (a former vegetarian) delighted in its consumption. As Ibu Ripka explained, "Many people 'enter' Islam when they go to the city. You can be Islam in the city because there are other things to eat there but when you return to the village you have to come back to Christianity. What can a Muslim eat here?" And Punan continually emphasized that, although I told them I am Buddhist, that we were the same religion because I ate pig, "It's easy for you to follow us into the forest because we are the same religion. But Muslims, pity them, there is nothing for them to eat here." Hajji Jupri never proselytized to the Punan. His mission in Long Suluy was economic and not religious, and he said this was because "Islam does not proselytize but lets people decide for themselves." As Healy points out, the conversion of tribal peoples to Islam often results in a change in the modes of livelihood that would have been antithetical to Jupri's interests:

By becoming a Muslim one also "became Malay." The conversion of tribalists to Malay ethnic identity negated the ethnic differences tied, in part, to different subsistence strategies. In becoming Muslims tribal animists lost something of the intimate contact with their lands which had facilitated the exploitation of valuable forest resources. Thus, for instance, swidden horticulturalists abandoned the *padi* cult, or hunter-gatherers adopted sedentary agriculture and village life on conversion to Islam...in cases where conversions were not accompanied by a thorough commitment to orthodoxy, and where true religious experience (as doctrinally defined) was not the immediate motivation for conversion, one may

surmise that many conversions occurred precisely because of an attempt to gain access to political and economic resources (tangible or otherwise) seen by the converts to be controlled by Muslims. In other words, conversion may inevitably involve an attempt at transformation in lifestyle outside of strictly religious spheres. (Healy, p.18)

The Punan pride themselves that they “are all Christians” but those close to Jupri have had to carefully negotiate their religion. Two men, for example, who often work as boat drivers for Jupri do not claim to follow Islam, but they do not eat pig, explaining rather transparently that it makes them “feel sick”. The wife of one of these men, Wasti, claims that she is Muslim and thus does not eat pig and does not attend church because, “Hajji won’t allow me.” Interestingly, her husband, Benyon, continues to emphasize the differences between Moslems and Christians as in the following conversation when I asked him about sharing practices:

KH: If I did not have any rice could I, as an outsider, ask you for rice?

B: Of course you could ask me, we are the same religion aren’t we? Haven’t we eaten pig together?! A Muslim can’t ask me. What would I give a Muslim to eat?

In fact, we never had eaten pig together as he does not eat pig, but his reference to pork asserts our common religious identity, our ‘sameness’. Benyon acknowledges that his wife ‘subscribes’ to Islam but as her ‘practice’ of Islam is both politically motivated by her allegiance to Jupri and only manifested in the negative i.e., not eating pig and not going to church, it is not problematic. In contrast, if, for example, a Punan actively engaged in Islamic prayer or if a Punan woman wore a *jilbab*, a Muslim head covering, these practices would cause controversy in the village.

The rest of the village, including the minister, insists that Wasti is Christian but, like many of the Punan, rarely attends Church. The claim that “we are all Christians” thus overrides any individual aberrations that are politically motivated, strategic and temporary or which might challenge the vision of a common religious identity.

Christianity is not only an institution that serves to unite the village, it unites them with other Dayak peoples as well, supplying a calendar of holidays and events that, along with the newly adopted agricultural cycle, helps remove group barriers. According to an elderly Punan man, “In the past it was dangerous to meet strangers in the forest but now we are all Christians so it is safe. All Dayaks are Christian.”

The problem for Tai and Bakri was one of religion, pig meat, and also one of residence. Bakri and Tai both wanted to marry one another. Hajji Jupri refused to allow the marriage if Tai did not convert to Islam. Her parents refused to allow Tai to adopt Islam, not necessarily because Tai could not survive in the village without pig meat, but they were afraid to lose her. Adopting Islam would symbolically sever her ties to the village, to the forest and to her ethnic identity as Punan. She might follow Bakri down to the city and perhaps no longer even visit Long Suluy. Long Suluy has not been fortunate in terms of its émigrés’. Whereas many rural communities throughout the world today expand their economic networks through emigration, the Punan have experienced emigration in recent years as a loss of personal ties with no accompanying economic gain. It is difficult to speak of emigration *per se* prior to, more or less, 1980 as the Punan still lived a less sedentary lifestyle and the village had not yet cohered into a stable and bounded

community. When Punan speak of ‘people who left’, they do not refer to those families, for example, who in the 1970s migrated to the Wahau River or those who split off to form the village of Long Kian. Nor do they mention even the individuals, such as Son and Kay who moved to Long Boi or even Selbut’s youngest brother, Agai, who followed her to Merasa as a child and continues to live there. In fact, ignoring this earlier division of the old village, Punan often speak of the relative stability of Long Suluy, comparing it to those downriver villages which have ‘fallen apart’ with many of their members having moved to other villages, married out or migrated to Tanjung Redeb. Punan in Long Suluy have learned to co-opt the notion that downriver Punan have of Long Suluy as ‘primitive’ and, instead, pride themselves on their strong adherence to ‘tradition’ which forbids its members from permanently moving out of the village or marrying Muslims. Thus, Tai and Bakri – like the characters in a Joseph Conrad novel – were caught in a kaleidoscope of social contradictions – Muslim/Christian, primitive/modern, upriver/downriver, movement/stability – that converged to keep the two apart.

Pak Markus, Pak Welgung and Pak Gung explained to me one afternoon after Welgung had recovered from his illness that only two families have moved out of Long Suluy; Pak Ot, a Suluy Punan, who was widowed and married a woman on the Sigah, and Gu Swiyu, Pak Labong’s older brother who went to work for a timber company and settled in Sido Bangun downriver. Although two Kelai families also moved to Long Gi a few years prior to my arrival, most Punan I spoke with say that those two families are still ‘part of’ Long Suluy and will move back eventually. (Those two families themselves, however,

say they are much happier in Long Gi and have no intention of moving back upriver).

Yet although some of the Punan Suluy families travel to the Sigah to visit Ot, he himself has not been to visit for many years. And Gu Swiyu, who has grown children in Long Suluy and who I am told has done financially quite well for himself, is all but lost to Long Suluy and does not visit or send money. Additionally Punan Long Suluy used to travel to the Wahau during the gaharu days to visit their families there, most of whom were Kelai Punan, but it is has been years now since anyone has had news from them. Most Punan are no longer willing to travel so far by foot and it is too expensive to travel by boat without an accompanying economic incentive to make the trip. Thus, ironically, with the adoption of modern transportation and despite the increasing transportation infrastructure, Punan mobility has become more constrained in some ways than when they traveled by foot. In any case, no one receives economic support from people who have left.

While the Punan I spoke to expressed anger over what little contact they have with those families who they deem to have ‘officially’ migrated out, the greater sadness emerged over those children who left and did not come back. Two young Kelai Punan who Hajji Idrus took with him to Bulungan never returned to the village. No one has news of the boy who left, who is probably about thirty years old, but the girl, who is now probably about thirty-five or forty, married a Muslim and lives in Tanjung Selor. Even those children were probably only about ten years old when they left, they were described as “being old enough to remember their families.” In addition to these two Punan, four

children live in Samarinda, the provincial capital, with Hajji Jupri's son Hajji Aman. The children now are about high school age. The Punan have expected those children to return when they finish high school to live and work in the village as nurses and teachers, but there is some concern and suspicion now that there is something amiss. The families have had no contact with the children in at least four or five years and recently one of the fathers discovered his son had adopted Islam. Certainly their families might have expected a casual adoption of Islam while they were in the city, but they now suspect that they have been 'duped' by Jupri. It was difficult for me to know whether their recent concern about the children in Samarinda arose from new information about the children or whether the worsening of the relationship between the Punan and Jupri has led to an increase in feelings of frustration about their situation.<sup>90</sup> In any case, all of these 'missing' children set the stage for the deep concern over Tai and her absorption into Jupri's extended family.

In the meantime, as the respective families negotiated over what was to be done about Tai and Bakri, the village engaged in heated discussion over the situation with Kas. After I returned from the talk with Selbut that morning after the meeting at Pak Welgung's, I sat with Kas as her mother and neighbor attempted to talk sense into her about the marriage.

