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# The Iban of Temburong: Migration, Adaptation and Identity in Brunei Darussalam

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# *The Iban of Temburong: Migration, Adaptation and Identity in Brunei Darussalam*

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*Victor T. King  
Magne Knudsen*

## **Abstract:**

Iban are the most well-documented and studied of all Borneo indigenous peoples; there is a wealth of material on their language, history, social organisation and culture which can be used for comparative purposes. Yet, the Iban of Brunei are relatively under-studied. This paper is based on fieldwork on selected Iban communities in Temburong, Brunei Darussalam during research visits there between 2018 and 2021. The focus is on current developments and the ways in which the Iban have adapted to life in the sultanate and come to terms with its politico-legal and socio-economic environment. The heartland of Iban society and culture is located in the neighbouring state of Malaysian Sarawak, where the Iban comprise around 30 per cent of the total population, which on current estimates amounts to about 840,000. In Brunei, the Iban are a minority population of about 20,000 and, in terms of its Constitution and the Nationality Act of 1961, they are not considered as one of the recognised indigenous populations (*puak jati*) of the state. Despite being marginal to the Brunei state, they have chosen to make their home here and enjoy the support and the employment opportunities that the state provides. This paper aims to fill a gap in Iban Studies by providing recent data on the Temburong Iban's social organisation, economic activities and cultural identity in conjunction with their responses to their minority status in Brunei. It is also an ethnographic prelude to a prospective major study of the Iban of Brunei.

**Keywords:** Iban; Temburong; Brunei; society; culture; migration; adaptation; identity

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## **Introduction\***

The paper first contextualises the Brunei and Temburong Iban within the wider literature on Iban, primarily arising from research and scholarship in Sarawak. The identity of Iban in Brunei is, in an important sense, dependent on the identity of Iban in Sarawak, and the expression of that identity through published work and the media. A major focus in the introductory sections is on Iban migration and their later movements and settlement in Brunei. Then we consider the issue of nationality and ethnicity in Brunei and the status of Iban there in terms of citizenship and recognition. We also provide recent ethnographic information on Temburong Iban social organisation, including the important institutions of the longhouse, the household or *bilik*-family and the kindred, and their changing economic activities. Finally we examine the responses of Iban in Temburong to the politico-legal and economic environment in which they find themselves. In spite of the changes in Iban society and culture in Brunei, including the conversion of some to Islam and the increasing use of Malay and English by the younger generation, most Iban in Temburong retain an Iban identity. We consider why this is so and conclude with some reflections on what potentially lies ahead for them.

## **Literature on Iban**

Iban are the most studied and documented of the indigenous peoples of Borneo. Yet the Iban in Brunei have been somewhat neglected. Peter Sercombe referred to the scant attention paid to the Iban in Brunei as far back as the late 1990s (1999: 596). At that time, aside from the papers of Robert Austin published in *The Brunei Museum Journal* in the mid-1970s (1976, 1977a), Bernd Nothofer's study of languages in Brunei (1991) and Peter Martin's study of endangered minority languages there (see, for example, 1995), there was very little material on



Brunei Iban, though the substantial research and publications on them from Sarawak in particular provide a context and history for studies of Iban in Brunei. There have been some publications on Brunei Iban since then, but they are very few.

The Iban are the only ethnic group in Borneo to have a four-volume encyclopaedia dedicated to their history and culture compiled by two general editors, eight senior editors, and 40 contributing editors (Sutlive and Sutlive 2001). Some two decades ago a Checklist of Materials and a Bibliography of the Iban of Borneo in *The Encyclopaedia of Iban Studies* comprised over 200 pages (see King 2001: 2379-2385; [Checklist pp. 2373-2510]; [Bibliography pp. 2511-2602]). Dictionaries and grammars of Iban language also abound.<sup>1</sup>

### ***Derek Freeman, Benedict Sandin and the Iban***

Of the outstanding monographs and reports written on a Southeast Asian people, Derek Freeman's *Report on the Iban* (1970) and other related publications (1955a, 1955b) are far and away the most ethnographically detailed and internationally acknowledged contributions to our understanding of social organisation, culture, history and lifeways of an Austronesian-speaking population.<sup>2</sup> Freeman later set down his mature reflections on his Iban research in 1981.

