



From Island to Nation-state Formations and Developmentalism: Penan Story-telling as Narratives of ‘territorialising space’ and Reclaiming Stewardship

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Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to position Penan story-telling in the context of the evolution of Borneo from an island to that of a nation-state formation, defined ultimately by the grand narratives of Malaysian developmentalism. The paper initially addresses the historical picture of this transformation. It also critically interrogates the question of epistemology in relation to the anthropology of 'the Other', specifically the methodology of research on indigenous society. Against the dominant state-capital narrations of development, the paper moves towards a postmodernist/storytelling ethnography of Penan de-territorialisation. It is argued that indigenous counter-narratives are equally capable of generating their own legitimate forms of knowledge and discourse on development. By adding to the Penan ethnographic base that has been paved by scholars such as Langub and Brosius, I foreground my analysis of Penan de-territorialisation based on my fieldwork in the Ulu Baram area of Sarawak, where I present an overview of the impact of the state-sponsored modernisation process (read: developmentalism) on the Penan traditional landscape and *communitas*. My argument on Penan de-territorialisation is further empowered by the storytelling of Penghulu James, which is a representation of an indigenous notion of place, space and territory. This may also be seen as a defence of Penan claims to 'stewardship' over the land despite their traditional status as non-cultivators, to contest the current bureaucratic 'rational legal' and official discourse which governs the present Penan landscape. The paper calls for the role of a de-colonising anthropology in mediating knowledge from the margins through the postmodernist texts and storytelling ethnography, to narrate not only the realities of de-territorialisation, but more importantly, the 're-territorializing' imaginings of indigenous society.

Keywords: *Anthropology; Communitas; Developmentalism; De-territorialisation; Ethnography; Narratives; Penan; Post-colonial Studies; Reclamation; Stewardship; Story-telling*

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Zawawi Ibrahim

From island to nation-state formation and developmentalism: Anthropology and indigenous counter-narrations

The island of Borneo was initially very much a part of the greater archipelago formation of the Malay world or what in popular usage is often referred to as the *Nusantara*, characterised by its own differentiated forms of pre-colonial 'state' and other indigenous notions of governance, including 'adat' (*masyarakat adat*) (Institut Dayakologi, 2001; Alcorn & Royo, 2000; Warren, 1987; Cleary & Eaton, 1995; Gautama & Kartika, 1999; Selatto, 2002; Andaya & Andaya, 2001). The nineteenth century saw in this part of the Malay world the increasing contestation between different imperialist imperatives over control of trade and sources of raw material and commodities in the region, and the concept of the 'sphere of influence' became a cornerstone of British diplomacy which served "to limit the commercial or political ambitions of rival powers while avoiding the expense of establishing additional outposts of empire" (Andaya & Andaya, 2001: 125). It would appear that by the beginning of the 19th century, while other parts of the region were rapidly becoming an integral part of the world economic system, "Borneo remained essentially marginal" (Cleary & Eaton, 1995: 45). Its indigenous cultures and politics, especially the coastal ones, had a long and rich tradition, with Brunei and Banjarmasin constituting powerful and influential presence well before the coming of the Europeans.

But in the course of the 19th century, the political boundaries of Borneo were substantially reshaped. At the root of these changes lay the role of a certain colonial adventurer, and the decline of influential sultanates on the island—especially Brunei, Banjarmasin, and later, Kutai – “these faded glories were a backlash to the political entities of Borneo- Rajah Brooke’s Sarawak, the British North Borneo Company and Dutch Borneo”, which were established “often through violence and bloodshed” (ibid, 47).

In the initial phase of the colonial engagement in the Malay world, the Anglo-Dutch Treaty with the Netherlands in 1824 did not mention Borneo and thus left its relationship to the Dutch and British spheres of influence “ambiguous” (ibid:128). With the vantage of hindsight, the Treaty stands as one of the key events in shaping the division of the Malay world and ultimately, the transformation of the imperial “spheres of influence” in *Nusantara* and present-day nation-states. In the context of Borneo, it manifests itself in its reconstitution into Sabah and Sarawak (which joined the Malaysian nation-state in 1963), Brunei (which remains a sovereign monarchic modern nation-state though retaining a much reduced land territory compared to the past, and Kalimantan (which, after becoming part the Indonesian nation-state after the latter wrested its independence from the Dutch in 1945, was divided into four provinces). It is not the focus here to detail the genealogy of Borneo history from island to nation-state transformation, as this has been done elsewhere (see Andaya & Andaya, 2002; Cleary & Eaton, 1995; Anton Widjaya, 2012). However for the purpose of this chapter, it is crucial to acknowledge the backdrop of the ‘grand narratives’ of the projection of empires and nation-states which frames the indigenous subjects of this paper and their counter-narrations and storytelling.

On the relationship between nation-states and indigenous communities, Stavenhagen (1994: 54) has argued that the tyranny of the nation-state unleashes itself through both ‘economic ethnocide’ and ‘cultural ethnocide’. ‘Economic ethnocide’ means that “all pre-modern forms of economic organization must necessarily disappear to make way for either private or multinational capitalism or state-planned socialism”. On the other hand,

‘cultural ethnocide’ means that “all subnational ethnic units must disappear to make way for an overarching nation-state (in which) development and nation-building have become the major economic and political ideologies”. Thus for Stavenhagen, both economic and cultural ethnocide “have been ethnocidal in that they imply the destruction and/or disappearance of non-integrated, separate ethnic units. This is frequently carried out in the name of national unity and integration, progress and of course, development”.