Kas insisted that she had a Kenyah boyfriend downriver in Long Gi and that Dar, who

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<sup>90</sup> When an assistant I had working with me for a few months went to Samarinda, he visited these Punan children at their home. "They're never coming back," he said, "They are mall kids now." Their caretaker said that when he wanted to scare them he threatened to send them back to Long Suluy, and they would run into their rooms and slam the door. He also said that they were very serious Muslims. I tried visiting shortly after but when I arrived at the address, I was told I had the wrong address. When I checked with Jupri's people in Tanjung Redeb, they said I had the correct address, but because Hajji Aman was not there they were probably scared to let me in. They were probably scared that I was there to take the kids.

had once been her boyfriend, had given Erna expensive sandals that he had bought in Tanjung Redeb, thus revealing his affection for this other girl. The two older women spoke quietly and soothingly to her, reminding her that she could not marry downriver with a Kenyah, it would be too difficult and too far, that she could not eat pig downriver, that she should stay in Long Suluy and be near her parents.

As I spoke with people around the village in the following days, opinions were divided over the question of forcing two people to marry. One young Kelai man, about eighteen years of age and unmarried, said about Kas's refusal, "She is stupid. She doesn't want to eat pig, doesn't want to eat the head. Dar is a good hunter. She is old maybe sixteen or eighteen and she's still not married. She will become like Tai and then what will she do?" His best friend, of about the same age, whom I spoke with later that same day argued the opposite, "This isn't like the old days. Our parents can't force us to marry. Things are different now. Now we have to be in love with the one we marry. We can't be happy if we are forced." Although my 'survey' was informal it seemed that many Punan closer to the kepala desa agreed that a marriage that is forced cannot work and that young people must choose for themselves. Those Kelai Punan who aligned with Yohannes and Bau, the group most invested in modernizing the village, felt, with varying levels of conviction, that Kas should marry Dar and, as one man, exclaimed, "If the same thing happens with another girl as happened with Tai I will be so embarrassed that I will move away." The Suluy people seemed relatively uninterested in the debate, unconcerned with either the reputation of the village or with Kas, but generally agreed

that people should not be forced. Dar, in any event, wanted to marry and was not opposed to the marriage with Kas. There was a shortage of marriageable aged girls in the village and although Punan are not forbidden to *marry* out, they are forbidden to *move* out. At the same time downriver Punan, Dayaks, or for that matter, Malays, have no desire to move *to* Long Suluy.

**These** days when the Punan refer to *hilir*, or downriver, they are referring to that section of the Kelai River between Long Gi and Long Suluy. Prior to 2000, if the Punan traveled to Tanjung Redeb, which they did quite frequently in the 1980s and 90s with the rattan and gaharu trades, they traveled by boat the entire way. Sometimes they stopped in Merasa, visiting Selbut when she was there, her younger brother, or some of the Kenyah families they had come to know. A few of the Punan might stop in Muara Lesan to visit Pak Laloi or Si Anto's family, traders whom they trust "like family." The trip took two days, with an overnight often spent sleeping on the bank of the river. In 2000 a dirt logging road was completed from Tanjung Redeb to Long Gi and, slowly, as more vehicles began to make their way back and forth from Tanjung Redeb, the Punan shifted to leaving their boats in Long Gi and paying for road transport to Tanjung Redeb. Although one can sometimes catch a ride in the late afternoon to Tanjung Redeb, most cars (most of the three cars anyway that make the trip regularly), leave in the morning thus requiring an overnight in Long Gi unless one is willing to pay extra to have a car make an extra trip. Nor is the ride cheap. As the Punan usually travel in small groups or families downriver, they rent the car for 350.000 rupiah or about \$40 USD one way.

At this point, Long Gi is the largest village on the upper Kelai with about 600 inhabitants. In 1983 the village was home to only seventy people, all of them Punan. As a large influx of Kenyah from the Kutai Regency migrated in, the Punan now represent only about 30% of the village. Some say the migration was largely instigated by the one Kenyah school teacher in the village who later became the very powerful kepala desa and wanted to establish a majority of his own people so as to control the profits from logging.<sup>91</sup> The Punan and Kenyah, all Christian, inhabit the north bank of the river; the familiar Dayak symbols decorate the homes and new totem poles topped with Hornbills in the process of construction stand watch over the river. On the opposite bank of the Kelai, the sun glints off the aluminum dome of a new mosque and five times a day a loudspeaker can be heard calling the faithful to prayer. In addition to a logging camp, the south bank is home to a makeshift village of 'Malayus', ethnic Kutai, Javanese and immigrants from Lombok, who have come to work in the gaharu trade in the Bulungan Regency upriver from Long Suluy. These 'Melayu' make up about 10% of the village's population.

Surprisingly, the Punan of Long Suluy usually overnight on the south bank when traveling through. Even the two Punan Kelai families who recently moved to Long Gi remark on the tendency of their families and friends to sleep across the river, "It's strange, they rarely stay here with us. They prefer to stay in the gaharu camp." On one

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<sup>91</sup> I received news just recently (September 2006) that a Punan has been elected kepala desa in Long Gi, someone who has worked as an employee of The Nature Conservancy.

hand, transport from the gaharu camp is more certain, but nothing would stop them from sleeping on the Punan bank of the river and making the one-minute trip across in the morning. Yet the Punan in Long Suluy are by this time more familiar with the gaharu workers, who spend many nights in Long Suluy on their trips into the forest and who depend on the Punan Long Suluy for transport, than they are with downriver Kenyah and Punan. My sense too is that as frequent visitors, ‘business customers’, and, not to mention, as frequent teammates in volleyball games, the Punan are in fact less shy of these ‘foreigners’ than the other Dayaks and Punan who have for so long looked down on their upriver relatives. A number of Punan refer to a few of the Malay merchants as being “like family” to them.

The rest of the upriver villages are all ethnically Punan, with the exception of a few individuals here and there, and significantly smaller than either Long Gi or Long Suluy: Long Duhung (pop. ~100), Long Boi (pop. ~ 100), Long Lamjan (pop. ~68), Long Lamcin (pop. ~90) and Long Kian (pop. ~100). Until just recently none of these smaller villages had electricity but with the arrival of timber companies into the areas, the villages have begun to receive electricity as part of the ‘package’ the companies must present to local peoples. With the very recent arrival of logging roads, which began to reach as far upriver as Long Lamcin just before my departure in August 2004, a couple of villages, Lamcin and Duhung, have chosen to rebuild on the opposite side of the river so as to have better access to the roads. The timber companies have responded by clear cutting-swaths of forest for the villages and supplying timber. The roads are still quite

treacherous due to deep mud and the continual threat of landslides and, for the most part, the only transport is an occasional logging truck. Although a few individual Punan might be able to garner employment as laborers for the companies, most timber company employees are outsiders arriving with the company and small logging camps began to spring up on the upper Kelai during my time there. A timber company does indeed own the timber concession for Long Suluy, but it was still in question whether it would be profitable enough to log so far upriver and in such steep terrain.

When I first arrived on the Kelai I had expected that, given the proximity of the villages to one another and the ethnic homogeneity of the upriver, there would be significant interaction, and intermarriage, among the villages. In fact I seldom saw Punan from downriver in Long Suluy, except very occasionally at Sabran's when Punan from Lamjan or Lamcin would travel upriver to buy gas or use the threshing machine. Even these individuals would leave quickly, waving at me with open smiles so uncharacteristic of Long Suluy Punan. Two Long Gi Punan men hired as assistants by an NGO working in the area refused to sleep in Long Suluy when the NGO team was visiting, and the team leader told me that they didn't like Punan Long Suluy and preferred to overnight at Lamjan instead.

Likewise, Long Suluy Punan do not mix when they do downriver. Whenever I visited the Kelai 'guest house' in Tanjung Redeb, an unfurnished house near Jupri's owned by the Long Gi kepala desa, I noticed that the Punan from Long Suluy gathered together and

there was little interaction between them and other Punan staying in the house. When I asked downriver Punan about this situation they explained that the Suluy Punan "...are like we used to be. They are chained by Hajji and not used to outsiders...and they never show up at important meetings." They also refer to the Punan of Long Suluy as "arrogant". On the few occasions I stayed overnight in Long Duhung, my host explained, "I know Punan from every village, from Long Boi, Lamcin, Lamjan and even Long Kian but not Long Suluy. Even Long Kian people are more friendly and stay overnight in our village if they are here. Suluy Punan don't come into the village. They sleep on the river rocks." I can attest to the truth of this statement. On the occasions when my Long Suluy companions did not want to sleep in Long Gi when returning from Tanjung Redeb, we would start upriver in the late afternoon. When dark set in, rather than pulling into Long Boi, we wedged ourselves in among the stones on the river bank. Downriver Punan did not understand why I wanted to conduct research in Long Suluy and often invited me to move to their villages.