Indeed, Freeman put the Iban on the anthropological map, and confirmed that a population that had spread from the western coastal areas of Borneo into the interior and eventually moved over what came to be the border between Sarawak and West Kalimantan should be called 'Iban'. The term 'Iban' was certainly known in the literature from the late

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\* Our sincere thanks to the editors of IAS Working Paper Series, Paul J. Carnegie and Lian Kwen Fee, and their attention to detail. It has helped turn the original draft of our paper into something which we hope is much more fluent and structured. As always, any limitations or omissions in this final version remain the responsibility of the authors.

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Asmah Haji Omar 1969; Howell and Bailey 1900, 1909; Hussain bin Jamil and Henry Gana 1989; Richards 1981; Scott 1956; Sutlive and Sutlive 1992; Jaya Ramba et al 2010; Janang Ensiring and Jantan Umbat 2011; Janang Ensiring et al 2016; and online Borneo Dictionary 2017-2021; Glosbe 2021.

<sup>2</sup> His field research in 1949-51 (with a revisit in 1957-58) was undertaken in three longhouses (Rumah Nyala, Rumah Sibat and Rumah Tungku) in the Baleh region of Kapit District in the Third Division of Sarawak. However, although his base camp was in the Sungai Sut at Rumah Nyala, he and his wife Monica travelled widely through Iban country, in the Third Division (the upper Mujong, the lower, middle and upper Rejang, the Katibas and the Ngemah) and the Second Division (in the Saribas and the Ulu Batang Ai) (1970: xiii).

nineteenth century, but only came increasingly into general use following Freeman's major publications from the early 1950s.<sup>3</sup>

Freeman says of the communities which he studied 'Although it would be an overstatement to describe the Iban as nomadic, migratory they certainly are, for, during the past 130 years, the people we are here discussing have travelled from the head-waters of the Batang Ai and Kanyau [in the then Dutch Borneo], by way of the Katibas and Rejang, to occupy the Baleh and its tributaries' (1950: 76). '[T]hese great Iban migrations into the Rajang [Rejang] and beyond were the most momentous happening in the social and economic history of nineteenth-century Sarawak' (1970: 130).

Prior to the movement into Sarawak and then to most of the remaining regions of Sarawak, the ancestors of those people now called 'Iban' had travelled from coastal west Borneo along the Kapuas river and its northern tributaries in what is now West Kalimantan. In his proto-historical account of Iban migrations (or as he refers to them 'Sea Dayaks'), based on oral materials (genealogies [*tusut*], and various oral literary forms, including extended chants delivered in major festivals (*gawai*), songs of invocation, songs addressing themes of love or war in major rituals [*pengap, timang, renong, kana*] and retained memories of local and general histories, the late Benedict Sandin, a foremost Iban scholar and former Government Ethnologist and Curator of the Sarawak Museum, provides a detailed account of the movements of his people into what is now Sarawak (1967a: 1-7, 1994; Pringle, 1967: xiii-xx). Using these materials, it is calculated very approximately that the Iban began to move into Sarawak from the Upper Kapuas around the mid-sixteenth century and progressively populated what is now Sarawak's First and Second Divisions (Pringle 1970: 39). The first phase of aggressive and rapid expansion lasted until the beginning of the eighteenth century, followed by a period of settlement and consolidation (Sather 1994: 1-4; and see Pringle, 1970 38-44; Sandin 1967a 18-22).

Interestingly Pringle then points to 'wholly new elements' in the Iban oral narratives relating to the turn of the nineteenth century, which Sandin collected, comprising 'contact with would-be Malay overlords, sometimes acting in the name of Brunei. They tell of Iban leaders receiving titles from Malay chiefs....' (1970: 41). This period was also marked by the emergence of powerful Iban regional war-leaders and increasingly 'large-scale, inter-regional

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<sup>3</sup> At the turn of the twentieth century Howell and Bailey state it is 'the name by which the various tribes of Sea Dayaks in the Rejang district are known.....and the name is now being adopted by Sea Dayaks in other rivers' (1900: 70).

warfare' among the Iban (Sather, 1994: 8, 13-16). Hence, during the later nineteenth century the Europeans made a distinction between the aggressive war-like 'Sea Dayaks', some of whom had become involved in coastal raiding in alliance with Malays, and the more settled and peaceful, culturally different 'Land Dayaks' inland of Kuching.<sup>4</sup>

Our focus of research in this paper is to examine issues of identity and the circumstances of marginality and minority status among Iban in Brunei. The core of Iban culture, language, population and recognition is in Sarawak: the marginal populations are in the borderlands of Brunei, Sabah and West Kalimantan, where they are minorities. In these cases, they are more prone to absorption into the populations which surround them, but this cultural interaction in the periphery is made much more complex because of the reinforcement of Iban culture, language and identity in the heartlands of Sarawak. As Sather has said 'the region first settled by Iban migrants to Sarawak' is known as the *menoa lama* ' (the old territory) in the Second Division of Sarawak. 'Virtually all subsequent movement was out of this region' (1994: 27).

