

THE LAHANAN OF THE BALUI, 1963-2006¹

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The Lahanan of the Batang Balui were the focus of research I started as a Queen Elizabeth II Research Fellow at Macquarie University in Sydney. My original plan was to carry out a demographic and socio-economic study of Levu Lahanan, Long Pangai on the mid-Balui. Two five-month periods of intensive fieldwork were carried out in 1987 and 1988 and subsequently for much shorter periods in the 1990s. In the new century I paid three brief visits (2001, 2002 and 2006) to the longhouse community at Sungai Asap to catch up with events since my last visit shortly after resettlement and the funeral of Pemancha Nyipa Pasu in 1999 (Alexander 1999a).

This paper provides a background to the Lahanan from the time of Sarawak's independence in 1963 to the present and focuses on the socio-economic processes which have transformed their society. The most crucial feature of their recent history is resettlement. In 1987, when I started fieldwork the Lahanan community of Long Pangai was one of fifteen longhouse communities which had been selected for relocation because of the plan to construct a dam downriver at the Bakun rapids (Rousseau 1994; 1995; Tan 1994). Although this project had been mooted since the early 1980s, it took nearly two decades for the resettlement to come to fruition. Other crucial features of recent change include religious conversion from Adat Bungan to Roman Catholicism and the introduction of educational and health services progressively updated since their introduction in the early 1950s. The Agricultural Department has assisted the community with agricultural development and the introduction of cash crops such as rubber, coffee, cocoa and pepper (see Alexander 1987: 75-77; Alexander & Alexander 1993; Guerreiro 1988a; 1988b).

The Lahanan, who belong to the so-called Kajang group (Alexander 1989a; 1989b 1990a; 1990b; Guerreiro 1987; Leach 1950; de Martinoir 1974:267; Nicolaisen 1997: 239; Rousseau 1974: 18; 1990), are one of the smallest ethnic groups in Sarawak. Their total population of around 1,000 people are allied with two longhouse communities of Belaga District in the Kapit Residency. The larger group, the focus of this paper, are the Lahanan Long Pangai. When Sarawak joined the Federation of Malaysia on September 16, 1963 this community lived on the upper Balui River, but by the end

¹ The first draft of this paper was prepared for a volume to be published in honor of the Orang Ulu of Sarawak, intending to trace the constituent groups' development from 1963 to the present. Unfortunately the volume never came to fruition and, keen for my intended contribution to be produced in some form, I approached the editor of the *Borneo Research Bulletin* who graciously agreed to publish it.



of the century had moved to the Bakun Resettlement Scheme (BRS) at Sungai Asap.² A splinter group, the Lahanan Belepeh, live in the lower Balui at Long Semuang and number around 200 individuals. Although the two groups share a common ancestry, over the 150 years since they split over a leadership dispute, the Lahanan Long Pangai have become steadily Kayanized because of their close proximity to, and intermarriage with, nearby Kayan communities. The Lahanan Belepeh, however, living close to other longhouse villages loosely labelled Kajang, have, in some respects, retained a stronger sense of being different from the Kayan.

The incorporation of Sarawak in the relatively young state of Malaysia in 1963 was marred by conflict with Indonesia. Early in that year the Indonesian government announced a policy of confrontation and within a few months launched a series of attacks on Sarawak border towns. Shortly after Sarawak joined the Federation, the Indonesian Army engaged in a skirmish with British Gurkha troops at Long Jawe on the upper Balui

² The Bakun Resettlement Scheme is located on the Asap and Koyan Rivers in the northeast area of Belaga District, although the general term for the area is Sungai Asap. In the original plan for resettlement, Sungai Penyuan had been chosen for settlement rather than Sungai Asap. Prior to the establishment of the BRS this area was largely uninhabited except for isolated groups of Penan and the Sambu who were closely linked to the Kenyah.

(Armstrong 1987:5). While the loss of life was confined to the Gurkhas, many elderly Lahanan recalled the anxiety they felt about the threat of “Communists” and other “strangers” at the time. They did report, however, that they and other upriver people (Orang Ulu) had good relationships with the Gurkha troops who used them as guides and traders. August 1966 marked the end of the conflict with Indonesia and genuine independence from the former colonial power, Britain.

In the post-colonial era, life in the upriver communities was altered by a state committed to particular policies of modernization and development. Local communities



Plate 1: Roman Catholic Sunday service with Mieng Alan and Husun Gong, Long Panggai, 28 June, 1987.

the Roman Catholic Church and remained in power until the end of the sixties and was influential in establishing a Catholic mission in Belaga. A SUPP representative won the 1970 election and encouraged the missionary activities of the Borneo Evangelical Mission, later to become known as the Sidang Injil Borneo. While the latter became more widespread throughout the area, the first of the Lahanan to convert to Christianity

were incorporated into the political system and encouraged to convert to a major religion. The medical facilities which were built along the river radically improved health, especially infant and maternal mortality, and all children were given access to primary and secondary education. New technology and transport also helped to raise living standards, as well as making longhouse villagers more dependent on cash. Not surprisingly, many younger people left to seek employment elsewhere (Alexander & Alexander 1993).

In the post-independence period, former indigenous leaders, such as *penghulu* and *temonggong* lost some of their powers as indigenous politicians associated with various political parties emerged. The local representative of Partai Pesaka aligned with

in 1986 chose Roman Catholicism. Adat Bungan, a syncretic religion introduced into the region in the 1950s has steadily lost ground to Roman Catholicism in the subsequent decades (Alexander 1987: 18-23; 1990:207-9).