The Punan in Long Suluy claim that they are related to the downriver Punan. Some individuals claim relationship with all Punan down to Long Duhung while others include Long Gi as well.<sup>92</sup> But when I asked them why they did not marry with downriver Punan, I was told by one man laughing, "We don't marry them because they don't have teeth," implying that it is the downriver Punan who are primitive and poor. Another man in his forties also smiling said, "We don't want to marry downriver Punan because they

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<sup>92</sup> Long Gi Punan refer to their section of Long Gi as Long Beliu, the smaller river off the Gi river that they originally inhabited.

are ugly.” Their laughter let me know that they were conscious of their own biases, but revealing a sense of superiority nonetheless. A Punan elder in all seriousness remarked, “Everyone wants to marry us, even Dayaks, but we don’t want to marry them.” Two Suluy Punan told me that it is the downriver Punan who don’t want to live in Long Suluy. Although a few individuals say that the different groups intermarried frequently in the past, others say that intermarriage has always been rare. Given the Punans’ high mobility and the fluidity of their group boundaries in the past, it is not unlikely that there was much more mingling of the many Punan groups along the Kelai River that might have led to more intermarriage. Certainly there was more contact among the Punan groups as downriver Punan often foraged in the upriver areas. As Punan adopted boat transport and as downriver Punan settled and adopted agriculture, there was less and less contact between the downriver groups and the Punan of Long Suluy. As I traced genealogies in the village, no one had any memory of specific individuals who had married with downriver Punan. Given, however, that Punan did not usually remember even the names of their grandparents and given the dispersed nature of the Punan groups in the past, individuals who married out might well have been forgotten.

It is much easier to trace who has married *in* to Long Suluy. Pak Herman is a Punan man from the Sigah River, about thirty years old. He met my neighbor Ta when he was working for a timber company that tried to build roads in from the Sigah to the Twow on the upriver Kelai. Eventually the company gave up after bulldozers toppled down into the river but Pak Herman moved to Long Suluy. Five Long Kian people have ‘married

in' but given the amorphous boundary between Long Kian and the Suluy Punan, and given that three of those five grew up in Long Suluy Dulu when the two villages were united, marriage with Long Kian can still be considered endogamy. Otherwise, all the Punan living in Long Suluy are natives born in the village (or more accurately, in the forests) of Long Suluy or Long Suluy 'Dulu'. (Prior to the adoption of Christianity, Punan were often named after whatever was around in the forest or the names of rivers: *Wokless* (gaharu), *Selah*, *Dengeh*, *Wahai* (types of wood), *Lakay*, *Talkin* (names of small rivers), *Jiyu* (a deer). Many Punan after conversion adopted a Christian name as well although only a few of the older Punan use their Christian names. Most children now are only given names by the minister.)

According to Pak Lura, young people are not only allowed to marry outsiders but encouraged to do so. However, anyone born in the village is not allowed to move out. The village is worried about losing population and thus would very much like new people moving in. While there is no real mechanism for enforcing residence rules, most young people do not want to move away or actually to marry out. As Saleng, a young unmarried man told me, "If you marry with someone downriver then it's difficult. You have to live there one year and then live here one year. You have to go back and forth. It's too hard to live downriver. Hunting and fishing are no good there. It's better to be in our parents and ancestors village." A few young men who worked birds' nests in the past have said they wanted to marry in the city but 'were called back' by their parents or 'lured back' by friends. Given that Long Suluy still constitutes an economic frontier in

East Kalimantan, and for that matter, in Indonesia, marrying out and out-migration can not be justified on economic grounds and young people, though perhaps not 'forced', feel a strong tie to their natal home and community. Interestingly, the friends that some young Punan claim to have downriver in Long Gi and Merasa are Kenyah and Malay, not Punan.

While the Punan of Long Suluy are actively in the process of constructing an identity that increasingly unites them as a community and simultaneously differentiates them from downriver Punan, the regional church leadership hopes to create a pan-Punan religious identity that supercedes those village boundaries. This goal is primarily manifested in cooperative Christmas and Easter celebrations, with the host village rotating each year. It so happened that Long Suluy's first time to host the celebrations occurred during my first year of fieldwork. Unfortunately, I missed the Easter celebration, because the day before the other villages were scheduled to arrive in Long Suluy I scrambled to take a critically ill Punan man to the hospital in Tanjung Redeb. Christmas, however, was fascinating. More than one hundred downriver Punan ascended to Long Suluy along with at least a dozen traders, all coming to make money off the large celebration. The festivities lasted several days, complete with volleyball games and tug of war. Preparations for the event took many months and included the construction of a new church. A common theme that the minister espoused in attempting to both raise money and extract labor from the Punan for this effort was that "We don't want to be ashamed at Christmas." I spent many

evenings myself practicing Christmas hymns with a group of Punan women at the minister's house so as to be ready when Long Suluy's turn came to sing at the event.

What I found most interesting about the event was that while it was hard during the days to do more than to soak in the Durkheimian effervescence of such a large gathering, as people milled about or sat on front porches observing the games, the different groups separated and differentiated themselves upon entering the church in the evenings. Each village group sat together in one section of the church rather than intermingling with one another. Each night the downriver Punan took their places in church well before the Long Suluy Punan arrived. While the downriver Punan were all formally dressed, many Long Suluy Punan wandered in wearing shorts or were barefoot, and many sat outdoors on extra seating even when there was still room in the church. Many did not even attend. When all the other Punan stood to pray or sing, the Long Suluy Punan remained sitting except for a couple of teenagers who stood and unsuccessfully exhorted the others to stand. When it was Long Suluy's turn to go up front and sing they sang softly, almost inaudibly, and I noticed the Long Gi Punan in front of me laughing. The second time the Punan went up to sing, I joined them as a show of moral support. The comparison with the New Year's testimonial celebration after the other villages left was striking. Left to themselves, the Punan of Long Suluy filled the church, and as they stood talking about their good fortune in the previous year, spoke much more clearly and strongly. Although asked to speak about the previous year, as the minister pointed out, they don't usually have a conceptualization of a year and thus spoke only about the past few months.

When Easter celebrations were held the following March in the downriver village of Long Boi delegations from all the other villages except Long Suluy attended. Long Suluy Punan had already departed to the forest to look for gold.

In the end, Kas refused to give in to the pressure mounted by Kelai leaders. Instead, her friend Erna, whose parents had both died, was forced by her elder sister, Meryanne, to marry Dar. With three young children of her own and aligning closely with the Kelai Punan who wish to modernize the village, Meryanne did not feel that she could take responsibility for Erna and it was 'safer' for her to marry. The head teacher and many of the Punan continued to be angry for some time about the marriage. Erna, perhaps about fifteen years old, had been the one student in the primary school who might have had a chance to have passed the graduation exams and go on to secondary school. They also feared that she was too young to have children exposed as they have been in recent years to health messages from a visiting downriver nurse.

Tai gave birth to a baby boy in February 2004 in Tanjung Redeb. She lived for awhile with Bakri's older brother's second wife but after a few months left the child downriver and returned to Long Suluy. Bakri had already left Long Suluy and went to work in Jupri's businesses downriver. Although the situation was not completely resolved when I left, Bakri claimed that his brother had adopted the child. When I visited Bakri's brother, his second wife, who had not been able to have children, had very clearly taken in the

boy as her own. Tai insisted that she planned to return to Tanjung Redeb eventually to get her son and often asked me whether I had seen Bakri whom she clearly missed.

## CHAPTER 6

### VICTORIES AND UNCERTAINTIES: THE END OF A MONOPOLY

On September 23, 2003 Pak Cin tried to hit Hajji Jupri. He lunged at him furiously and unexpectedly in the main room of Sabran's house, but two Punan men jumped in to restrain him, pulling them apart. Hajji, stunned and furious, left the village immediately and, upon arriving in Tanjung Redeb, called in the police claiming that Cin was starting a 'war' against him. Four police officers, expenses and salary paid by Jupri, made their way up to Long Suluy where Cin was courteously and patiently 'arrested' and brought down to Tanjung Redeb for questioning. Two of the officers remained in the village for several days to calm the situation, to hear the Punans' side and to collect all the hunting guns in the village, a total of fifteen, which the Punan compliantly delivered to them.<sup>93</sup> The police listened to everyone's stories, and tired as they were by now with Jupri, understood that there was very little that needed to be fixed in Long Suluy and soon departed.