Elsewhere, similar views of the nation-state in relation to indigenous peoples have been echoed by Howitt, Connell and Hirsch in *Resources, Nations and Indigenous Peoples* (1996: 15), when they conclude that:

“(N)ation states assert that the ‘national interests’ justifies usurping indigenous peoples’ rights to self-determination, to say yes or no to propositions affecting them and to have a decisive say in their own futures. Throughout the region, governments have claimed indigenous lands, seas and resources as fundamental elements of their territorial integrity and economic and political sovereignty. Indigenous peoples’ assets, interests and property have been sold, leased, traded and despoiled; communities have been dispossessed, displaced and impoverished; lands have been submerged, cleared, fenced and degraded; seas, rivers and lakes have been polluted, denuded of life, exposed to exploitation by commercial and recreational fishers, and appropriated as national heritage, and commodified as an economic good; and even indigenous people themselves have been classified, subjected to repressive legislation... In these processes, nation-states, their political institutions and the private interests favoured by them have been empowered in national political life and international political and economic base.”

In the same vein, Duncan argues that in Southeast Asia, ‘civilizing the margins’ has become a common policy which seems to unite nation-states in their engagement with their respective ethnic minorities living on the periphery (Duncan, 2008).

Hence for the indigenous communities of Malaysia, it is not surprising that the contestation against the nation-state is something that the Orang Asli and Penan share in common even though the former are located in Peninsular Malaysia, whilst the latter are the inhabitants of the rainforests of Sarawak. Below I share the eloquent reflections of Romeli, an educated indigenous Semelai from Pahang, Peninsular Malaysia as he tells the Semelai story of ‘experiencing’ the nation-state:

“When I was small, we never talked about land rights...these things did not exist. I was free to do what I wanted. I could move here and there as what my old folks used to do before. But today Orang Asli are faced with a foreign concept of land which was imposed from outside, and which they had never before imagined. Before Orang Asli used to say: “This is my land and it has no borders”. Yes, no borders, maybe during our time before, we were already living in a borderless world. But now we are trapped in the concept of the nation- state. With the nation-state, Orang Asli have to accept the reality that the present system of land tenure is one that is demanded by the nation. But until today, the Semelai, for instance, do not accept the system imposed upon us by the nation-state. Why should we accept a concept that was never part of our vocabulary? We have been forced to accept it. And when we talk about the land, no Semelai tells me that he wants a title over his land. “Why should we have a title? he asked. “For isn’t the land given to us by God? Anyone has a right to cultivate and own without having to show any evidence as long as the community recognises these rights as his!”. Thus among the Semelai, what has emerged is some sort of conflict with the nation-state...they refuse to accept what the nation-state is trying to impose on them”.

In my journey as an anthropologist, I have never ceased to be amazed by the eloquence of the indigenous people, whose narratives I have diligently been recording in celebration of the birth of the new postmodernist ethnography (Fontana, 1994: 218-220; see Zawawi, 1996; 1997; 1998a; 1998b; 2000; 2001). In many ways, the task of the anthropologist is made easier by the presence of these articulate speakers in their midst, for what they express are not only the facts but also the wisdom and knowledge of their landscape. For a long time, anthropology, as we were reminded way back by the insightful Levi Strauss, has created the indigenous as ‘objects’ of its research enterprise. However, the more I listen to their narratives, the more I have come to believe that it is these ‘subjects’ rather than the anthropologists, who have been the true bearers of knowledge of the field. To a large extent, there has been a degree of mythologising which privileges the anthropologist as the authority who translates, interprets, and gives ‘added value’ to the raw data solicited from fieldwork. In so doing, the anthropologist apparently renders

respectability to indigenous narratives and forms of knowledge, elevating them to the status of 'scientific knowledge'. This has been a part of the baggage of 'orientalism' and the colonising methodologies that has trapped western anthropology since its birth when dealing with indigenous people (Smith, 1999), and in the representation of 'the Other' (Hallam and Street, 2000).

A critical epistemological question revolves around the imperative for Asian scholarship to decolonise itself from orientalist and Eurocentric forms of knowledge, the western discourse of the non-European that was eloquently critiqued in the influential writings of Edward Said (Said, 1979; Syed Farid Alatas, 2006: 42–45; Cohn, 1996; Zawawi Ibrahim & NoorShah M.S, 2012) From the Asian world, the sociology of knowledge – based on arguments by S.H. Alatas (1977) that preceded Said's *Orientalism* and the perspectives reconstituted from various disciplines under the rubric of cultural studies – has played a vital role in advancing new understandings of how and why colonial knowledge is produced and reproduced. Within western anthropology, notwithstanding its early functionalist and classical author-driven ethnography associated with the British School of Anthropology, there has also been a long tradition of reflexivity and auto-critique, from anthropologists such as Peter Worsley (1966), Kathleen Gough (1968), Dell Hymes (1969) and Talal Asad (1973), culminating in the postmodernist turn led by George Marcus, James Clifford and Michael Fischer (see Marcus and Fischer, 1986; Clifford and Marcus, 1986. This new wave of postmodernist anthropology drew inspiration not only from Said but also from the deconstructionist ideas of Michel Foucault (Gardner and Lewis, 1996: 21–24). Postmodernist ethnography has since become in vogue, usurping the author-driven methodology of classical participant observation functionalist anthropology (Fontana, 1994).

Within postcolonial anthropology, for instance, Linda Tuhiwai Smith, representing the new imaginings of Maori indigenous anthropology, launches a vehement critique against colonial modes of epistemology and methodology that have rendered Maoris as mere objects of research. The 'calling' by Tuhiwai Smith is to move the 'indigenous' as 'agency' and 'subjects' in their own right, thereby empowering them to determine their

own 'indigenous' research agenda through 'decolonising methodologies' (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). In this context, I believe that Smith has moved her methodology beyond postmodernist ethnography. Of the 25 indigenous projects that she advocates, they emphasise not only 'storytelling', but also 'claiming', 'remembering', 'indigenising', 'writing' and 'sharing'. Among the Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia, for instance, indigenous storytelling and writing has already assumed momentum (see Zawawi Ibrahim, 1996; 1998b; Akiya, 2001; 2007). In Borneo, the island which locates the Penan, the Dayak intellengenstia of Kalimantan Indonesia have long been active in 'writing their own culture' through the NGO movement, *Pancur Kasih*, and the formation of their own research and publication wing, IDR- *Institute of Dayakology Research and Development* which publishes the monthly *Kalimantan Review*, and books – all of which articulate and attempt to represent Dayak perspectives on culture and development (see Tamayo et.al., 2012).