The Lahanan of the Balui River regard themselves as among the original inhabitants of the area. Often loosely defined as Kajang, along with other similar small groups, the Lahanan have no difficulty in enumerating the cultural differences which distinguish them from major ethnic groups, such as the Kayan and Kenyah, living in Central Borneo. The most important of these included secondary burial of the dead, the cult of the sacred stones, and the erection of *kelerieng*, massive funerary poles for the elite (Alexander & Alexander 1999:71; de Martinoir 1974:268; Low 1882:64; Nicolaisen 1997:249-51; Rousseau 1974:18.). While these customs have long since been abandoned, and many of

the features which once distinguished the Lahanan from other local groups have been submerged in common cultural practices, the Lahanan are still keen to promote their differences. A glimmer of what it means to be a Lahanan in the post-colonial era is illustrated by this brief quotation from their oral history:

We Lahanan are amongst the oldest inhabitants of the Batang Balui. Our ancestors, as with all those people originating from the Apau Kayan, the high plateau in the centre of Borneo, trace our source to a forest giant. One by one as each person emerged from this giant tree they were assigned to a particular community with its own language. Except for we Lahanan, who did not have a language, as we were the last to emerge from the tree. Our founding ancestor Laké Galo consulted those who had emerged before him. "What are we Lahanan going to do about a language? We want one of our own." After much



Plate 2: Urieng Emang & Tumin Lusai dancing around the altar (*jok*) during the women's day (*lau lerah*) rituals of the Adat Bungan festival, Long Pangai, 9 April, 1988.

discussion we Lahanan were permitted to borrow language terms from the various other communities to make up our own language. That is the reason why Lahanan is so mixed up - we have borrowed words from many different peoples.

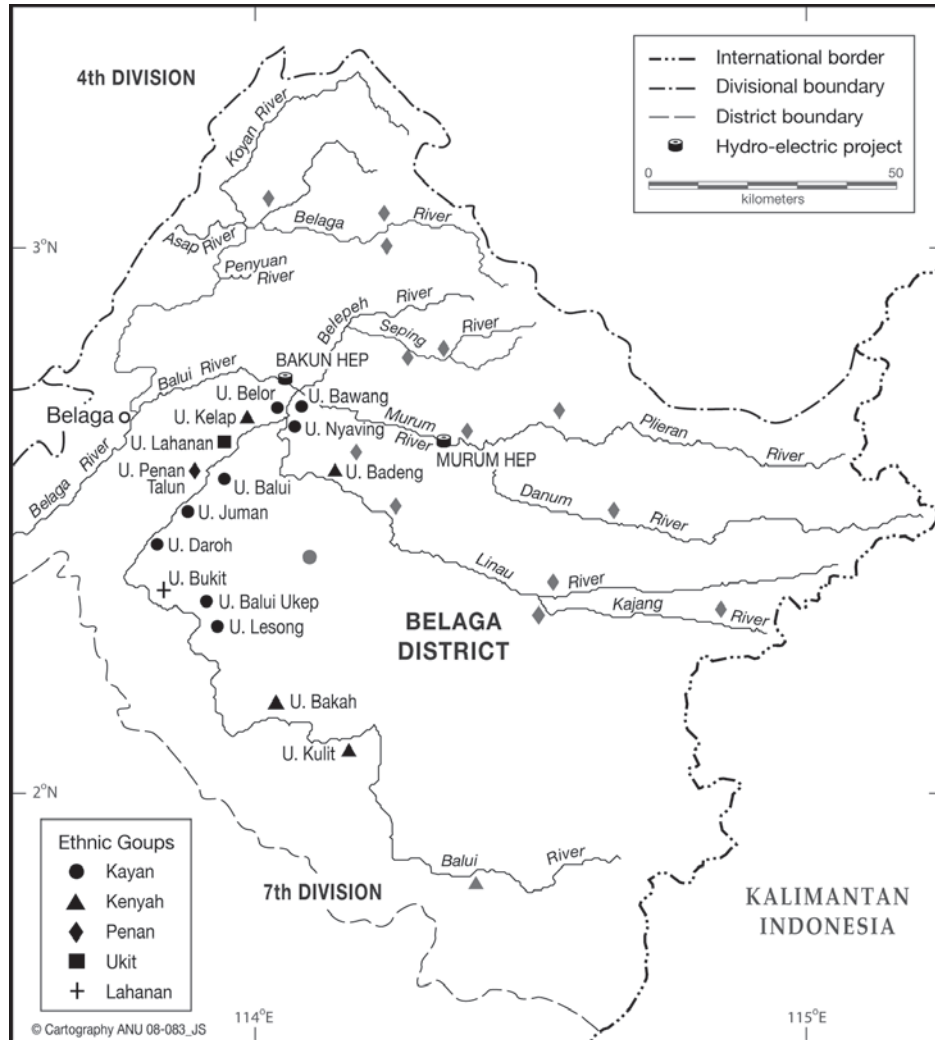
This story, revived as the Lahanan people of Long Pangai were faced with planned resettlement, illustrates the centrality of language for Lahanan identity (Alexander 1999b).

The Lahanan do acknowledge similarities with other Orang Ulu. They share a material culture with each other in that they are hill rice cultivators living in longhouses on the banks of a river. In terms of social structure, the most significant similarity is that they all belong to stratified communities. In the Lahanan case the four ranks, in descending order, were the *linau laja*, the *laja ki*, *panyin* and *lipen*. The first three remain essentially intact, but the fourth, the *lipen* or 'slaves,' had been absorbed into the *panyin* by the 1960s. The *laja* are those who belong to the ruling family's apartment or *tilung*.

Laja ki have kinship relations to the *laja*. Both commonly marry outside the community to women of similar rank, and wives usually reside with their husband's family. The reverse is the case for the *panyin* or ordinary folk (see below). The *panyin* used to make regular "gifts" of cooked and uncooked foodstuffs, including wild boar and fish, to the headman's *tilung*. By the mid-1980s *panyin* were more reluctant to pay tribute in this form. Even more significantly, *panyin* used to perform labor (*mahap*) for the headman in exchange for his services. The increasing autonomy of the *panyin* gradually eroded this practice, and by 1985 the headman agreed that *mahap* labor within the longhouse could be replaced by each *tilung* making a contribution of paddy or RM 10. Despite the erosion of this and other practices honoring the elite, the Lahanan have always taken



Plate 3: Jau Sivap conducting household headhunting ritual on men's day (*lau savie*) of the Adat Bungan festival, Long Pangai, 11 April, 1988.



some pride in the genealogy of their *laja* (headman). They regard themselves as the center of a genealogical network which links all Kajang and Kayan communities on the Batang Balui. This genealogy spans at least thirteen generations from the founding ancestor Laké Galo to Laké Pasu Beloluk, to his son Laké Nyipa Pasu, and to the present headman, his adoptive son and nephew Lajang Nyipa (Alexander 1992:19; Guerreiro 1987).