The story as to what exactly incited Cin, the village secretary, to attack Jupri was a bit confusing to piece together at first. The attack was the outcome of a long history of relations with Jupri but the immediate precipitating cause was the following: Upon

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<sup>93</sup> The Punan mainly use spears and blowpipes for hunting but occasionally use guns, fashioning home made bullets. Although they are technically illegal, (the parts are smuggled in largely from Malaysia and assembled by downriver Kenyah), the police and military officers in the area ignore them or even join in target shooting with the Punan on their visits to the village. In the case of "war", however, as Hajji claimed, they police felt compelled to confiscate them

arrival in Long Suluy, Jupri ordered Taran to take a few other Punan men with him and go out hunting for deer. Leaving in the early evening when dark was settling in, Taran, using Jupri's boat, accidentally ran into a boat belonging to Agai, Cin's brother-in-law. Although no harm seemed to have been done at the time, in the morning Agai claimed that his motor had been ruined and his back hurt. He demanded retribution from Jupri in the form of a new boat motor. Jupri refused and Cin, who is known for his hot temper, became enraged by Jupri's arrogance and thus the events unfolded as above. Cin ultimately only spent one night in jail. Jupri, once he had calmed down, sent word to the police that he required only an apology and, upon delivery of such, all charges were dropped. But up in the village, the event signaled a major disruption and turning point in the Punans' relationship with Jupri, a disruption that many Punan did not necessarily welcome.

As usual after a big event, I wandered over to Sabran's house hoping to be privy to the latest news or to at least take the pulse of how tempers were running on Jupri's side of the fence. I was surprised to find Sabran vociferously arguing for the Punans' side. "Cin hit Jupri because he is angry about all the corpses in the past," he told me. "Palis' brother died building the pump for Hajji. And then there were the two deaths at the birds nests – he didn't even pay for the hospital after the attacks. He had good reason to hit Jupri. He didn't hit Jupri because of Bakri, he is angry because of the corpses!"<sup>94</sup> When I asked if

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<sup>94</sup> Several years earlier the Punan had cleared forest nearby and put in a line to pump in water from mountain streams into Jupri's house in the village. A tree had fallen on one Punan man and killed him. Although Sabran referred to deaths at the birds nest caves, although there had been attacks, there had not

Agai, a young father in his twenties, had in fact been hurt and his motor ruined (Agai *appeared* unscathed) Sabran demurred, mumbling something like “Well, his boat seems to be fixed.” (As it turned out my neighbor Wulun, Agai’s other brother-in-law, had put him up to it and, in fact, the accident had been very minor). What I did not know at this time was that the relationship between Sabran and Jupri, although always tense and mutually suspicious, had hit even rockier ground just recently. Jupri had found out that Sabran had been stealing gold behind his back. Evidently, Sabran’s wife down in Tanjung Redeb, owing Jupri a certain amount of money, delivered the payment in uncleaned gold validating whatever suspicions Hajji already held about this non-relative’s loyalty. Hajji, furious, had put Bakri in charge of supervising Sabran, a terrible insult given their respective ages and Sabran’s years of experience with Jupri.

But Sabran’s allegiance was soon to change. Although most Punan felt that it had been wrong for Cin to try to hit Jupri and were critical of his temper, they understood his motivations and did not speak against him. Many, although not all, Punan responded to Cin’s arrest by distancing themselves from Jupri’s store and from Sabran. At times they were forced to go there for supplies, but many stopped selling their gold to Sabran and avoided the store as a place to socialize. Cin’s brother, in protest, returned a used ketinting to the store that he had bought on credit and refused to pay the remainder of what he owed on it. (Unfortunately, as Bakri pointed out, the motor was still relatively new and had almost been completely paid for. The brother, realizing his error, was said

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been any deaths of Punan. Also, the young men working at the caves who had been attacked say Hajji Jupri did pay for their hospital care

to want the motor back but was afraid to offend Cin). A few Punan began to open small 'stores', transporting small loads of goods up from Tanjung Redeb, and selling them out of their homes. When I asked one man about why he had not opened a store earlier he responded, "In the past we had to work together with Sabran, we had to be careful, but now Hajji has tried to break us." And as the Pak Dalai, the *kepala adat*, had recently bought a television and DVD player, the Punan had another option for entertainment, although without a satellite dish it had no reception and could only play movies.

It was not long before the Punan began to feel the price of their actions and the effect of Hajji's anger. In response to the boycott and to Cin's attack, Jupri decided to embargo Long Suluy and stopped sending up supplies, including the most important ones, gas and rice. It was a critical time of year for the Punan as it was a few months until the next harvest and most rice supplies had run out. It also coincided with fruit season and thus with the time of year the Punan spent long periods in the forest. For awhile there was almost a mad dash for gasoline anytime a Punan or smaller trader brought minor amounts into the village. Sabran's mood had by now changed to one of rage and resentment.

Sabran and Bakri's salaries were not only paid in cash by Jupri but in a percentage of the gold collected, 10.000 rupiah each per gram. Bakri, dealing as he was with Tai's pregnancy, seemed relatively unconcerned with the current economic situation. Sabran, however, felt deeply betrayed by the Punan and stormed about. Planning a long trip to Tanjung Redeb for Ramadan, the Moslem month of fasting, and planning to close the

store for that time he raged, “Where will their strength be *then*?! If they can’t get gasoline, that’s not my trouble, they are not good to me.”

During those months following the incident, there was almost continual discussion among the Punan as to whether they could survive without Hajji. A number of Punan felt empowered by Cin’s brazenness and talked about how they were no longer afraid of Hajji, “Hajji used to keep us chained,” Bau told me wrapping his hands around his throat, “We were ‘ignorant’ in the past and afraid of him but now we have gotten brave.” They used this opportunity to speak out against the debt claiming that they were not required to pay it, that it was not true and that Hajji had made fools of them in the past when they were afraid and did not know the worth of their products. Interestingly, Cin, who actually is considered the most ‘forward’ thinking of the Punan by much of the community as well as by outsiders, did not use the opportunity to default on his debt but rather worked assiduously to pay it in full, as did his brothers and father. This was not out of deference to Jupri or an attempt to heal the relationship with Jupri but a desire to stand on equal ground with him. Not surprisingly, it was those Kelai leaders, the ones who had gathered at Welgung’s house to discuss Kas’s fate and who most wanted to modernize the village, who recounted Jupri’s offenses and claimed their independence from him and Sabran.

Others were more circumspect. As one man said, “There have never been problems between us and Hajji, only that he didn’t pay us enough for our goods. Things have been

peaceful until now.” Others reiterated this message, emphasizing both their close relationship with Jupri and their dependence on him. The kepala desa, as well, who had enjoyed close relations with Jupri and who benefited economically from him, attempted to maintain a neutral position during the turmoil. More important than social relations, however, was the question as to whether they could survive without Jupri. The former group largely claimed that Jupri was not necessary, that other traders would fill the vacuum left by Jupri and that they themselves had developed the skills and experience to conduct trade directly with Tanjung Redeb. The latter group, however, did not believe it would be so easy without Jupri. The heart of the matter, they said, was that no other trader could extend the amount of credit that Jupri did or carry a debt for as long. The loss of Jupri would signal the economic downturn of Long Suluy. Some of the older people claimed it was Jupri who had made life easier, less ‘dark’, and that younger people were creating a situation where they would revert to more difficult times. The Suluy Punan, as far as I could gather at that time anyway, seemed relatively unconcerned about the matter, shrugging and claiming they would be fine if Jupri left.

Ultimately a number of traders did come in to fill the gap left momentarily by Jupri. Pak Muin, a gaharu boss in Long Gi, sent up a couple of his younger relatives to set up shop in the gaharu guesthouse in Long Suluy. As Pak Muin regularly sent gaharu boats up to Long Suluy it was a relatively easy matter to maintain a steady supply of commodities into the village. Yet the range of goods was far more limited at Muin’s, and, true to some of the Punans’ predictions, he only extended credit for gasoline and required repayment

within a month. Some of the goods, as well, were a bit higher in price although most were comparable with Sabran's. Other traders did not set up shop but traveled periodically upriver carrying small amounts of material to sell, glad to have a new market open to them. Yet, although Sabran claimed that Hajji did not mind the other traders coming up and said he himself was unconcerned, the question of the Punans' debt still weighed heavily. The Punan sold their gold to other traders, including Pak Kaleb the head teacher, but they did so relatively surreptitiously and neither Kaleb nor Muin desired any direct confrontation with Jupri. Jupri believed that the Punan were legally required to pay their debt to him, and thus trade in gold with the Punan, beyond the small amounts necessary to cover the costs of minor purchases, he considered illegal.