Marsden, in his review of the place of indigenous knowledge under the domination of conventional scientific thought, echoes the sentiments of the Maori anthropologist when he remarks that

(u)ntil relatively recently the dominant paradigm, which stressed the superiority of western objective, scientific rationality consigned 'other' forms of knowledge to positions of inferiority. It seems that the scientific tradition itself is the one that 'traditional', endowed with magic, religion and superstition, as its tenets turn into dogma and as intellectual creativity is thereby stifled. 'Local', 'traditional or 'folk' knowledge is no longer the irrelevant vestige 'backward' people who have not yet made the transition to modernity ,but the vital well springs and resource bank from which alternative futures might be built (1994: 45-46).

This paper is an attempt to decentre Penan's development discourse away from the dominant state–capital grand narrations of 'modernization' couched in the language of the 'development industry' (Crush, 1995: 5) or the 'development project' (McMichael, 1996: 77-143). These hegemonic texts of developmentalism, written in representational language are a 'language of metaphor, image, allusion, fantasy and rhetoric', and they 'have always been avowedly strategic and tactical - promoting, licensing and justifying certain interventions and practices, delegitimising and excluding others (Crush, 1995: 4-5). Out of this deliberated packaging, indigenous cultures are seen as 'undeveloped',

‘static’ or ‘fatalist’ and ‘natives’ are depicted as ‘lazy’ (S. H. Alatas, 1977). For, in the words of Jonathan Crush (1995: 9),

deeply embedded within development discourse...was a set of recurrent images of ‘the traditional’ which were fundamentally ahistorical and space-sensitive. Collectivities (groups, societies, territories, tribes, classes, communities) were assigned a set of characteristics which suggested not only a low place in the hierarchy of achievement but a terminal condition of stasis, forever becalmed until the healing winds of modernity and development began to blow.

Ideas of development therefore do not arise in a vacuum but are mediated via a hierarchical apparatus of knowledge production and consumption, as has been succinctly synthesised by Claude Alvares’s (1992: 230) Foucaultian remark that ‘knowledge is power, but power is also knowledge. Power decides what is knowledge and not knowledge’. It is in this deconstructionist spirit that we feel moved, in this paper, to unravel an alternative, but subjugated discourse on development - drawing from the Penan’s experience of the Malaysian nation-state’s ‘modernisation’ process.

“Civilising the (Penan) margins” and the evolution of the Development Discourse: From Brooke, formal colonialism and Nation-state rule in Sarawak

In an instructive article, Brosius (2000) has outlined the different stages of Sarawak’s evolution from the period of Brooke and the White Rajah, to the British colonial period, culminating to present-day nation-state, the era of developmentalism – and their respective impact on local and Penan society.

The Brooke period (1841-1946), covered over 100 years. The early Brooke period was primarily concerned with pacification and the establishment of government authority throughout the expanding realm – “piracy and headhunting were both commonplace ...and many indigenous communities steadfastly resisted the establishment of Brooke rule” (ibid:4). Under the rule of the second Rajah Brooke, both planting and mining as well as the emigration of Chinese were encouraged, but there was also strong opposition against large-scale European-run commercial plantations, based on the belief that these were antithetical to the interests of the indigenous communities (Reece, cited in Brosius,

ibid: 4-5). It seems that before the 1930s, ‘an ideology of preservation’ prevailed. Brosius detected a strong strain of *Penan exceptionalism* in this early phase of Brooke rule, stating that “(a)lone among indigenous interior communities in not practicing headhunting, and conspicuously timid in their relations with outsiders, Penan were viewed as an ‘inoffensive’ people apart, always reclusive and in need of special protection, both from headhunting raids and from exploitation by longhouse communities” (ibid: 11). Through government-supervised trade meetings (*tamu*) begun in 1906 in the Baram district, held three or four times a year at mutually agreed places, Brooke colonial officials met up with the Penan communities with “the explicit purpose...to protect Penan from exploitation” (ibid:12). Apparently, the most important aspect of *tamu*, apart from trading, tax-collection and the provision of medical services for the Penan, “were the dialogue sessions” in which colonial officials and Penan exchanged news and pertinent information – these *tamu* sessions became central to the lives of the Penan and continued for some 70 years (Langub, cited in Brosius, ibid:13). In my own research in the Ulu Baram, many of the older Penans remember with fondness the old days of *tamu* under the Brooke regime, in contrast to the present day when hardly any politician or Malaysian state official makes an appearance in their village, except during political elections (Zawawi & NoorShah, 2012). Brosius recounts that “(a)mong the most common themes expressed in contemporary Eastern Penan accounts of *tamu* are the messages of assurance given to them by colonial officers...how colonial officers regularly told them to bring their problems to them if anyone bothered them..that the government would look after them and protect them” (2000:13).

After 1930s there was a new shift of emphasis under the Brooke regime – moving from ‘conservation’ or ‘preservation’ to one of ‘transformation’, that “the appropriate role of government was one of outreach and improvement”, that native communities should be transformed through education, medical care and the like, approaching towards what might now be termed as ‘development’. In terms of Penan governance at the end of the Brooke regime, this shift represents a new rethinking about native ‘welfare’ and Penan ‘development’ – *tamu* then became more oriented towards “bringing these nomads together and convincing them that Government wants to help them but until they agree to

give up their nomadic existence little can be done to help them” (District Officer Baram in a 1949 memorandum, cited in Borsius, *ibid*, 14).