Iban in Sarawak comprise 30 per cent of the total population which was estimated at 2.81 million in 2020.<sup>5</sup> This is a substantial demographic presence and one which gives the Iban of Sarawak some political and economic weight and influence, in contrast to the Iban of Brunei, Sabah and West Kalimantan, and helps confirm their cultural and linguistic identity. The current Iban population in Brunei has been estimated at between 14,000 to 20,000 (Mahirah Nazatul and Lian Kwen Fee 2020).<sup>6</sup>

The presence of Iban in considerable numbers in the neighbouring Malaysian territories assists in the maintenance of Iban identity and their language in adjacent states such as Brunei. However, they are still subject to continuous pressures to conform to the requirements of the state within which they are located, and in Brunei, they have to respond and adapt to the

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<sup>4</sup> From the earlier part of the nineteenth century further expansionary movements recommenced resulting in the occupation of the great Rejang River basin (ibid.: 9, 17-20). Eventually in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century onwards the Iban reached the northernmost parts of Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo (Sabah).

<sup>5</sup> The last Malaysian census was conducted in 2010 when the population of Sarawak was 2.471 million (and see Minority Rights Group International [MRGI] 2018). The final results of the 2020 census, which is still ongoing, are yet to be released (Department of Statistics Malaysia 2021). However, estimates put the current Iban population at around 840,000 in 2020 (ibid.).

<sup>6</sup> The higher end figure seems more likely although the size of the Iban population is not available in official statistics. Martin (1995: 49) and Sercombe (1999: 606) had about 15,000 Iban in Brunei in the 1990s, and Coluzzi put their numbers at around 20,000 a decade or so later (2010: 122); he had a very precise figure of 1,891 for the Iban in Temburong in 2008 (ibid.).

dominant Malay-Muslim national identity and to the national ideology of Malay Islamic Monarchy (*Melayu Islam Beraja*).<sup>7</sup>

### ***George Appell's Overview***

In a substantial work of synthesis George Appell also documents the importance of studies of the Iban, particularly those of Derek Freeman in contributing to social theory in anthropology and our understanding of other societies in Borneo (2001; and see Appell and Madan 1988). It is a monumental effort in capturing the importance of Iban Studies, although it was published two decades ago, and much more has been produced on the Iban since then. If anything, the rate of output in Iban Studies has increased, and particularly among Iban researchers. One important outlet for them is the journal *Ngingit*, published regularly by The Tun Jugah Foundation in Kuching in both the Iban language and English. Appell summarises the importance of work on the Iban in the following terms: 'Iban society now provides the model, the background phenomena, on which all other ethnographic inquiries of Borneo societies can proceed....Iban culture forms the fundamental grounds against which other cultures are compared in order to elicit cultural information and to test hypotheses in social theory' (2001: 741). These are bold statements, but largely justified. Appell categorises Iban Studies into several major areas of interest, some of which we will investigate in the Brunei Iban case. Appell's categorisation is subject to modification and elaboration as a result primarily of recent research, particularly in the fields of development, modernisation, urbanisation, the politics of identity, media and communication.<sup>8</sup>

He starts with social organisation and cognatic (or non-unilineal) societies (and the importance of such social forms as the *bilek*-family [also now usually rendered *bilik*], the longhouse community [*rumah panjai*], the outlying farm-house [*dampa*] and the personal kindred [*kaban*], the practice of utrolocal residence after marriage and utrolateral filiation [either of two]; this was a field which Freeman commanded (2001: 741-744; Freeman 1955a, 1955b, 1960, 1961a, 1970). Appell follows with the cultural ecology of swidden agriculture, labour exchange and the character and consequences of mobility and fixity of settlement (2001:

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<sup>7</sup> See Maxwell 2001 on the problematical ethnic category 'Malay'.