In 1963 the group defined as the Lahanan Long Pangai were living, to use the oft-cited words of many elders of the community “in a grand, two-storey longhouse with a roof of *belian* shingles.” This 25-room longhouse (*levu* or *levu larun*) on the left bank of the Batang Balui had a population of a little over 200 individuals who were primarily

swidden agriculturalists earning a little cash from the trade of jungle produce and a limited amount of wage labor in downriver timber camps. The Lahanan built this structure circa 1961 and by 1965 the government had set up a primary school nearby, which opened up access to education for nearby longhouses. Part of the reason for stressing the quality of this longhouse is that it was burnt to the ground in June 1968. On this occasion many residents had locked up their apartments (*tilung*) and were staying in their farmhouses cultivating hill rice. Even the headman, Laké Nyipa Pasu, and his wife were absent. Many residents chose to stay in their farmhouses while the remaining took refuge on the school grounds while they built a temporary longhouse (*luvung*) near the school. The government provided assistance in the form of food and clothing. Some three years later another *luvung* was established across the river behind the permanent structure which people started moving into in 1974. In the years between 1975 and 1999 the number of doors expanded from 28 to 67, the resident population from approximately 250 to 470, and the number of longhouses from one to four.

In the four and a half decades since independence education has expanded at a rapid rate. In the 1950s education was largely restricted to the elite who attended primary schools downriver at Long Linau or Belaga. By the early 1960s approximately a third of the relevant age group took advantage of the boarding facilities at Long Linau. School attendance doubled once the Sekolah Rakyat Kerajaan Long Pangai was established in 1965, and by 1985 primary education was almost universal. At this time slightly less than half of those who graduated from primary school went on to attend junior high school for three years. By 1995, however, attendance at junior high school was the norm. Senior high school education has always been relatively restricted because schools were located a long way downriver at Song and Kapit, few had the appropriate qualifications and, even more importantly, the finances required. By the mid-1980s a third of the relevant age group were attending senior high school and by the 1990s most of those who succeeded in gaining the junior high school certificate went on to senior high school. Kemas introduced a kindergarten in 1982 and has maintained a teacher, usually a girl resident in the longhouse, to conduct classes. Attendance has always fluctuated widely from day to day, but most children in the appropriate age group (3-7) are registered as pupils.

As in other Borneo societies, the *tilung*, commonly glossed as the ‘apartment’ or ‘door,’ is the main reference point in Lahanan social structure. Ownership of the dwelling, its contents, and the land farmed by it are vested in the *tilung* which is usually “headed” by the senior woman (*kebaken tilung*). Lahanan society has strong matrifocal elements: for example, post-marital residence is usually in the wife’s apartment, women have full rights to children or property after the frequent divorces, and agriculture is mainly organized by women. Except for men from the elite, there is a very strong preference for longhouse endogamy; very few women move outside the longhouse and in-marriage men are often handicapped by their inability to speak Lahanan. Each apartment contains a nuclear, a stem, or extended family, although it is prestigious to maintain as large a household as possible. However, limitations of space and the splitting off of domestic groups create cyclic fluctuations in *tilung* size. Most apartments contain a single household – the consumption and production unit – but those which have already split

into two households with separate economic units (*karong buyun legua* i.e. ‘two cooking pots’) normally establish a new apartment when circumstances permit. The most common form of household organization is the stem family with parents, unmarried children, a married daughter, her husband and their children. Extended households usually contain two married daughters, but this is always a transitory form as the expectation is that all but one married daughter will eventually establish their own apartments (Alexander 1990a; 1990b; 1992; 1993).

The *tilung* – in a wider sense– is also a kinship unit; consisting of all those who were born into it even though they may now live elsewhere. This kinship unit owns heirlooms which are shared by all members of the descending generations irrespective of where they live. The *tilung* is a continuing entity as at least one child always remains with the natal apartment, even though the physical building may have been replaced or relocated. To ensure the continuity of the *tilung*, childless couples arrange for the adoption of children, commonly the children of siblings.

The Lahanan kinship system is bilateral and encompasses all of an individual’s consanguineal kin. The term *panak* is applied to all persons for whom a kinship tie is known to exist, whether the exact genealogical link is known or not. The Lahanan distinguish between close and distant kin, with all those who have a great-grandparent in common regarding themselves as close kin (*panak lekin*). Even in the 1980s marriage within the longhouse was the norm and the Lahanan, like other Kajang groups, continue to have a strong preference for uxori-local residence after marriage. It is compulsory for the initial post-marital period and is the common residence pattern for a very high proportion of marriages. The Lahanan’s strong preference for uxori-local residence after marriage has important consequences for gender relations, which are, as a rule, characterized by a strong egalitarian ethic. Lahanan women have prominent economic and even political roles. They carry out a larger part of agricultural activities and *tilung* continuity is normally achieved through female lines. Ties between siblings, particularly female siblings, are very close and quite frequently reinforced by the adoption of children within the sibling group (Alexander 1990a).

The Lahanan have long been swidden cultivators, growing one crop of hill rice a year and cultivating the crop on the basis of exchange labor (*pelado*). *Pelado* is calculated in terms of the exchange of work days. Membership in a work team is usually based on the proximity of swiddens or gardens, but workers are also recruited on the basis of friendship, kinship and/or residential proximity. Each individual, or, if he/she is unavailable, another member of the household provides one day’s labor for each team member who works on their land. Along the upper Balui exchange labor was used in both hill and wet paddy cultivation, as well as in the cultivation of cash crops. It was particularly important in hill paddy cultivation and was used for nearly all activities associated with the cycle. The biggest work teams (10-30 persons) participated in slashing, felling, sowing, hand-weeding, harvesting, and transport. Very little of this work was done on an individual basis (*nyadui karep*). Other activities such as chemical weeding, fertilizing, pest and disease control and threshing, winnowing and storing, were performed by work teams consisting of only two to ten members, and much of this work was also done by individuals. *Nyadui gaji*, or ‘working for wages,’ was fairly rare within the longhouse economy during the

1980s, but became increasingly common during the 1990s when a significant number of young people left the longhouse temporarily to seek work outside. Young women commonly sought wage labor as maids for wealthy families in urban centers and domestic work as cooks in timber camps, while young men took on both unskilled and skilled labor in timber camps (Alexander 1990a).