The Brooke period was replaced by The British colonial period (1946-1963), which began with the ceding of Sarawak to the crown in 1946 until its entry into the Malaysian nation-state in 1963. There began an articulation of a more consistent and explicit concept of development “focused on a discourse of public works: that development entailed the provision of government services that served the rural and urban publics (which was) in the end, a matter of good administration and civil service” (*ibid*, 7). It was also in the beginning of this period, that *The Land Classification Ordinance, 1948*, was passed by the colonial government, in which under the classification of *Native Customary Land*, the following clause (a) *Land in which native customary rights, whether communal or otherwise, have lawfully been created prior to the 1st day of January, 1958, and still subsist as such*” (Ezra Uda, 2012:109) continues to have radical ramifications in terms of Penan stewardship and their rights to the land on which they as nomadic non-cultivators have been traversing in Sarawak.

Borsius emphasises that under Crown rule, the official “desirability for Penan to settle” and give up their nomadic ways continued throughout the 1960s. Towards the end of colonial rule, the 1960s was apparently a decade of enormous change for the Penans: “In the late 1950s perhaps 70-80% of Eastern and Western Penan were still nomadic. Most settled during the 1960s. Today fewer than 400 Penan, less than 5% of the total, remain fully nomadic” (Borsius, 2000:15).

The colonial period ended in 1963, culminating with the entry of Sarawak into the Malaysian nation-state. The years 1963-1975 marked the early Malaysian period, whilst the period from 1975 until present day represents the contemporary Malaysian nation-state governance. The early Malaysian period was marked by “a rationalized and extensified variation on the colonial-era public works approach to development, which depended...on the civil service for implementation”, with greater emphasis to bring development and civic awareness to the rural areas. Hence the 1970s was a period of

government bringing in a range of development initiatives to the settled Penan communities. These range from minor rural projects (materials for longhouse projects, outboard motors, chainsaws, piped water, toilets), to agricultural extension, the construction of schools and clinics, including the flying doctor service.

The 1975-contemporary Malaysian period ushers into Sarawak “ a discourse of development that is ever more politicized ...increasingly taken from the realms of the civil service and tied to the goals of politicians” and together with this transformation is “an increased incursion of national development discourse”, and “A theme that dominates State development/political/civic discourse more than other element is the idea “that various “communities” should have to take their place in the mainstream of Malaysian society” (Brosius, 2000: 8-9). For the Penans, it implies the need to be ‘mainstreamed’, “to catch up” with the development of other ethnic communities in the state and nation-state. At the level of the state, this was defined by the Chief Minister’s “politics of development’, whilst at the national/nation-state level, it was identified with Prime Minister’s Mahathir’s ‘grand design’ of “Malaysia Incorporated” and the push towards vision 2020- the emergence of Malaysia as a newly industrialised nation. The genesis of this transformation was driven through the state-engineered New Economic Policy (NEP) introduced in 1970 as a strategy to restructure Malaysian ‘plural society’ via state intervention, through the creation of a *Bumiputera* (Malay) capitalist class so as to balance the economic dominance of the Chinese, and also to abolish poverty irrespective of race. It was clear that as the NEP evolved, the policy also created its own version of capital accumulation which was forged by statism (the creation of ‘bureaucratic capitalists), and hybridized by the likes of rentier capitalism, authoritarianism, political patronage, cronyism and money politics (see Gomez and Jomo, 1999) with radical implications for the identity of the indigenous people in the east Malaysian states of Sarawak and Sabah in Borneo (Zawawi, 2013). Elsewhere I have also discussed the emergence of a ‘developmentalist state’ in Malaysia following the template proposed by Leftwich (Zawawi and Sharifah Zaleha, 2009:48; Leftwich, 2000: 167,176).

From the point of view of the ‘grand narratives’ of the nation-state’s notion of development, the Penan appear as “an ungrounded people who wander aimlessly through the forest in search of food, living a hand-to-hand mouth existence, a people without history and a sense of place” (Brosius, 2000:22), and “Officials speak of Penan ‘attitudes’ and ‘mentality’, and Penan ‘confusion’ over what is best for them. Indeed “(d)evelopment is portrayed as an issue of convincing Penan of the benefits of development” (ibid, 17). But as Andrew Aeria asserts (2005:186-91), the dominant model propelled by the NEP has been regularly contested and confronted by indigenous groups, including Penans. In response, the state – at both the federal (national) and regional levels- has consequently resorted to reassertions of its hegemony, the classical combination of coercion and consensus. On the one hand, as Aeria puts it,

“the state has often acted as capitalism’s authoritarian handmaiden, protecting and securing it against all opposition.... [It] has on different occasions ... repeatedly intimidated whole native communities, enacted legislation prohibiting blockades of timber roads, prosecuted and jailed key local community leaders ... ignored the native customary rights of local communities, while nearly always supporting the concession rights of logging and oil palm companies”.

However, hegemony has not been secured by coercion alone. As Aeria goes on to note, “more effective than coercion has been the role of the State in ‘persuading’ natives to support the dominant programme of globalisation and capitalist development via a ‘politics of development’ ideology of the governing Barisan Nasional”. The result is a deepening political cynicism and a politics of resentment. The burning issue now is whether these conditions are sufficient to propel a new counter-hegemonic movement that could redress the ills of more than forty years.

Developmentalism and Penan Deterritorialisation in Ulu Baram

The interruption of the historical process constructing places occurs when one of the cycles of civilisation (the contemporary cycle) becomes independent from all the previous ones. The territory is treated as a tabula rasa, a mere support on which to design settlement according to abstract rules with no relation to the nature, quality and identity of place. Here deterritorialisation does not take the form – as in the past – of a phase of transition towards a new territoriality (a new form of jointly evolving relations between the human settlement and the environment). This time it has been

determined by an intrinsically de-territorialised socio-economic system, organized in an increasingly artificial atemporal abstract space destructuring (because of the form and speed of the process) the historical stratification of regions, places and their territorial types. (Magnaghi, 2005: 17)

Only a small percentage of Sarawak's 10,000 Penans pursue the traditional nomadic life of full-time foraging and hunting in the rainforest. Most of them are now sedentary, involving themselves in economic activities which carve out a new way of interacting with the environment (Langub, 1996). At the level of the nation-state's relationship with its indigenous minorities, this process is articulated via the language of 'modernisation', in which the last of the rainforest foragers have been given little choice but to join the development fray. At the level of Sarawak state, this was manifest in the establishment of the Penan Volunteer Corps in late 1989 to assist fellow Penans through the transition. Since its inception, volunteers have been trained as multi-taskers but masters of none, with some training in carpentry, adult and kindergarten teaching, hygiene, basic medical skills, and cultivation. In addition, they mediate between the Penan villages to which they have been posted and various government agencies under a special Penan Task Force led by a state minister.