**The** level of tension, debate and uncertainty in Long Suluy contrasted sharply with the state of affairs at Hajji Jupri's residence in Tanjung Redeb. Visiting his large home, which also housed his work headquarters, in late November I expected to encounter the same intensity of emotions that I was surrounded by in Long Suluy. This was far from the case. I arrived at the house by *becak* (bicycle 'rickshaw) my first morning downriver and when I entered, as I usually did, through Jupri's side office door, I was struck by how 'business as usual' life appeared there. Jupri's workers, who I knew well by now, greeted me in their usual casual and friendly manner; six or seven men, who lined the front office and who were there to chat or do business, nodded greetings, surprised to see a western woman entering the house so familiarly; Hajji Jupri, sitting at his desk and greeting me in his usual gravelly voice, seemed unconcerned with where I had just arrived from, and,

without much ado, waved me on, as usual, towards the entrance to the living quarters to visit with his wife. There, sitting on the kitchen floor surrounded by the women of the house and drinking sweet hot tea, Hajjia filled me in on the situation.

Long Suluy, she informed me, had been unprofitable for many years and the business was barely able to cover its own costs after paying Bakri and Sabran's salaries. For as long as six years, Jupri's grown sons, who now run the business, and she herself had encouraged Jupri to shut down operations in Long Suluy but Hajji had refused. "He goes there only to picnic," she said frowning, "It's only good for eating fish, not for business. But now the trip is getting too far...he is too old and comes back tired. Cin must have been crazy – maybe he had malaria." It became clear to me that Long Suluy had become simply an old man's indulgence. More than a place to picnic, it was a place where Jupri still held control and demanded respect at a time when his influence in his family life was waning. Cin's attack had shattered this fantasy. Jupri's children, involved as they were in their many other business ventures – construction, commerce, fish and shrimp farming, and birds' nests – reluctantly tolerated their father's attachment to Long Suluy. Now, however, it was becoming too messy and they hoped that their father would finally leave his sentimental attachment behind. The low profit margin in Long Suluy was confirmed later by Jupri's workers. Hasbi, Bakri's older brother, who had been overseeing Jupri's operations since 1988, informed me that since 1998 the amounts of gold could only barely cover expenses. When I asked him whether this was a matter of dwindling gold

reserves, he shrugged and answered, “In part. People in Long Suluy are also lazy to look for gold and they sell to other people.”

**Shortly** after Christmas, Hajji arrived in Long Suluy. For a couple of weeks prior the Punan had been informed of his impending arrival by Sabran (who had only been permitted a short visit to Tanjung Redeb by Hajji earlier in the month for Ramadan). Sabran had been nervous in the days preceding Jupri’s arrival as, at one point, many of the Punan leadership went off hunting so as to not appear to be waiting for Jupri as they were usually ordered to do. Some Punan had looked forward to his visit, other had not. And as Pak Anton, one of my neighbors explained, “It doesn’t matter either way. A lot of us don’t have strong feelings about Hajji. We are neutral.” When Hajji arrived, it was with minimal fanfare in comparison with previous visits. He sat in an almost empty house as Punan men gradually went to greet him, strategically biding their time so as not to appear overly conciliatory. As Pak Bau said sitting on his front porch letting time elapse before he visited, “Before we had to run to him but now he can’t order us around. We are free now.” Yet all of the leadership did eventually go to him, including Cin, and each, following a typical Indonesian formality, asking to be excused by Hajji and, in turn, Hajji asked to be excused by the Punan. I was not present at these early meetings as, with the increasing division between Jupri and the Punan, I had to carefully strategize so as to not appear to be in support of Jupri. Thus, I feigned disinterest in his visit but my neighbors informed me of the conversations that took place.

When I finally did wander over to greet Hajji on the second day of his trip, a group of Punan sat in the main room at Sabran's. I came in to hear Jupri making amends to the Punan, saying to 'let bygones be bygones' and exhorting them to work hard. He had plans he said for planting teak to help the Punan. Stepping fully into his role as patron he encouraged them to work together, to engage in trade and to get ahead, "If you want to get ahead (*maju*) you must not be lazy. You must change your character... You must look for gold and gaharu and take up trade. I pity the people of Long Suluy who don't want to unite, do not want to work together but go off to the forest just to look for food alone. I am happy if you get ahead and our smart. You should clean the village, take care of it, don't be dirty. If there is something wrong in the village you should talk to me directly." At this the kepala desa strategically pointed out that to start business they would need capital and Jupri responded that if they were serious he would help them. Ibu Suzi, Cin's wife, voiced that because they had paid their debt her family should be paid higher prices for their gold to which Hajji agreed. Pak Anton told Hajji that he had opened his own store and Hajji praised him for his efforts. It was, in short, a ritual to temporarily patch up a relationship that was rapidly unraveling at the seams.

What had struck me, however, during those months prior to his visit was that even those who did not hold bad feelings toward Hajji were angry at him for having *called the police*. Many Punan felt that Cin should not have tried to hit Jupri but believed that Hajji was primarily in the wrong for having called in the authorities. At the early meeting with Hajji that I had missed my neighbor told me, "We said to him, 'Hajji, you are our father

and we are your children. If we get angry and do something wrong, you have to show us the right way but you go to the police. Our anger is forgotten but you are still mad.’ ”

The choice of words was not intended to diminish their status in relation to Jupri or to appear to grovel, rather it was a strategic means by which to reinforce the unwritten social contract between the two parties. The patron-client relationship that had existed between the Punan and Jupri, embedded as it was in a discourse of kinship and mutual obligations, was both violated and explicitly undermined as Jupri revealed the explicitly economic nature of the relationship apart from its social and historical context. The State was suddenly revealed to exist. Before the attack, the Punan and Jupri operated outside of legal codes and state structures, negotiating their relationship in apparent isolation. Each party was familiar with both the playing field and the means by which each could manipulate or force the other to comply with their demands. The rules of the game they thought were clear. But when Jupri called the police, he illuminated both the larger social and political context in which they were operating and also called attention to the explicitly economic nature of the relationship. The social, emotional or ‘kin’ ties suddenly dissolved in light of this new awareness.

The Punan at this point in time were more confident that the police were fair and on their side. Jupri’s actions changed the rules of the game when he brought in a strategy that the Punan felt unprepared to deal with. Although the police were used in the past, there had been an understanding for many years that external force was not required to police the economic relationship between Jupri and the Punan. Hajji, now aware that he was losing

control over the Punan had panicked and relied on a strategy that he had originally used to establish his control on the Kelai. Yet things had changed on the Kelai. An amicable relationship had developed between the authorities and the Punan, and the police had grown quite tired of Jupri. As one officer remarked, “We are tired of being Jupri’s dogs. It’s too far to come up here and he doesn’t pay enough.” Moreover, a *kecamatan* (sub-district) police station had recently been established in Long Gi with responsibility for the upper Kelai.<sup>95</sup> Thus, city police, hired by Jupri, intruded on the jurisdiction of the *kecamatan* officers thus requiring sensitive diplomacy on the part of the outsiders. In addition, as the *kecamatan* police in Long Gi establish stronger relations with the upriver peoples, they are increasingly unlikely to tolerate interference from Jupri. In fact, the Punan who over the years negotiated higher prices for gold with Jupri did so at the instigation and encouragement of the military officials responsible for Kelai, who informed them of the true prices for their goods.