Rice cultivation is now regarded as part of the Lahanan cultural identity, even though they traditionally ate sago rather than rice. They grow some vegetables inter-planted amongst the rice but also have separate plots of vegetables and tobacco. All these crops are largely subsistence but the Lahanan economy was traditionally supplemented by hunting, fishing and gathering. The gathering of rattan and various other products of the forest enabled the Lahanan to acquire a cash income from either the raw product or from mats and basketware produced from rattan. In some cases the Lahanan acted as intermediaries between the hunter-gathering Penan and Chinese traders located in the bazaar town of Belaga. The Penan, renowned for their weaving skills and smithy work, provided the Lahanan with rattan baskets and mats as well as bushknives in exchange for clothing, biscuits, sugar, and tobacco (Alexander 1992: 215; 2008; Alexander & Alexander 1994; Alexander 2008).

The first cash crop to be planted by the Lahanan in the 1970s was rubber. In 1987 the Lahanan had 84 acres of rubber, but production largely ceased in the early eighties because of the fall in rubber prices. Coffee was also an early cash crop but was, within a relatively short period, replaced by cocoa. An innovative farmer first introduced cocoa to the Lahanan in 1980 and persuaded fourteen more households to establish holdings nearby. Within two years the Agricultural Department introduced their initial



Plate 4: Women's ritual procession to longhouse after harvesting the first of young rice (*anap parei bau*)
Long Pangai, 10 January 1991.

scheme and by the end of the nineties most households were acquiring cash income from cocoa. The agricultural department also sponsored pepper cultivation with some degree of success, even though the returns were a little more uncertain because of the frequent destruction of the vines by pests. During the eighties and early nineties the acreage under cash crops increased as it was becoming increasingly clear that people would acquire compensation for any investment they made in cash crops (Alexander 1987: 75-7; Guerreiro 1988a; 1988b).

One of the most profound changes in the final decades of the twentieth century was the rapid expansion and improvement in river travel. The initial introduction of outboard motors made access to Belaga Bazaar and distant swiddens much easier. Express services between Belaga, Kapit and Sibu introduced in the 1970s, and expanded by local entrepreneurs to Long Linau and Long Pangai in the late 1980s, had a marked impact on the local Balui economy. Upriver people took advantage of the new services to travel further downriver to shop for more expensive commodities and also to sell cash crops.

New innovations such as chain saws, herbicides, and fertilizers, from the 1970s onward, had a strong influence on local farming patterns, improving yields and enabling swidden cultivators to diversify their crops. The quality of life for the longhouse people was also improved by the introduction of a gravity-fed water system, latrines, and raised fireplaces. The Agricultural and Health Departments played a very prominent role in instituting these changes. Socio-economic changes in the 1970s and 1980s transformed the Lahanan subsistence economy to one highly dependent on the modern market. By the 1990s they were actively participating in a modern market economy because of escalating demands for cash to pay for services, particularly education, and commodities (Alexander 1987; Alexander & Alexander 1993; 1995).

The relatively swift change to a modern market economy was heavily influenced by the Lahanan and other Orang Ulu attempts to deal with government proposals to build a dam at the Bakun rapids. When it became certain that the dam would go ahead and teams of officials began to enumerate *tilung* possessions, there was a remarkable upsurge in economic activity in the area surrounding the longhouse. The motive for this activity seemed fairly straightforward; *tilung* wanted to be able to provide material evidence of their possessions to sceptical enumerators. But other actions were not so easy to interpret by a simple utilitarian calculus. For example, the most striking Lahanan response to the prospect of the dam was to sharply increase the size of their community. In 1989 the accepted population was 302 distributed among 44 *tilung*, five years later it had grown to 514 distributed among 67 *tilung*. While some of this growth rate of 12 percent per annum was a natural increase resulting from better medical services, most of it was an artifact of the construction of new longhouses (Alexander & Alexander 2002).

Resettlement

For the Orang Ulu of the upper Balui, the last two decades of the twentieth century were clouded by the threat of government-sponsored development requiring their forced resettlement. Both the Federal and State governments were opposed to small communities living in isolated areas outside the effective limits of central control. Some



Plate 5: Adat Bungan ritual on river bank prior to migration to new settlement (*pelah melek uma*), Uma Belor, Long Sah A, 17 November, 1998.

of the opposition was motivated by humanitarian concerns; it is difficult to provide education, health care or community development to remote communities. There were also security concerns that some of the longhouses might be stepping stones for illegal migrants. And there were also suspicions that the State government wanted to clear the land of people to facilitate logging. The catalyst for resettlement was the proposal to dam the Balui River at the Bakun rapids and create a 700 square kilometer lake. Although the 15 longhouse communities in the catchment area could have re-established themselves on higher ground near their previous sites, the government decided to remove all 15 villages from the Balui, paying compensation for their lost resources, and resettling them in a previously uninhabited area (Alexander & Alexander 1999; 2002; see also Rousseau 1994; 1995; Tan 1994).

In 1999 the Lahanan community had just moved under the Bakun Resettlement Scheme (BRS) to a new area, some five hours travel by boat and timber roads north from Long Pangai. The Lahanan's mass evacuation from the Balui took place in mid-June after several days of ceremony (*bulak*) incorporating both Bungan and Christian rituals in their former longhouse village. Lahanan views of the mass departure from their old longhouse to the new were rosy, if tinged with sorrow. They had planned and executed a great ritual performance at the old longhouse and invited numerous people to participate. One of their elite had recorded the events on video and these were on frequent show during the early days in the new settlement and during the funeral of Laké Nyipa Pasu, their former headman and *pemanca*, held within weeks of their arrival. The excitement associated with their mass emigration was short-lived. Feelings of dislocation,



Plate 6: Funeral procession of Alm. Pemanca Nyipa Pasu, Levu Lahanan, Sungai Asap, 15 July, 1999.

disorientation, malaise and even dismay took over once they had settled into their new quarters. They had felt intense grief on the imminent departure from their ancestral lands and this was once again revived when they had finally completed the move.