In concrete economic terms, the new orientation means shifting from hunting and foraging to cultivation and the eventual abandonment of the Penan's strategy of sustainable development of their forest resources through the practice of *molong*. Molong refers to the Penan way of ensuring 'sustainable' development. For example, they practice cutting up the sago for their own consumption without destroying the whole plant; hence ensuring that the sago tree is able to regenerate itself for a later harvest. Replacing autonomy, viable traditional knowledge, and a balanced person-environment matrix, however, is a new form of dependence on the tools of cultivation and the knowledge and skills necessary for new interactions with the environment. Sedentarisation leads to the subjugation of Penan economic and political life to forces outside their control.

In the new environment, it is increasingly difficult to fall back on the forest for daily needs or tradable products. Loggers have chased away the wild game, and much of the

jungle produce, like rattan and gaharu, has been destroyed. Penans now have to travel far to find these. To cultivate the new staple, rice, they constantly have to negotiate with state agencies, through the Penan Volunteer Corps, for new equipment and tools. Even in their housing, the introduction of the permanent longhouse means dependence on the outside world for a supply of nails, planks, zinc, petrol (for generators and boat engines), and kerosene. The modernisation package also includes toilet bowls, water pipes, medical facilities, clinics, and schools. But these are not always available when requested and have constantly to be negotiated. The burden always falls on the Penan Volunteer Corps, and failure or delay causes the Volunteer to lose credibility in the eyes of the community.

While there is a greater need for cash in their new economic life, Penans face the loss of commodities to sell that others want to buy. And because their environment is the jungle interior where access is through rivers or by foot, they have trouble marketing their products. So Penans are forced to make deals. The pro-active seek to forge agreements with the logging companies – giving permission to the company to build a logging road through their land in exchange for the free supply of planks for their longhouse, petrol for their generator, and transport to market vegetables or other food at the logging camps. The companies do not always fulfill their promises. And of course there are Penan groups who refuse to make such deals, especially after being disappointed with their first encounter with the loggers, who ‘came without knocking on our doors’.

My own research undertaken in the Ulu Baram area of Sarawak took me to two Penan villages with two contrasting ideological orientations towards development. The first is Kampung Long Lamai, an earlier established Penan village, which refused to allow logging companies to come in with their bulldozers and roads as they felt betrayed after the first encounter. Their reluctance to expose their land to the above influence does not mean that they oppose other forms of development. Long Lamai has been known for its capacity in producing some of the early Penan teachers in Sarawak. In contrast, in the adjacent village of Long Beruang (located about half a day’s walk away), founded by breakaway relatives from Long Lamai, the community decided to make ‘deals’ with the logging company. At the time of research, there was some concern that the ‘Company’

was not fulfilling part of its promise in meeting some terms of the agreement signed between the two parties.

Finally, the new environment ushers the Penan into a contestation between two sets of laws – the traditional notion of Penan stewardship (Brosius, 1986) and the modern legal order laid out in the Land Code of 1958, which recognises ‘cultivation’ (the felling of trees and creation of cultivated land, *temuda*) before January 1958 as evidence of land ownership. At present, Penans have been allowed to settle and cultivate without resort to the Land Code through ‘goodwill’ arrangements with other established, land-based, cultivating indigenous groups mediated by administrative officials. In some of these areas, disputes arise between the non-Penan claimants and the Penan newcomers. Penans, however, tend to argue their claims on the basis of stewardship – their earlier physical movements through land they have traversed for generations – not ‘cultivation’ or the presence of *temuda*. In fact, they can even show ancestral burial grounds which they have marked as evidence of their claim to stewardship over such areas. In the new deterritorialised Penan landscape, the call for official recognition of their rights to the land based on the principle of stewardship (Brosius *et al.*, 1998) is becoming more urgent in the face of ‘large-scale mechanised logging and the dispossession of indigenous communities’ (Brosius, 1999: 345), to a point of desperation where some have been forced to resist by blockades and other foot-dragging forms of resistance (Brosius, 1997a; 1997b).

‘Modernity’ also entails new dilemmas for the young generation of Penans. They now have to seek a new mode of integration into the bigger society through the schooling system. For the children, it means leaving their parents to stay in boarding schools as early as Primary One as most schools are a distance away from the village, thanks to the absence of a developed infrastructural road system in the Sarawak rural heartland. Accessibility is predominantly by utilising its jungle tracks or its many inter-connecting rivers. Whilst logging roads built by companies to facilitate their ‘business’ have also begun to make their appearance in the Penan landscape, its indigenous dwellers will have to become dependent on the company’s transport and goodwill to actually benefit from

these roads.