**Over** the next couple of months discussion continued among the Punan as to whether they would be better off without Jupri. Sabran made it clear that it was quite likely that Jupri would close business on the Kelai and demand immediate repayment of the debt. No one, including myself, knew whether the threats had a basis in reality or not. When I spoke to Hajji periodically in Tanjung Redeb he too was unclear. He knew that there was no profit coming out of Long Suluy but claimed to feel sorry for the Punan, “I pity the Punan. There is nothing there anymore, the gold is almost gone. I want to help them get

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<sup>95</sup> *kecamatan*: The political unit below the district level

ahead and if I close the store they will suffer.” At the same time he admitted to being annoyed with the new generation of Punan, “I was close with the old people,” he said, “the young ones are lazy and dishonest.” He said he would close shop if another trader would take over the debt and he was angry and frustrated with Pak Kaleb, the teacher, who bought gold from the Punan. Everyone, including the Punan, Sabran, Hajji’s family and myself seemed to be waiting and watching to see what would happen. I should mention that, among the Punan, no one seemed to harbor hostility towards those who had different views about relations with Jupri. As I have already explained in previous chapters, even though there is conflict among various factions the conflict does not result from one’s proximity to Hajji. In fact, those Punan who work for Jupri as boat drivers elicit sympathy from other Punan. As one Punan man said about Taran, “*Kasihannya* (pity) Taran, Hajji doesn’t pay him enough but if he’s busy working for Hajji he can’t go into the forest to pursue business on his own.” Taran had to carefully negotiate his distance with Jupri because, as he said, he has a child in school in Samarinda at Hajji Aman’s home, Jupri’s son. “It’s hard to argue with Jupri,” he told me, “For every one word we have, he has ten.” Those Kelai Punan most ardent about separating from Jupri refer to those who stay close to Hajji as ‘stupid’ and say they don’t realize they are being taken advantage of. Those Punan careful about guarding the relationship with Jupri regard the others as being too emotional and not thinking about the future. Supporting or not supporting Jupri is not regarded as a betrayal by the other side, rather it’s regarded as a very bad decision.

On March 3 2004, the long period of waiting and wondering came to an unexpected end. Early that morning, about 3a.m., my neighbor Pak Wulun was having difficulty sleeping on account of a cough he had been nursing for several days. Wanting to avoid waking his wife and daughter, he went outside to sit on the front porch. He was unexpectedly met by a bright glowing light coming from the other side of the village and quickly realized that Pak Dalai's house, right next to Sabran's, was on fire. He went running across the village banging on doors and shouting out to the Punan who were in the village. By the time they woke Dalai's daughter and son-in-law (Dalai was in the forest) and roused Selbut, whose small room was attached to Dalai's house in back, the fire had almost made its way through the roof. The people inside just barely escaped with their lives, with no time to take any belongings. The wind was blowing lightly downriver and thus the flames, fed by containers of gasoline stored in Dalai's house, quickly spread to Sabran's house where Sabran and some Punan were hurrying to remove the most valuable articles, such as the television and communications radio.<sup>96</sup> By this time, those Punan who were not frantically emptying their own houses of their belongings to the river side, were busy fighting the fire with buckets of water. The Nature Conservancy had recently installed pumped in water and that system, combined with Jupri's pumps, managed to finally put out the fire, but only after it had destroyed both houses and Pak Salem's kitchen that sat just downriver from Sabran's. When morning finally broke, all that was left of the houses was a field of black smoldering ash.

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<sup>96</sup> It has never been clear to me whether some Punan were attempting to help or pillage.

Although there were rumors flying around that the fire had been intentionally set, they were quickly dismissed. After all, not only had Pak Dalai and his son-in-law Libut lost their entire rice harvest that had been stored in the house, a number of relatives who were upriver had stored some of their valuables in the house as well and, of course, there was the near loss of life that was evidence against intentional arson. The accepted cause of the tragedy was that Libut had left a candle burning in the kitchen and, after the family had gone to sleep, it had melted down and ignited the house. As is customary for Punan when they are angry, Pak Dalai, hearing the news the next day from Punan who traveled up to his *ladang*, refused to come into the village and remained for almost a month in the forest ‘to get over his anger’. Libut and his family moved in with his brother and quickly set to work cutting planks to construct a new house for his father-in-law. Pak Sabran moved into a spare room in the newly-built health clinic, a move that was supposedly temporary but stretched on for months to the increasing irritation of the village nurse. His semi-homeless status also resulted in a loss of his symbolic power as Sabran’s vulnerability as an individual was suddenly revealed without the store or Hajji Jupri to reinforce his position in a wider network of influence. Ibu Selbut moved into a small room in the back of Pak Salem’s house.

One might have expected that the destruction of the store would have finally severed Jupri’s relationship with the Punan, but it managed to limp along during my remaining months in the field. Hajji sent word that he was willing to rebuild the store, provided that the Punan provide eight cubits of *pappan* (cut boards) and all the labor. The Punan

refused, offering only two cubits and demanding payment for labor. Hajji, in turn, threatened to move the threshing machine that had survived the fire downriver but the Punan, though irritated, claimed they could go back to threshing by traditional means or buy a machine themselves. Hajji made plans to hire police to come to Long Suluy after the Indonesian national elections in May to demand immediate repayment of the debt (which by now was reported by his people to be between 150 and 250 million rupiah rather than the initial 350 million) and to confiscate the belongings of those who did not pay. He also intended to arrest Pak Jep, a Suluy Punan, who had the largest debt and who had been avoiding repayment altogether. Nothing of the sort ever took place, nor probably would it have been possible given the changed attitudes of the authorities and the number of NGOs which had begun to operate on the river. At the time I left a few of Jupri's workers, along with Sabran, had moved operations upriver into the Suluy where, instead of waiting for the Punan to bring in their gold, used large, environmentally destructive machines to search for gold themselves. Sabran also rationalized that this method would allow him to more closely 'monitor' the Punan upriver. 'Outsiders' are not permitted to look for gold without consent from the kepala desa, but the Punan had still not completely shifted to thinking of Hajji or Sabran as 'outsiders'. Some of the Kelai Punan were beginning to grumble though as it was understood that the kepala desa was paid quite well for his consent. But Jupri's people could not navigate the rivers alone and it was the Suluy Punan who, opportunistically, jumped to work with Jupri's camp in the forest as boat drivers and laborers. The Kelai Punan shook their heads,

claiming that they would never be paid the percentage of profits they were promised or, as one Punan Suluy claimed, given a ketinting for their labor.

It would have taken longer than my remaining time in the village see the ultimate effects of the loss of Jupri's business on Long Suluy. Still the Punan were already beginning to complain to me that life was getting more difficult. Ibu Minah, the wife of one of the Kelai leaders most ardent to break from Jupri, whispered softly to me one afternoon sitting on her front porch, "It's hard now. I don't have any soap. Over there [at Muin's store] we can't get any credit. When the 'boss' was here we could always get credit." And my neighbor Ibu Nyow often came over to complain that there was nothing in the village, "I haven't been to Tanjung Redeb for a year and I need to buy pants. There are no clothes at [Muin's]. Sabran always had clothes." And Ibu Santi told me as we camped together in the forest, "I cried the night Hajji's house burned, we depend on him for supplies. Long Kian almost died when Hajji Idrus left and now we will be the same." Pak Gun, an older Kelai man, complained that without Hajji there would be "nothing" in the village, "...no cigarettes, no bread, no gasoline. There is nothing at [Muin's]. There is not enough gas in the village now." Yet others continued to be optimistic about the changes, claiming their independence from Hajji and their freedom from what they experienced as bondage. As Taran claimed, "I am glad if there is not a Hajji here. We want to prove that without him we can still live. Already there are people who don't depend on him, who have TV's, video players and generators. There are already brave and smart people [i.e. those who can interact and negotiate with the outside]. Yohannes,

Bau, Lewi and Kaleb all want to build much better houses [i.e. they have the skills that they didn't used to have]. And there are already people here – Yohannes, Bau, Lura – who have money growing in the bank.”

## CONCLUSION

### REFLECTIONS ON A TRANSITION

When I arrived in Long Suluy I was immediately aware that as an anthropologist I had found a very opportune place. Here I was introduced to a community of hunters and gatherers who had just recently begun to adopt agriculture and who were actively negotiating their increasing involvement in the market economy. More than that, the community at that time was heavily controlled by a powerful outsider, Hajji Jupri, raising so many classic anthropological questions about power and resistance, cultural change and the intersection of the global and local that I felt like I was at an ethnographic smorgasbord. Although over the following eighteen months I diligently followed the Punan into the forest gathering observational and interview data, hounded them with questions when they were in the village, collected genealogies and demographic and health information and designed informal surveys covering everything from trips to Tanjung Redeb to ownership of outboard motors, it sometimes felt that I really barely had to do fieldwork as the story between the Punan and Jupri unfolded before my eyes. The most effective research method often turned out to be simply sitting on my front porch sipping coffee and looking out over the happenings in the village as my Punan neighbors stopped by to fill me in the day's events. And given that the Punan were usually sitting on *their* front porches observing the happenings in the village and discussing the day's events I felt in good company in my 'non-activity.'