During the period when the Lahanan were consulted about the style of housing they wanted in the new settlement, a few, mainly younger people, expressed a desire for individual houses, although the majority were firmly of the view that they wanted to retain a longhouse lifestyle. For most the intense sociality of longhouse living was seen as highly desirable and was heavily focused on the communal verandah (Alexander 1993; cf. Helliwell 1992; 2001). On the whole, they felt their accommodation and landholdings compared very unfavorably with those on the Balui. Their greatest regrets concerned the new, exceptionally narrow verandahs which inhibited their use as a place for convivial activity, the lack of a river big enough for transport and fishing, and the distance of the allotted three acre plot from the longhouse. This was in some cases “several hours” walking distance from the longhouse. While this may have been exaggerated, it was clear people were not used to walking any distance, particularly in the heat of the day. Used to paddling their longboats, or using an outboard motor to more distant landholdings and then walking a few minutes through the forest, they found walking on bare exposed roads totally exhausting. There was no cheap public transport and people were reluctant to pay high prices for private transport and thus deplete their savings.

My initial impressions of the BRS, formed less than a month after the Lahanan had resettled, were not altogether critical. From a Western perspective, the new longhouses

were neat and architecturally rather pleasing, with lattice work on the verandahs and windows giving a vaguely Japanese appearance. The buildings were superficially attractive with dark-colored wood and professionally constructed by contractors, though even to my eye construction was flimsy and obviously lacked durability. But in the eyes of the Lahanan, the buildings were far from adequate. The longhouses were largely constructed of treated softwoods, not hardwoods, and numerous cases were reported of the new buildings already showing signs of rot – one report mentioned a large hole in a section of the verandah, for example, and another household was disrupted by the damage caused by a tree falling and destroying most of their roof. With a strong do-it-yourself tradition, they were of the view they had been deprived of the labor and pleasure of constructing their own longhouses.

The new longhouses are constructed in blocks of ten to fifteen *tilung* in the interests of preventing fire, but have a long continuous verandah. Each longhouse village was an exact replica of the next, with the only distinguishing features being the actual location and the number of apartments and longhouses in each community. At the time of settlement in 1999, every community had its own church and its own kindergarten as well as a bus shelter, but as yet no buses. The orientation of longhouses is no longer towards the river: in the Lahanan case the two rows of three longhouse blocks face each other and the rear of each apartment is accessible by road. In their new cultural setting it is not appropriate, for the river is not used for transport. Roads link the various longhouse communities to each other and the wider world, and because of the way the longhouses are constructed, residents enter from the rear rather than the front.

Before settling in, the new residents had already paid deposits for water and electricity. While they had temporary access to a free supply of water for the first two days of residence in order to hose down their incredibly dusty living quarters, they now face regular monthly bills for both services. Both charges have caused considerable resentment. On the Balui, water was a free resource with each household supplied with a single tap. People appreciate the availability of electricity for the access it provides to amenities of modern living - lighting, fans, freezers, washing machines and rice cookers. But as they had to make a considerable sacrifice for the sake of development of the Bakun hydro-electric scheme, they do not see that they should bear the burden of paying for electricity. Those with experience of modern life in the towns and cities are more accepting of these costs but were almost universally of the view that they should have been given a few months' grace to adapt to life in the new settlement before being burdened with the charges.

Within the first month at the new settlement people had already become intensely anxious about the lack of income. Although all had compensation funds stored in bank accounts, they resented the fact that they would continually have to dip into these accounts for living expenses well into the future, and that these funds might be totally depleted before they could establish a regular income. One young mother reported that "*Ata lingget. Tanah elau sukup, buna tanah anti.*" "We have no money. The land (allotted) is insufficient, there is plenty of land available back there (Long Pangai): the land, three acres per *tilung* is inadequate for our needs." People used to collecting their own supplies of food from the river and jungle were now forced to buy everything: rice, fish, meat,

fruit and vegetables. Women from longer established longhouses who had had sufficient time to plant and harvest a crop or two, regularly engaged in peripatetic trade selling vegetables and snacks, but meat and fish were much more difficult and more expensive to obtain. The river, Sungai Asap, is too small a waterway to be useful for either transport or fishing although some people made what use they could of its resources.

Peoples' stories about compensation for housing and land were confused, expressing their bewilderment about the whole process. Prior to departure from Long Pangai they had received 30% of the compensation due on their lands and crops, the remaining 70% finalized not long after resettlement, but this was paid over in a rather piecemeal fashion. About three weeks after their arrival in the settlement each household received a check to finalize the payment for their cocoa garden sums, ranging from a couple of hundred to about three thousand ringgit. A government valuation was placed on each apartment in the old settlement and this was offset against the RM 50,000 being charged for the apartments at the new settlement. Many considered the charge outrageous when compared with the value of low-cost housing in Kuching, even more so when compared with low-cost housing in Peninsular Malaysia. One couple reported obtaining a valuation of RM 40,000 for their old apartment and had only a further RM 10,000 to pay on their new one. Other valuations ranged from RM 20,000 to over RM 100,000. One *tilung* valued at RM 80,000 had been occupied by three families who each had new accommodations in the settlement, or apartments worth a total of RM 156,000. The remainder was scheduled for payment in installments starting in 2005. By 2006 it was clear that no one had in fact paid any installments. All Lahanan had built a new *tilung* in the last few years in anticipation of the resettlement and to maximize their chances of a higher valuation and consequent compensation. People did receive some money for their land, burial sites, field huts and crops before resettlement and this supplied them with the cash they needed until able to earn an income.

By 2002 compensation for communal land held under Native Customary Rights had not yet been paid out to individuals. The sum has been held in trust but a system has been devised to split up the amount by a special Lahanan committee. Each longhouse establishes its own system. The Lahanan one has been worked out in various ways, according to residential unit, marital links, and per individual—those with large families gaining a larger share. All those with *tilung* in the new settlement, including those who are non-resident, are entitled to the same shares as residents.

The duties of the headman have changed considerably since the move to the new settlement. The work now involves an increasing number of meetings to discuss issues of concern to the entire settlement, and the headman has to delegate work to others in the community to a much greater degree than in the past. Fortunately there are a number of ex-teachers and civil servants with the education and skills to assist in this regard and there were a number of social institutions organized by local government already in place. The present headman's sister has taken over the role of entertaining guests on behalf of the longhouse, and representing the longhouse elite at events outside the longhouse, leaving her brother, deputy headman and various committees to deal with the day-to-day running of the longhouse.