<sup>8</sup> Obviously some of the categories overlap, particularly oral literature and religion, ritual and symbolism (see, for example King 2013: 8-12). Nevertheless, his categories will serve for our purposes; it brings to our attention significant conceptual and analytical contributions in Iban Studies to anthropology, which is its main purpose (selected references are given by way of illustration).

744-746; Freeman 1955a, 1970; Cramb 2007; Padoch 1982; Wadley, 1997, Wadley et al. 1997); the analysis of land tenure and the jural status of the social units which have rights to property, particularly land (Appell 2001: 746-754; Cramb 1986, 1989); the nature of egalitarian society among the Iban [to which Freeman gave great emphasis] and its relationship to hierarchy (Appell 2001: 754-756; Freeman, 1970, 1981; Sather 2006a); ethnogenesis and ethnic diversity (Appell 2001: 756; Sather 1994); gender equality and inequality (Appell 2001: 756-763; Davison and Sutlive 1991; Mashman 1991; Sutlive 1991); Iban expansion, warfare and headhunting and the reasons underlying migration (Appell 2001: 763-772; King 1976; Pringle 1970: 18-65; Sather 1994: 1-78; Vayda 1961, 1969, 1976); religion, ritual and symbolism and the different analytical frameworks (including, among others, [social] structuralist, symbolic, contextual, ethnographic, psychological/psychoanalytical/psychotherapeutic/biological perspectives (Barrett and Lucas 1993; Freeman 1961b, 1967, 1975, 1979; Graham 1987; Jensen 1974; King 1977, 1980, 1985a; Sather 2006b, Uchibori 1978) used to understand these cultural dimensions; oral literature which is truly substantial (Appell 2001 778-779; Masing 1997; Sandin 1976, 1977, 1980; Sather 2000; Sutlive et al. 2012); and finally regional variations in Iban culture within Sarawak (Appell 2001: 779-781; Freeman 1975, 1981; Sather 1994: 27-29) and between those Iban populations in West Kalimantan referred to by Sarawak Iban as ‘Kanyau’, ‘Merakai’ and ‘Danau’ (see, for example McKeown 1983; Wadley 1997), along with those groups culturally and linguistically related to the Iban, and misleadingly designated as ‘Ibanic’; they include residents of the Ketungau river basin, and such named groups as the Mualang, Seberuang, Sebaru’, Banjar, Desa, Kantu’, Bugau and Air Tabun.<sup>9</sup> In this paper we discuss the variations that have developed since Iban migrated to and settled in Brunei. It raises the question of whether or not those in Brunei are in the process of becoming different kinds of Iban?

Much has also been written on the great Iban expansion across north-western Borneo (Austin 1976, 1977a, 1977b; Sandin 1967a, 1994; and see Sather 1994), their settlement of the upper Kapuas lakes area of West Kalimantan, their movements into most of what is now the state of Sarawak from the mid-sixteenth century, and then eventually their marginal drift into Brunei and Sabah in the late nineteenth-early twentieth century; Iban there reside at the

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<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Gavin [2012] who questions the use of some of these terms including Ketungau and ‘Ibanic’ [for some of the differently named groups see Dove 1985; Drake 1981].

periphery of the diaspora which has an important bearing on the adaptation of the Iban to their political, economic and socio-cultural environment.

## Migration

As we have seen, one of the dominant features of Iban history is their propensity to migrate, hence their arrival in Brunei from Sarawak. Sather has said that through the nineteenth century Iban had spread through ‘the whole of the enormous Rejang basin and beyond, reaching, by the end of the century, Sarawak’s northernmost frontiers with Brunei and Sabah’ (1994: 18, 21-22). It is interesting to refer to the index in *The Encyclopaedia of Iban Studies*, in which ‘Migrants, Migration Leaders, Migration Personnel and migrations to specific locations totals 33 entries (Sutlive and Sutlive 2001: 2718). It demonstrates the importance of movement in Iban history and culture. Peter Mulok Kedit, a distinguished Iban scholar, has examined, in detail, *bejalai*, an Iban concept which embraces movement. He discerns eight categories of ‘related behaviour’ associated with the concept (1993: 16-17; and see Padoch 1982). There is *bejalai* (‘to go on journeys with the view of acquiring wealth, material goods and prestige’); *belelang* (‘to go on an extended and distant journey sometimes without returning’); *bekuli* (to do wage-labouring, to take on labour migration’); *kerja* (‘to work as a non-manual earner, e.g. to work with the government’); *pegi* (‘an equivalent term as *bejalai* used by Layar/Saribas Iban, possible deriv. Malay (*pergi*) “to go”’); *kampar* (‘as “orang Kampar”, Dyak product-hunters, or Dyak wandering without their own country, trading, etc.’); *ngayau* (i) (‘a large war party’), *ngayau anak* (ii) (‘a small war party, e.g. 4-5 men’); *pindah* (‘to migrate permanently as a family group, or long-house community’) (ibid. 16).<sup>10</sup> Kedit refers to Brunei in three of these categories: *bejalai*, which embraces Iban working as labourers or as non-skilled workers in oil-fields and as construction workers in urban centres; and *bekuli* as other unskilled manual workers. For Kedit, *bejalai* is [or has often been] ‘an antecedent of *pindah*’ (ibid.:17).