I stopped on many occasions to reflect on the question as to whether I was simply flattering myself that I had caught ‘history on the wing’ – was this really as consequential a point in the history of this community as it appeared to be? I did not want to risk the ethnographic (or Marxist) error of imagining the past as stagnant and unchanging until such time as market capitalism happened to wander in on the scene – or even worse, until I wandered in. I hope that it is clear from my earlier chapters on the history of Borneo and the Punan that life prior to colonialism and capitalism was anything but stagnant in the Borneo rainforest. Yet the big break with Hajji Jupri, which I would not have anticipated eighteen months prior upon my arrival, seems to have signaled the end of a transitional social form that having its beginnings in traditional forms of social organization, both facilitated and was undermined by the Punans’ entrance into the market economy. In the previous chapters I tended to the ethnographic details of life in Long Suluy as the Punan negotiate their changing social world, in order to place the Punans’ relationship with Jupri and the transition they were undergoing, in both a wider historic and geographic context. At this point I think it is helpful to reflect on Bronson’s model of the Sumatran trading state.

Bronson’s (1974) speculative model exploring the formation of ancient Southeast Asian coastal trading states, describes a situation in which relationships among various upstream and downstream exchange partners are relatively egalitarian as a function of the unique economic and geographic conditions of these areas. As I described in Chapter 1,

the early Bornean sultanates did not arise as a result of a ruling elite extracting the surplus of an agricultural peasant class as was the case in Java or mainland Southeast Asia.

Given the mountainous terrain and poor quality of the Borneo soil, there was no agricultural surplus available to give rise to such a peasant class. Bornean states, rather, arose from their ability to control the trade in forest products at the mouth of large rivers. Their wealth came from the taxes and tribute they exacted from merchants arriving from foreign ports and from the profits garnered on the sale of forest products originating upstream in the Bornean hinterland. Given the highly mobile nature of the upriver groups – hunter gatherers and swidden agriculturalists – combined with an inaccessible landscape – dense forests, steep mountains and dangerous rapids – military control of these upriver populations would have been prohibitively costly, if not impossible. Continued access to the upriver forest products on the part of coastal states depended on mutually satisfactory trade terms. If coastal states became too heavy-handed, upriver groups could flee into the vast forest and, even worse, make their products available to a competing coastal sultanate. The result, as Bronson notes, was that coastal trading states, given their dependence on unreliable trade partners both upstream and abroad, were highly unstable and often short lived. Healey (1995), in addition, emphasizes that the intense and violent competition among coastal trading states, often in the form of piracy, further served to destabilize them.

Bronson applies similar dynamics to the relationships among upriver trading partners in which a tribe, or one branch of a tribe, served as the ‘center’ or accumulation point for

the trade in upriver forest products. Although this model does not specifically refer to relationships between farmers and foragers, in the Bornean context swidden agriculturalists were *relatively* constrained in their gathering activities by their agricultural activities as well as a cultural life that revolved around the long house. Hunter-gatherer subsistence activities and social life, in contrast, were embedded in the rainforest and thus compatible with the intensive gathering of non-subsistence products for exchange. Dayak villages served then as the accumulation points for the upriver products with Dayak Chiefs serving as the middle men in exchange relationships with coastal traders. Bronson describes the relationship that would have ensued between these upriver trading partners in his model, as “quasi-kinship institutions combined with clientship and trade-partner relationships, some perhaps verging on debt-peonage... (p. 45)”. Although these relationships were almost always asymmetrical, if terms of exchange became too onerous to the client group-if for example they were increasingly forced into quasi or actual slave status with their patron group - they could escape into the forests and ally with a trading partner offering more generous conditions.

Bronson’s model illuminates the situation on the Kelai River well into the turn of the last century. As I described in Chapter 1, the early Kingdom-turned-Sultanate of Berau arose in about the 12<sup>th</sup> century and later subdivided into the two twin but competing sultanates of Gunung Tabur and Sambiliung. This polity attempted to control trade at the river’s mouth bringing it into competition with the other, often more powerful, sultanates along Borneo’s eastern coast, in particular Kutai. At stake were the large reserves of forest

products available in the hinterlands of the Kelai and Sigah Rivers, the two main tributaries of the Berau and which meet at Tanjung Redeb. Trade on the upriver Kelai was controlled, at least by the 1800s, the powerful Segai Dayaks with the primary collection point eventually established at Muara Lesan on the lower Kelai. At the time the Dutch resident A.H. Spaan toured the river in about 1900, the Punan had not settled into permanent villages. They existed in a patron-client relationship with the Segai who in turn traded with the coastal traders. Even with the official Dutch annexation of East Kalimantan, it was some time before Dutch officials were able to put an end to Dayak head-hunting and open the Kelai River to direct trade with the coast. Even then symbolic tributary relationships continued between the Punan and the downriver Segai at Muara Lesan as well as with the Kenyah who had established themselves at Long Gi. Older Punan still refer to the Kenyah 'Rajah' and Segai 'Rajah' with whom they participated in symbolic gift exchanges of forest products indicating continuity in that patron-client relationship into the 1950s.

By the time Jupri arrived on the Kelai in the 1960s these trade and tributary relations with the Kenyah and Segai had largely been disrupted as various traders who had entered into the area competed for control of trade with the Punan. Simandjuntak (1967) notes by the late 1960s the Punan avoided the Kenyah who they say looked down on them as inferiors. Jupri managed to gain a monopoly over the Punan, in a large part through force, establishing, what I described in my early field notes as, 'an anachronistic fiefdom' with himself as 'Rajah' and the Punan as subjects, needing both his tolerance and control 'for

their own good.’<sup>97</sup> Thus, although a coastal trader rather than Dayak chief, Jupri entered into a client-patron relationship with the Punan, a form of social relations with outsiders with which they were long familiar. Rather than relying on the outdated form of violence – headhunting – to secure his monopoly on trade, he used modern state-sanctioned forms of control in the form of the police and army officers. Over time the relationship became institutionalized in forms of debt peonage and quasi-kinship relations, economic gifts and sanctions became the primary mode of policing the relationship although the perception of Jupri’s relationship with official authorities continued to serve to reinforce his control. Given the Punans’ isolation in the upriver forests, as well as their perceived status as ‘primitive nomads’, the authorities in Tanjung Redeb would have made no attempt to regulate Jupri’s activities and, on the contrary, at least some of those authorities benefited from the relationship.

Despite the asymmetry of the relationship as near as I can understand from speaking with the Punan about their history with Jupri, they did not want to break away from him in the past. They seem to have accepted the relationship and their subservient status to this outside ‘boss’ possibly, in large part, because it was a transference from their earlier relationship with the Dayaks. And as I have noted in previous chapters, many of the older Punan speak highly about all of the changes that Jupri brought to the village. However, with the Punans’ increasing involvement in the market, they were also increasingly brought out of the forest, and so their social world expanded beyond the

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<sup>97</sup> Outsiders on the river, and sometimes even the Punan, critically or jokingly refer to Jupri as ‘Rajah’.

boundaries of their own social group. In the past, Punan often shyly avoided other groups, and even afraid to come out of the forest into the sunlight. Through Hajji Jupri they were thrust into new social milieus and became increasingly uncomfortable with their lower class status. Moreover, whereas in the past they might have been content to receive a small amount of tobacco for a box of gaharu, particularly given that the gaharu had no value to the Punan other than as an item of exchange, over time as the Punan began to increasingly adopt an identity referenced outside of their own social group, ownership of market commodities became the route to status. As the Punans' goals and Jupri's goals collided, i.e. as they both desired the same type of status as their social worlds merged, Jupri was no longer perceived entirely as a type of benefactor but began to be seen as an obstacle, a competitor. And as the Punan became more able to navigate in the market without Jupri – in large part because Jupri provided them with the opportunities over time to learn the skills necessary to operate in the market – Jupri increasingly lost control over the Punan.