Thus for all kinds of reasons, cases of unschooled children abound among the various Penan communities throughout the interior. Even many of those who attend schools may not necessarily understand why they have to do so. On the other end, urban-based teachers who have been posted to these schools are often impatient and have little prior knowledge of Penan community and their cultural values. Consequently, they fail to comprehend the slow adaptation of these children to the school culture. Penan children who attend 'mixed schools' (i.e. schools which are attended by both Penan and non-Penan children) also become socially and culturally 'visible' and may suffer from an inferiority complex. Many have to tolerate the experience of being 'othered' by children from other indigenous groups who are relatively more well off and have adapted longer to a sedentary form of 'modernity'. Not surprisingly, school dropouts have become a common problem in the community. The situation is relatively better in full-pledged Penan schools such as the one built in their own village, at Long Lamai. But that is an exception rather than the rule. Even if a Penan pupil manages to 'survive' his primary schooling, there is no guarantee that he or she will end up in a secondary school, let alone a university. Distance, lack of motivation and financial support combine in many devious ways to make a Penan's educational journey an anguished and frustrating one. At Long Lamai, the nearest secondary is in the Bario highlands, in Kelabit territory. The journey may take days with children and their accompanying fathers traversing the jungle tracks and rivers, before reaching the Bario. Normally, Penan children who attend the boarding school there often try to find some form of money-paying jobs in their free time in order to support their schooling and basic needs.

A low level of educational attainment means that for the new generation of Penans, their social mobility into education-related occupations is very limited. The Penan Volunteer Corps recruits Penans of both sexes drawn from the lower secondary school echelons. Whilst the few who have been 'successful' in their educational journey have ended up as teachers; fewer still are able to make it to the university. Many of the young, male and female, would end up in manual work, either in factories, shopping malls or some form of

contract work in the urban areas, such as in the towns of Marudi, Miri or other small townships. Those who are willing to work hard can also earn an income by seeking various forms of employment in the logging-related activities in the different parts of the Baram. Those who still linger in the village may assist their parents on the land, but for many, their needs for the new consumer culture and their increasing dependence on the cash economy means that they continuously have to find ways and means to pursue exchange-values which can be converted into hard cash. The new Penan environment is fast becoming a commodified landscape.

Modernisation (read developmentalism) has created new dilemmas for the majority of the Penans who have been forced to join mainstream society. Inevitably, the process has transformed how they interact with their familiar locality and environment. Their well-being is now more dependent on outsiders, external authorities and institutions. Many of the solutions and answers lie outside their control, especially with the state, the logging companies and the market economy. Under the ‘development project’ promoted by a combination of statist law, political power and capital, the process of Penans’ deterritorialisation from ‘locality’ and ‘sustainability’ (Magnaghi, 2000) is now almost complete.

The Penan Story-telling Research Project

Inspired by both the rise of postmodernist ethnography in anthropology and the ‘decolonizing methodology’ in Tuhiwai Smith’s work, my colleague and I initiated a ‘Penan story-telling research project’ in 2000. These stories captured the peoplespeak data from various sectors of the Penan community in Long Lamai and the surrounding villages, ranging from leaders, elders, young people and students. The narratives were conveyed through ordinary conversations, speeches and even through the medium of writing. The collection was published in 2012 with the title, *Masyarakat Penan dan Impian Pembangunan: Satu Himpunan Naratif Keterpinggiran dan Jatidiri* (Penan society and Imagined Development: Narratives on Marginalisation and Identity) (Zawawi Ibrahim & NoorShah M.S, 2012).

Narrating a deterritorialised Penan landscape: the storytelling of Penghulu James of Long Lamai

The following text is adapted from a chapter from the above volume and represents the lament of Penghulu James as he addresses the new generation of Penans in the changing new landscape of Long Lamai village. Most of these youngsters would not have been around to share his first hand experience as a member of the last of the rainforest foragers in this part of the world. Neither would they be a part of that memory in being able to reflect upon the journey of ‘transition’ from a nomadic livelihood to a new mode of sedentary and longhouse living in Long Lamai. For the old generation, many feel that they have done their duty in initiating the ‘transition’; how they move on from here, and how they carve their future – all these decisions will have to be borne by the new generation of Penans. But this time of ‘transition’ is also one of confusion and ambiguity as the older generation become more concerned with continuity of Penan life in the new landscape. So whenever a social occasion arises which brings the two generations together, some elders take the opportunity of ‘telling stories’ as a way of sharing their deep thoughts and concern for the community. The storytelling narratives below reflect the older generation’s feelings of anxiety and uncertainty for the future of their society. These are telling in terms of the nuanced revelations of the Penans concerning locality, space, territory and place, of wisdom and knowledge in the face of deterritorialisation in the face of current developmentalism.

What we do here today (to bring the elders together in a gathering with the young) is something good and should be emulated by others. We do need the new generation to listen to us. Remember, however far we have journeyed, however high we have achieved in our education, we must always remember to return to our own people. Whatever position or rank that you hold outside, as the Malay proverb says, ‘Let it rain gold in another country, and stones in our own’, however beautiful is someone else’s place, we must never forget our place of origin.

This spirit must be attached to the soul of our children. However far they have travelled, however beautiful the places they have seen outside, they must return home to show that they have not forgotten their old folks.

I myself do not have such a perfect advice to offer, though I have a great desire to say something good. For those who have managed to further their schooling, that is a good thing. If you do have a break, it is good that you seek out your old folks, to visit or be with them. They may then be able to share their words of wisdom with you.

What we have to think is the possibility of our young people who have gone out of the village having the opportunity to meet with some of our prominent leaders, or those who have a position in society. In such a situation, they are bound to ask you: 'What are the problems you face in the village?' That is the kind of question that they will normally ask. At one point in time, I was also asked a similar question: 'What are the problems in your village?' I replied: 'Yes, there are many problems affecting people in the village'. For sure, there are many problems, but out of all these, we must be able to identify the main one.

The analogy is that if you want to build a house, there are many problems that you have to face. But however difficult the process is, the first thing you have to remember is the pillars, then you can start thinking of the floor and other essential parts which will make a house complete. But remember the first thing is the pillars, then only the other components such as the roof, etc.

It's the same with the problems that affect our life today. Why do we need the pillars first? Because the pillars provide the strength that will support a house, that will make it firm and stable. It is the same with Penan life today. What constitutes the pillars for us is the land and the rivers that we have. If you of the new generation were to live a long life, you must realise that your future will be both changing and challenging.