The majority of Orang Ulu form hierarchical societies but in these democratic

times the apartments belonging to the elite were exact replicas of those belonging to the commoners. In most cases, however, elite families were able to afford more apartments and nuclear families almost invariably had a separate apartment of their own. This is in marked contrast to the past where elite families favored a multi-layered, but spacious apartment, as indeed did most commoners. The idea of independent nuclear families is one which has rapidly found favor particularly among the young. In the new settlement, provided they had sufficient money to purchase more than one apartment, families are located alongside other family members so that they have the best of both worlds: some independence and close proximity to other family members. Many young married couples feel very positive about having accommodations separate from their parents, and are free to decorate them according to their own taste and budget, and their parents are pleased to at least be living in adjacent quarters, something which had not always been possible at their old longhouse village.

Although each household started life in the new settlement with an apartment that was a mirror image of its neighbor, a new hierarchy of wealth has quickly emerged with apartments ranging from bare walls and floors with no furniture to elaborate melamine lined walls with fancy lighting, ornate cornices and leather lounge suites, a clear indication of the increasing disparity between those who have and those who don't. Some families, particularly those from the elite, had been able to accumulate some wealth by negotiating more favorable compensation payments, but the major avenue of wealth has been outside work, and children married to spouses with wages. Those fortunate enough to have family members working and residing in the larger towns have borrowed money to finance transport businesses. Absentee owners allow kin to cultivate their land in return for a share of the proceeds. But in general the possibilities of acquiring wealth through diligence and knowledge of farming have drastically declined because of the lack of land and the lack of guidance in how best to exploit that land.

There was very little future planning about how the settlers could make a living once they had been moved. Filling niche markets and wage labor on palm oil plantations were two general proposals made, but neither was well thought out and little consultation had been made with the new settlers. The idea that they might become modern commercial farmers with only three acres was also given a hearing, but no practical plans were made for execution. The settlers were expected to acquire a cash income from crops such as cocoa and pepper as they had previously, but with much reduced landholdings on relatively infertile soil. The idea of supplying niche markets was focused on vegetable growing for urban centers, or the production of soy bean curd, noodles and other small producer commodities. The first, aimed at supplying high-quality vegetables in the Bintulu market, failed because the vegetables were not of consistently high enough standard for Chinese traders to set up permanent relationships. The second never got off the ground because the goods were not only designed for a local market but also because the raw materials were not freely available at a reasonable price. The interests of resident and non-resident landholders are frequently in conflict: residents in general want to retain their three-acre lots for commercial crops such as pepper and vegetables and also grow a little hill rice for household consumption. Non-resident family members are usually reluctant to permit resident family members to deplete the quality of their land

by growing hill rice, even if they help to eat the proceeds, and resident family members are generally reluctant to get involved in the heavy labor requirements involved in establishing and maintaining a pepper garden for a family member.

With such a shortage of land, the longhouse people are gradually encroaching on what has been formally designated as State land. They make no payment for it, treating it in much the same way as their land formerly designated communal land. The primary forest in the hills behind the second longhouse block belongs to the government and they are not supposed to farm it. The State land to the rear of the first longhouse block, called *tanah payung*, lies between the longhouse and the household lots. Some longhouse apartments have established pepper gardens on this land and others are keen to plant hill rice. The government appears to have made little attempt to restrict the planting of commercial crops but strongly disapproves of growing subsistence crops.

There are few jobs available in the community and the recompense for some is totally inadequate. A kindergarten teacher, for example, initially earned only MR 100 a month. Higher rewards are available to those with some experience and the freedom to work outside the community. For example, one single mother has a job as cook in a timber camp where she earns MR 700 a month plus free board and lodging. Another, a widow, works at the new Sibuluan airport as executive cook, leaving her adopted child to be cared for by her married daughter. Employment for males is generally better recompensed and more freely available. But the men have to leave the longhouse and set up living quarters in the towns or timber camps where employment is available.

Women have been left behind in the development process. Men earlier took control over many technological innovations such as chainsaws, outboard motors, and herbicides. Women have, however, learnt to operate generators, gas stoves and household electrical equipment, and before too long a few women will undoubtedly learn to drive. Formerly women played a prominent role in their subsistence economy; in cultivation, collecting foodstuffs, and numerous handicraft activities as well as playing a very prominent role in social and ritual activities. Women are now totally dependent on men for transport: none of them drive vehicles, men are generally designated as the head of the household, they no longer have access to the materials for handicrafts and those mixed gender communal exchange activities which underpinned their economy in the Balui have now, where they still exist, largely been replaced by single gender activities. Women work where they can, but the opportunities are limited and the economic rewards seldom worth the effort.

In the early days of the settlement, transport to and from Bintulu, the major town in the region, was by express boat and hired landcruiser at a minimum cost of RM 50. After the Bintulu-Bakun highway was upgraded in 2000, the cost of long-distance travel declined to RM 30. In 2001 a bus service with a fare costing RM 25 was instituted, but consumers felt that the slightly reduced cost did not compensate for the inconvenience. In the interim, with increased competition from numerous hire vehicles, costs have further declined and the bus service is even less attractive. By 2002, transport within the BRS was still problematic, with no public transport and people reliant on local entrepreneurs to supply the need. At the time, five Lahanan households operated hire vehicles, but generally agreed that it is a difficult way to make a living. Within the

settlement, roads are very bad and the fares are too low to make a comfortable living. Vehicle owners also feel obliged to make a lot of neighborly trips for which they receive no monetary compensation. Shared transport from the Lahanan longhouse to the clinic in the BRS headquarters costs RM 1 per person. A standard fare to Belaga costs RM 25, RM 20 from Tubau to Sungei Asap, RM 30 to Long Murum. They expect the fares to be a lot cheaper once the roads are improved. People seldom stay overnight at other longhouses now as land transport can bring them home, unlike the longboats of the past which didn't travel at night except in emergencies.

The new longhouses are still very vulnerable to fire although firebreaks between sections have worked to Lahanan advantage. In January 2001 a fifteen *tilung* longhouse section of the Lahanan community was destroyed by fire. A temporary *luvung* was set up very rapidly within a day or two of the conflagration. The government supplied building materials and the victims and people from the longhouse quickly put together the structure. The housing was rather slum-like, but quite adequate for temporary accommodations with a pipe for water and access to electricity. Three of the fifteen households chose to take up residence in field accommodations or buildings erected for other purposes. Reconstruction of the block began in June 2001 and a largely Indonesian labor force completed it within a year.