Even if Jupri had not brought the Punan 'out of' Long Suluy, the outside began to enter in. During my fieldwork, approximately 200 gaharu workers passed through Long Suluy per month. They bring information on prices of commodities to the Punan, so that they no longer have to rely on Sabran's or Jupri's information. In negotiating business with the gaharu workers and forming friendly relationships with them the Punan increase their confidence in their ability to interact successfully with outsiders. As previously mentioned, the police were actually the ones who encouraged the Punan to fight for

higher prices for their forest products. With the teachers, the minister and now international NGOs working in the area, the isolation that allowed Jupri to maintain control over the Punan has now all but vanished. Even my presence, the Punan say, has been beneficial. Whatever confusion or irritation I might have caused them during my time there, it has been counter-balanced by their feeling that they have ‘gained experience’ with a new type of outsider. When I first arrived the Punan were so shy of me they would barely look at, much less speak, to me. Over time, however, they gained confidence in their interactions with me as we struggled to understand our commonalities and differences. And as one Punan man said, “In the past Hajji owned us. He paid whatever prices he wanted because we were ignorant. But now gaharu workers come here and tell us prices and we know a lot of types of people. When you first came here we were so shy of you but not anymore. Now no one is shy of you anymore.”

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At the time that I left in July 2004, it was predicted that there would be only two more years’ worth of gaharu in Bulungan and thus the steady flow of gaharu workers through Long Suluy would come to an end. As Pak Muin, the gaharu boss with the new store in Long Suluy, said, “And then Long Suluy will be quiet.” In September 2006, I received news that the logging companies had reached Long Suluy and were beginning to build a road into the area. The Punan, with the assistance of The Nature Conservancy and World Education Organization, are presently trying to negotiate to save a certain amount of land

for hunting. The last that I heard about Hajji Jupri is that he is often in Surabaya seeking medical attention and rarely can be found in Tanjung Redeb.

## AFTERWARD

It is usually in the introduction that one mentions one's research methods. Although my research proposals all included impressive sounding repertoires of ethnographic field methods, the Punan in general did not accommodate them. When I first arrived in Long Suluy many Punan would not look at me, much less speak to me. I had a very hard time figuring out whether they were shy or simply did not want me there. One afternoon in complete frustration I climbed up the steep hill in back of the village and tromped off into the rainforest, walking along some well trodden paths and grumbling to myself that this was no way to get data and why hadn't I gone to Africa where people would talk to me. When I returned that evening tired, leech bitten but a little more relaxed, I found out that everyone was talking about how brave I was to go walking alone in the forest – they would never have expected it of an outsider much less an American. What I had assumed was a wasted day turned out to be an important step in building a relationship with the village. People reacted similarly when they saw me jump into the river and swim. As time passed and they saw that I could keep up in the forest, sleep on river rocks and eat wild pig, they felt more at ease having me around.

On another occasion, after about three weeks in the village and thinking I would give the Punan a break from my presence, I decided to take a trip down to Tanjung Redeb. As I walked away from my house carrying my backpack, my neighbor, who had up until that point refused to speak to me or even it seemed to look at me, called out "Where are you

going?” “To Tanjung Redeb but I’ll return in a few days,” I answered. But I used the Indonesian word ‘pulang’ which means ‘to return home’. “*Pulang?*” she asked seeming worried. “Yes,” I responded again, “but I’ll return in a few days.” And then she said sadly, “Ke Amerika!” “*No,*” I said, “to here. I’ll return *here*” And then she broke into a smile and laughed. A number of other people approached me also concerned that I was going home and was unhappy in the village. I was amazed! The Punan had barely seemed to notice me and here they were visibly upset that I was leaving. Many months later an American and Indonesian team from an environmental organization from Jakarta visited the village while I was up in the forest. When I met a woman from the team months later she asked me, “What is it with your village? The Punan looked right through us, it was like we didn’t exist. We said good morning and they didn’t answer. It was not like that in any of the other villages on the river.” I laughed because of course my neighbors had provided me with quite specific details about the team’s visit to the village.

Even as our personal relationship warmed, throughout my fieldwork I had to tread carefully so as not to irritate the Punan. If an outside agency visits the village and conducts a survey, the Punan usually politely answer all the questions put to them, although often incorrectly. This is not out of malice, but they are too embarrassed to say they don’t know something. It is different to have someone for almost two years asking so many questions. Thus, if I wanted to information it was usually best to not ask directly but to sit for awhile next to a Punan, staring out at the river and then, feigning

complete disinterest, casually ask about the recent harvest, an issue in the village, or how many children their sister has. I hope this does not sound manipulative. Rather it was my way of being polite – to soften the pointiness of my very American manner. The Punan had no hesitation about not answering my questions or letting me know they didn't like my manner. "Ha in," they would shrug, "I don't know," to even the most obvious questions. I think my absolutely favorite moment during fieldwork was when an elderly Punan man, Pak Uyow, who rarely came into the village visited me on my front porch. A particularly open and talkative Punan, Pak Uyow complained to me, "What is it with Pak Lahow and Pak Meling?! I ask them a question and they don't even answer! Don't we speak the same language?! Aren't we one tribe?! I don't understand these quiet people!" My heart filled with joy – they weren't talking to him either!

But irritate the Punan I did, sometimes to the point of anger. I actually found out about all the major political factions in the village simply by offending all of them equally. Sometimes I understood what I had done, such as hiring and then firing someone as my boat driver. At other times I had no idea. Sometimes a Punan would feel that they had told me too much and then become suspicious and not want to speak to me for weeks after. At other times I found out that I had spent too much time with someone they were on bad terms with. I panicked at first because given the small size of the village, someone's anger with me could have a domino effect and ruin my research. But no such thing ever happened. Punan often get mad at each other as well, and I learned that if I

were patient and respectful that eventually a Punan would indirectly let me know when things were okay again.

I also discovered that much of the Punans' reticence to speak with me would disappear if I met them in the forest rather than the village. Individuals who had never said a word to me in the village, seeming to look right through me, in the forest would treat me like an old friend, "Hey Katerin, you're here. How's it going?" and sit down to chat. The same happened in Tanjung Redeb. On my last trip down to Tanjung Redeb before finishing my fieldwork I met a Punan couple staying at the Kelai guesthouse. I had simply decided in the village not ask this couple questions as they would never speak to me. All of a sudden in the city they smiled broadly at me, the woman wrapped her arms around me as we walked down the street, and her husband beamed and bragged to the other people staying at the guest house that I spoke their language. I was so surprised by their warmth toward me that I was almost completely speechless. I also discovered upon hiring a male student from the city to work with me for a few months in the village that many of the Punan men had wanted to speak to me but had been too shy. They said to the assistant, "But what if I say something wrong and make her mad?" With a male assistant present they were more comfortable coming by to visit and after he left they continued to stop by, convinced now that I would not get angry at them.

I confess most of the village never really understood why I was there, something which has a way of making an anthropologist a bit uncomfortable with her project. The Punan

*liked* the idea that I would be writing a book about their village. They are quite proud of who they are and thought everyone else knowing about them was a good thing.<sup>98</sup> But given my often odd lines of questioning, particularly about economics, many suspected I might be working for a gold company. Even those who believed I was a student still expected that, like everyone else coming to exploit the forest, that I would at some point start looking for gold.

Yet whatever discomfort it might have caused the Punan to have an odd stranger in their midst for such an extended period of time, it was clear to me early on that, aside from their personal likes or dislikes, that they valued the *experience* of having me there. As anthropologists we often wonder whether our presence is a blessing or a burden to our research communities and we try to do what we can to give back to the people we work with – sometimes our actual research has beneficial effects for the community while at others we try to assist in ways aside from the research such as advocating for the community or donating funds to community projects. The Punan often made clear to me that they welcomed outsiders to their village. They felt that it was their isolation in the past that allowed them to be exploited. With increasing numbers of people coming through the village they receive information and experience that empowers them. For many of them, I was their first real experience with a Westerner. Although occasional tourists and researchers have visited the village briefly in the past, most of the Punan did

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<sup>98</sup> According to Kaskija (1999) the Punan Tubu/Malinau often complain about their poverty and often express self-pity over their disadvantageous position relative to outsiders. I did not encounter this among the Punan of Long Suluy. On the contrary, individuals often commented on how good life is upriver.

not interact with them. While at first they were shy and deferential with me, over time the western mystique started to dissolve. My sense was that I was one more experience with the 'outside' that would provide them with a certain confidence in dealing with new situations in the future, particularly as increasing numbers of international organizations arrive in Berau.

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