Today I represent the old generation; but even at the time when I was still active and able to work, I was already talking about land. But I never said that the government was not able to think, or that the government was stupid. They had the knowledge of what there was to know but what they were unable to see was the way we lived our life here. That aspect had not been reflected in the system of law, in the Forest Ordinances that were passed. In Sarawak, land legislation had been initiated since 1951 but in 1958, they

became more restrictive. According to these laws, whoever had cultivated land before 1st January 1958, the individual would have rights over it and he would continue to have control over that land until today. Hence 'temuda' land became recognised by the government and the law, and that is the indicator that is applied to every ethnic group in Sarawak; including the Baa Kusan (Baram) area in which groups such as the Kayan, Kenyah, Kelabit, Iban and others had settled. But these are tribal groups who had been sedentary and living in their longhouses from the time of their ancestors; and since they are cultivators, they own 'temuda'. As a consequence, they have a stake and rights over land, in accordance with the above laws.

But we belong to the Penan; we don't have 'temuda'. Since time immemorial, our ancestors had never cut down trees; they lived in the forest, foraging for food on what the forest could provide. Natural jungle plants and many other products of the forest- all these became our mainstay. That was how we lived our life. As for the land on which we reside now, it was only lately that we started to plant and grow. So the 'temuda' that we now own are not those from the days of yesteryears but are only of recent origin.

What the government sees as the prerequisite for rights is 'temuda'. That is the only thing they see; they have no idea what tribal group we come from. Yes, maybe they know that we are the Penan but they have no knowledge of our origins. What they know, what they hear is: 'Yes, Penans move and shift from place to place'. What they understand is that Penans keep moving from here to there and everywhere, to Kalimantan, and even to Sabah, without any sense of direction. That is simply untrue! Penans have their own sense of permanent territorial boundary within which they move. Just like any other group who moves around in order to visit some place or to look for something – so it is the same with the Penan.

In the old days when Penans were tracking down wild game, say a rhinoceros, they would roam through a larger area, say from here moving across the border of Kalimantan in Indonesia. But after having caught the animal, they would return to their original territory. For that matter, even if they ended up in Brunei, they would still come back to the original area after their successful hunt. That was how the Penan lived.

The Penan had a concept of an original territory, where their ancestors had conducted their life, where their ancestors had historically traversed. It was in this area

that they would stay. So it did not matter where they travelled for in the long run, they would return to the original territory. It's true that the Penan always moved and shifted around but they did so within the boundary of their own territory. Very seldom would they move out of this boundary. Such is the history of how Penan tribal groups from various territories originated, as in Baa Kusan (Baram), in Baa Buto and in the Fourth Division. The bases of these territories were already carved out by their respective ancestors. As a matter of fact, names such as 'Penan Selungo' were taken after our ancestors. There are of course other groups of Penan but the examples I have given here is simply to explain to you, young people today, about the history of our people.

As to the history of our own area, some may ask the question: 'Who are the real owners? Does anybody know?' If you look carefully in this area, you're bound to find the relics of other people who had either settled or moved around here. There is evidence, such as, of big stones being moved, and other landmarks, which may indicate the presence of other communities in the area, some of whom may even be our neighbours today. Originally this area was only a place of rest to quench one's thirst after a tiring journey. At that time the Penan were still roaming the forest; it's only recently that they have come out.

As for our views on this matter, we are willing to discuss them with the government anytime at all. In the past, and until now, we have been consistent , i.e. to appeal to the goodwill of the government to consider giving us the stewardship, which will empower us with the rights to take care and look after the land on which we are living now. We do not ask for those portions of land settled by other communities. What we mean is empowering Penans to be stewards over their own area, so that Penans will have rights over their forest resources, not only for the current generation, but also to ensure that the needs of the generation of their grandchildren will also be looked after. This is also to avoid us from infringing on the forest resources of other communities, such as when our own resources have run out. In this way, we can also prevent inter-group competition or conflict from occurring.

It is in the light of the above consciousness that we should convey our case to the government. This is how we should explain to those who ask us – 'What problems?' The biggest problem that faces Penan society today is undoubtedly related to land. This does

not mean that in other sectors such as agriculture, and many others, we have excelled. Far from it! In other areas too, we face problems, but these problems are nothing compared to those relating to land. Even if one day, we have all become skilful in agriculture, and other fields, it will be totally meaningless if our rights and control over land, or the trees in the forest, have been taken away by others; and all our other resources have also become depleted. In such a situation, what can we do with all that knowledge? However smart we are, it will be impossible to blow with the wind and expect things to change. Impossible! The knowledge that you have acquired will be totally useless if there are no more available resources that can be utilised with that knowledge.

We are not blaming the government for assisting our children to be educated. We thank the government for accepting our children – that is not an issue. Our concern is that it does not really matter how highly educated our children will be in the future, if after their completion, they return home only to find that their rights and control over land have all perished. Under these circumstances what good can they do with their new knowledge?

Personally I cannot imagine what our children will do with their knowledge if all the forest resources have all gone. We are always conscious of this fact when we emphasise that this is the main problem that we face. What we ask is for the government to learn who the Penans really are, their origins, their history and their way of life. Our community and the old generation of Penans have not been resisting, or fighting for their forest without any clear reason, nor have they been totally irrational. We understand that many from outside have the opinion that the Penans are against logging for no reason at all, but this is exactly what we have been fighting for, i.e. to restore the rights over our land.

We would welcome it if the government were to officially give recognition to Penan's rights over their land, then other communities will not disturb us even though we were not cultivators and did not own 'temuda'. For the land on which we are living now has historically been with us for generations. The government should have realised it and have knowledge of the boundary which locates Penan way of life. We do not intend to make claims, as other groups have, over land outside our area. If we were to do that, we

could have made claims in such areas around Sungai Puak, or Sungai Benali. Why? Because we used to move in these areas in the recent past, and even earlier. This can be proven by the names of our ancestors who died and were buried there. For instance, Dulit Baa Keluan in the area of Sungai Keluan, is one example that is proof that the Penan people had been present around the area long before the appearance of other tribes.