At the time of the fire most adults were working in the fields but even those at home, in the confusion, fled, managing to rescue nothing apart from their children. One man lamented the video camera and tapes destroyed in the fire, others all their worldly goods. Generous donations from the government and family members residing in towns enabled many to replace goods, including gold jewelry and clothing. This, the second fire in the new settlement, damaged RM 850,000 worth of property and made 87 people homeless. Residents consequently complained about the long delay in setting up a fire station in the BRS, the inadequacy of water supplies to some of the longhouse villages, particularly Levu Lahanan, and the lack of any training to contain outbreaks of fire. Residents realized that, failing government intervention to set up a fire station on the allotted site, they would have to set up a voluntary fire service themselves. Under the circumstances, this was a very difficult task as the only public telephone available at the time was located in the community service center for the BRS. By 2005 public call-boxes had been installed in each longhouse community, but by April 2006 the public call-box at Levu Lahanan was out of order and had been so for some time.

At the time of resettlement, the Lahanan population of more or less permanent residents numbered 469 living in 89 separate *tilung*. The higher figure of 530 included part-time residents, some of whom only maintained a standing in the community by returning once a year. Other part-time residents worked in camps or settlements nearby and returned on a more regular basis. By 2006 the "resident" population in the new settlement had increased, but there was also a very high frequency of people moving in and out in response to employment opportunities beyond the community.

As far as most families are concerned, the primary benefit of living in the new settlement is improved access to clinics and hospitals. All parents of young children pay regular visits to clinics and hospitals at any sign of illness, even a common cold. Those seeking private or hospital treatment travel to Bintulu, only a two-and-a-half-

hour journey away. Views about the changes in diet since the move are mixed. Children, thanks to the education provided by the Health Clinics interested in inhibiting cavities, no longer consume many sweets. Sweets, however, have been replaced by savory and fat-laden snacks, and some children are showing signs of the obesity which plagues the West. People frequently lament the lack of fresh fish and game, particularly wild boar, and easy access to jungle products such as rattan. Nevertheless, the plentiful supply of vegetables means they have sufficient food for side-dishes even if they are regarded as a poor substitute for more desirable foods.

By the time the Lahanan people left Long Pangai there were less than twenty practitioners of the Bungan cult. Numbers had declined even further within two years of settlement with even the *dayong* abandoning many rituals in face of the overwhelming conversion to Catholicism. With the erection of a large church in each settlement, Christianity plays a much more dominant role in the settlement longhouses than it did in the past. In 2002 a Roman Catholic catechist (*gembala*) was conducting religious classes for children during their school holidays. Parents in general were somewhat ambivalent about this particular aspect of their much higher exposure to religion. But in other

settings a sizeable proportion of the community feels very positive about the greater part Christianity now plays in their lives. In the early years of the settlement, attendance at the Sunday service was usually high and the Roman Catholic Church service had taken on many aspects of evangelical or charismatic Christianity, with a loud band accompanying the hymns, fervent affirmation of beliefs, and the shaking of hands at the completion of the service. But by 2006 attendance had declined and the services lacked their former vitality.

In the decade prior to resettlement significant changes in marriage patterns emerged and this trend has



Plate 7: A Kayan Baram guest rolling a cheroot at a longhouse wedding, Levu Lahanan, Sungai Asap 10 September, 2001.

continued. Local Orang Ulu are increasingly marrying spouses of ethnic groups well outside the range of earlier times, with some marriages contracted with people of different religions (mainly nominal Muslims), different states (Sabah) and even different countries (the Philippines and Indonesia). In the ten year period prior to the move, many young women and men worked in timber camps and contracted what turned out to be temporary marriages with either Indonesians or Filipinos who either had wives back home or could not extend their work permits. But many then went on to contract marriages within the Sarawak community. Young women have become increasingly concerned about only marrying a man with paid employment. Many young men are keen to marry, but know they cannot afford the expense or responsibility. A significant number of families consist of an unmarried or divorced woman with a number of children struggling to make a living with the support of male siblings, while young idle bachelors are a frequent sight in most communities.

Traditional practices such as adoption are still frequent but almost universally now have formal sanction under State regulations and many are being adopted from outside the longhouse community. With the increase in the number of *tilung*, young couples have increased privacy and although most still share sleeping space with their young children, the greater privacy, approaching that experienced in the field huts, will undoubtedly affect the frequency of sexual relations and consequently fertility.

“We are all Orang Ulu now, though once we were different. Now we are all of one voice.” This sentiment, frequently expressed by urban-based Orang Ulu, encapsulates the current pressures the longhouse communities within the BRS feel to conform to state ideologies to become part of a larger identity. As part of reinforcing a single identity there were moves, later abandoned, to formalize the use of one language to replace Malay as a medium of instruction in schools. As new settlers, all BRS communities face similar problems and a feeling of unity between communities is promoted by the presence of close relatives in nearby settlements. The increase in inter-community marriages also encourages allegiance to a wider social grouping.

But bigger is not necessarily better. While each individual longhouse has its own kindergarten, or at least the building to house one in the future, the two new larger primary schools which replace the numerous primary schools on the Balui are a source of considerable alienation for young children. Following a pattern established on the Balui, the children are weekly boarders, returning home to their families on the weekend. Many children find the larger schools of the settlement alienating, the conditions less comfortable than most of their homes, the lack of parental support on a daily basis distressing, and the responsibility of maintaining their boarding quarters burdensome. From the point of view of teaching staff, homework can be monitored and children are not left unsupervised by parents at work in the fields and elsewhere.

After the early days of bewilderment in the new settlement and a profound sense of displacement, disorientation and lack of control, the Lahanan gradually re-learned to exert some control over their own lives. One of the things all the longhouse communities on the Balui valued was their independence as small-scale communities to a large degree autonomous and in control of their own lives. In a move towards exerting independence and individualization, people are making fairly extensive renovations to

their new longhouses. In the Lahanan case, in the first three years at Sungai Asap they erected a passageway linking the two rows of longhouse blocks, widened the verandahs, and erected new balustrades for each individual block. People have lined the bare wooden walls of the *tilung*, some have added fancy cornices and others have broken down the partition between *tilung* to make a more spacious room for the extended family. Many people have also erected partitions (in the upstairs area assigned for sleeping) between *siluk* for privacy. Of course, there are yet others who have made no alterations at all. One household, for example, lives in a *tilung* which is as yet not painted and it looks as though the upper storey remains unused, the entire family preferring to sleep in the *tilung* proper. Some *tilung* have already removed the joint wall between *tilung* and are operating as one, more or less on the same principle as the *jahan* of the old longhouse. The fence between *tilung* in the common passageway between two *tilung* has in some cases been removed or lowered. One of the most substantial *tilung*, three made into one, consisted of melamine-covered walls, linoleum flooring with a wooden parquet pattern, elaborate ceilings with cornices and roses, and the fly-screen windows replaced with vented glass. People are relatively rapidly making their own mark on their dwellings, and even more so on the landscape. Both communal and individual labor have been devoted to making the formerly desolate area between the two rows of longhouses into a garden incorporating playing fields and an array of tropical flowers and shrubs.

But even three years after their resettlement, residents' complaints continued to echo those of their initial impressions. One young, recently divorced mother eloquently expressed the major grievance with the new settlement. "*Pegieng melai, ata lingget, ata kayau melai minyak ges, elau murip. An nayu buna tanah anti*" 'We are always buying goods/have to buy everything, don't have any cash, there is no firewood so we have to buy gas, we can't make a living. Upriver (i.e. the old settlement) we had lots of land there.' Admittedly, vegetable foods are much more plentiful as land and labor formerly used for cash crops have been diverted to growing their own foodstuffs. The short-term requirements of obtaining cash to pay for water and electricity, rice, meat, and fish have women as well as men busy with cultivating vegetables and preparing snacks for sale. Lahanan women were selling fruits and vegetables in their own longhouse and to other more recently settled longhouses who had not yet had the opportunity to set up their own gardens. Such employment is inevitably short-term.

People have used compensation money to buy expensive commodities such as automatic washing machines. The somewhat unreliable water supply often means that the machines are used only to spin the washing dry to speed up the drying process, rather than for a full machine cycle. One young mother does not have a washing machine to cope with an endless demand of underpants and has used disposable nappies since birth, a huge dent in household income as they are purchased at the local Chinese supermarket, the Melegai. Food preparation still takes a long time despite the use of two-burner gas stoves and electric rice cookers. The lack of employment and the security of compensation money in savings accounts means that shopping has become "retail therapy" and, unlike the shopping expedition to the Belaga bazaar of the past in which time constraints limited purchases to essentials with the odd indulgence, the shopping expedition to the local Chinese store in the new settlement involves aimless wandering

round buying up goods of minimal value including snack foods and sweets and anything the children may desire. In the past they recognized that goods became cheaper the further one went downriver, and they are rapidly coming to the realization that the same applies in their new circumstances. Goods in Bintulu, Miri and Kuching sell for a lot less than they do in the settlement.

By 2006 Lahanan complaints about the standards of the dwellings were muted, as were their complaints about the size of their farm lands and the distance from the longhouse. Grievances voiced to local politicians had been consistently subdued by suggestions that if they created a fuss they would antagonize the State leader who would stubbornly refuse to do anything to remedy the situation. The elderly continue to have strong feelings of nostalgia for the old life on the Balui. The complaints of mature women and men at the peak of their powers have declined as they strive to earn a living at the new settlement and concentrate on nurturing their new environment. Children quickly forget all that made life attractive in the “ulu” and focus on contemporary attractions. Bitterness about the enforced move is largely submerged, but the occasional outburst occurs over specific issues: the lack of land, lack of employment and lack of cash. There are a number of individuals of both *panyin* and *laja* rank who are vociferous internal critics of the political process involved in resettlement, but increasingly they are confined to the older members of the community and they curb their animosity towards the BRS in more public contexts. Although the communities face an uncertain future, the children, their parents and the mature couples at the peak of their powers are dealing with their new circumstances as best they can.

By 2006 many members of the community were more sanguine about their socio-economic future. Material signs of wealth included 23 private telephones, a number had ASTRO TV, washing machines, electric rice cookers and other modern conveniences. The number of vehicles has skyrocketed. The community had drawn on its reputation as one with a strong ethic of group work and community leaders, supported by the agricultural department, had become heavily involved in the production of a wide variety of vegetables for the Bakun market. Sales are organized by one household with an outstanding reputation for hard work. This family sorts and packs the vegetables and transports them to Bakun twice a week. Those which are not sold at the Bakun market are sold by the bundle in the shops near the school and clinic on an individual basis.

The Agricultural Department has sponsored a ginger (*halia*) scheme in the Bakun Resettlement Scheme and Levu Lahanan was one of the sites selected because of the Lahanan's good track record in agricultural activities and energetic team work, compared with other longhouse communities in the new settlement. The work involved a lot of time and effort in terracing the relatively steep slopes in the vicinity of the longhouse. In contrast to the vegetable sales which have been conducted by individuals on behalf of the community, FAMA will purchase all the ginger for sale and distribution. At the time of writing, those involved in the scheme are preparing to harvest their first crop.

In October 2006 three Lahanan living in urban centers made a move to register their own Lahanan association with the Register of Societies. They, and others in the community, were keen to re-assert their unique cultural identity. In contrast to the Kayan

and Kenyah which are large enough ethnic groups to retain an identity without effort, the Lahanan, in an era which encourages the all-encompassing Orang Ulu identity, want to maintain a separate ethnic and, even more importantly, community identity. Numerous individuals stress their unique cultural values, such as their willingness to work together for mutual benefits, specific cultural artifacts such as dances and games, and wish to retain their own language even though they recognize that it continues to be influenced by other languages around them. They, like many communities before them, wish to promote difference. Their application succeeded and despite what is commonly viewed as the “hybridizing imperative that all ‘communities’ (that is, ethnic groups) in Sarawak must strive to take their place in the *mainstream* of Malaysian society” (Brosius 2006: 286), there is a counter discourse which encourages difference.

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Alexander, Jennifer and Paul Alexander

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