Dulit Baa Kusan, is my own father who was buried in the area of Hulu Sungai Baram. Even before the presence of other tribes in this area, my ancestors were already here. Dulit Sewen, for instance, was buried in Long Puak, again before the arrival of other groups. Before his death, his hair was said to be as white as the head of a 'belok' monkey, and all his hair had fallen, because he was so old. It shows that he had lived a long life and given birth to children and grandchildren in this area. After Sewen died, there were a few of his children, like Jabu, Dulit Baa who lived in Long Beruang; they lived during his time and were able to witness the day of his demise.

These were the generations who had made their home in this area – this is the history of our ancestors who were born, died and were buried here. The generation after was led by Dulit Baa until the new breed of leaders who founded this village, including our Ketua Kampung (village chief) and Penghulu of Long Beruang. Now another new generation is born and many more will settle here.

The leader who started our life here was not only Sewen, for there were others before him, like Jaleng and Muai. So the new generation of today must know our history, even if one day you will be travelling far away to other people's places, you must not forget your origins, your village. The only way to remember your history is to bring together the elders and listen to their stories.

As for me, for your information, every time I had the opportunity to present our case to the government, I would always stress the main problem that we are facing. Even though the issue is getting bigger and 'hotter', what is at stake here is the struggle for our rights and control over land. We feel anxious after realising that our rights and control over our land are increasingly being marginalised. We are worried for the future generation. It will indeed be a miracle if they can continue to live on air or on water.

If the new generation were to lose this control, their life will be nothing more than an animal just lying in waiting for death to come, either tomorrow, or the day after, without even a sound. We must remember that as human beings, for as long as the sun continues to shine, we must be mindful of what the future holds for our children and grandchildren. The old generation must share their deeper concerns with the new generation. A nephew of mine once asked me: 'What do you want to do?' I replied: 'What I want to do is this: there must be an official recognition of our legitimate rights as enjoyed by other indigenous groups!'

Our people are quite different from other indigenous groups. Maybe you young people today think that we old people were born in the village or the longhouse. That's not true! We were children born in the deep forest, in the highlands yonder, beneath the green canopy of the jungle. As for me, I was born near a rocky mount, which has now been converted into a centre of worship near Long Beruang. My sister was also born in the same place. This is proof that we were not born either in the village or the longhouse. But today, we live in the longhouse. In the old days, our parents would not have tolerated even for an hour being in a place exposed to the sun.

That was the old life. Only our generation and a few other elders made the decision to open up this village for the future of our children and grandchildren. Why? Because we began to realise that other indigenous groups had already laid their claims over the land on which they lived, and in so doing, they were able protect the well-being of their people for the new generation, The older generation were able to secure their land earlier for fear of future changes to come. Now as you can see, radical changes have taken place which the new generation must face.

In the future, with the new knowledge acquired by our educated children, many of these trees, plants and fauna growing here will have more value. But if they are not able to hold on to the land, they will be full of regrets, watching these natural resources falling into the hands of other people. At that moment, they will say: 'We could have preserved these trees in our area!!' Maybe they will go back to search for them now but only to find that they all have been cleaned up by others. All they can do then is just to appreciate with their eyes what is no longer theirs, powerless to do anything else.

It's not too late for us to preserve our land for the future. It's not too late to negotiate with the authorities, so we can retain our forest. We ourselves can be its caretaker so that, one day, it will benefit our children and their children to come.

I was the first generation of Penans from Long Lamai, along with my younger brother, to continue my studies in Bario. That's before, but now I am too old, inactive and unable to move around anymore. The new generation will have to take our place now, to travel, to search for knowledge'.

In the tradition of postmodernist anthropology, the storytelling of Penghulu James above could be seen as another script from some 'out-of-the-way-places', representing a 'cultural and political construction of marginality from the periphery of a nation-state' (Tsing, 1993: 5). But it is at once a representation of an indigenous notion of place, space and territory, an argument which, in the Penan's case, supports their claims for 'stewardship' in the changing forest landscape of Sarawak. From this viewpoint, 'community ... territorialises place, and not the contrary' (Gibson, 2006: 16), hence, 'space is a practised place' (De Certeau in Gibson, *Ibid.*). It is also a perspective which deconstructs the neo-classical economic notion of land as simply a 'physical' form, whilst its notion of *communitas* (after Victor Turner) is very much intertwined with the community's conceptions of space and territory – both of which contest the current bureaucratic, 'rational-legal' and official discourse which governs the contemporary Penan landscape.

'Territory', therefore, is not a simple equation between community and physical land or 'place', but is a vital expression of community 'space' that is ongoing because of community.... Space, the territory of community, is created by community and its movements, rather than reduced by the law. Indeed, it is precisely through the movements of community that territory is also re-affirmed, rather than lost. In other words, 'stories' (knowledge) are integral to the community, part of the community, and inalienable as commodities or individual expressions, deriving their legitimacy from the stability of tradition and the responsibility of its narration' (*Ibid*, 15-16).

Conclusion

From a comparative anthropological point of view, the above storytelling and discourse that I have presented above on Penan deterritorialisation represents yet another ‘showcase’ of the impact of ‘developmentalism’ on indigenous communities in the Malaysian postcolonial nation-state. In the context of existing Sarawak anthropological representations of ‘indigenous development’ it serves to complement earlier baseline investigations and analyses by Langub and Brosius on Penan’s nuances of ‘locality’ and ‘sustainability’, their indigenous knowledge and resource management, and to some extent, their subalternity, by offering an alternative ‘script’ to the one propagated by the state–capital ‘grand narratives’ of modernisation. Such excursion also represents a decolonising anthropology which listens to the voices of its ‘subjects’ while its storytelling texts and ‘peoplespeak’ ethnography mediate knowledge from the margin, narrating not only a deterritorialised landscape but perhaps, and more importantly, also the ‘reterritorialising’ imaginings of indigenous society.

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