## Migration into Brunei

Kedit’s work squares with the emphasis that Robert Austin places on two categories of Iban migration (*bejalai* [and we would include *bekuli*] and *pindah*) to Brunei. *Bejalai* comprised a male pathway in search of work, accumulating resources, making a contribution to the

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<sup>10</sup> It has to be said that in all categorisations, the boundaries are somewhat ill-defined, and the various types of movement overlap.

household or family (*bilik*) in the home long-house and accumulating prestige which comes not just from securing material resources but from experiencing new places and different peoples at a distance from the long-house (1974, 1976, 1977a, 1977b). In many cases this practice progressively transformed into permanent settlement (*pindah*). However, evidence also suggests in the Temburong case that rather than *bejalai*, groups of Iban also moved into this region in Brunei in search of land for rice agriculture and began to settle there (*pindah*) from the late nineteenth century (Misa Juliana Minggu 2016).

Austin has also proposed in relation to Brunei that for young Iban men in the first half of the twentieth century the objective was increasingly to secure employment in the modern sector, in industry, in commercial plantations and in urban centres. He says ‘This is the contemporary *bejalai*, and as one would expect, the high wages, relative prosperity and availability of work in Brunei have made the site an ideal destination for such migrants’ (1976: 64). Some adventurous Iban also travelled across the South China Sea to Peninsular Malaysia in search of work and to New Guinea, whilst others went over the border into Indonesian Kalimantan to work primarily in logging companies, still others ended up in Sabah from the 1930s and 1940s, working on plantations on the east coast around Sandakan cultivating tobacco, cocoa and abaca or in logging or road construction (Soda and Seman 2011). However, the rewards from the Brunei oilfields and the activities which it spawned from the early 1930s, especially for those Iban from such neighbouring areas in Sarawak as the Baram, Bakong and Tinjar (where the Iban settled in the first half of the twentieth century) and Limbang and Lawas to the north-east and east, beckoned young Iban men in significant numbers in search of employment and adventure (Uchibori 2004). The Baram in Sarawak was settled by the Iban from around 1900 to the 1940s (Sercombe 1999: 598; Pringle 1970: 269-272). From such places as the Baram, Brunei recorded 453 Iban migrants in 1931, which had increased to 6,850 in 1971, though some had returned to Sarawak (Heyzer and Vojackova-Sollorano 2008: 7; Franz 1980). Iban began to move into the upper Temburong in the late nineteenth century (see the later section on Temburong) around the time that Limbang was annexed by Rajah Charles Brooke in 1890. Perhaps Austin does not adequately address the early movements into Temburong from the late nineteenth century in search of land for agriculture (Misa Juliana Minggu 2016: 20-21).

Of course, there was also continuing vigorous movement within Sarawak itself to urban areas, construction sites, commercial logging companies and to plantations and agricultural

development schemes.<sup>11</sup> Kedit points to an interesting feature of *bejalai* in that it involved groups of young men rather than individuals, and, in this respect, should they succeed in their new homes, they might well settle there as communities, either forming relationships with local partners or bringing their own womenfolk from their home areas (1993: 65). He also draws attention to the lure of oil. 'Labour recruiting drives were common in the 1950's, where the oil companies in Miri and Brunei needed labour to open up sites for oil exploration and for refineries in Lutong (Sarawak) and Seria (Brunei)' (ibid.).

Austin demonstrates, using statistical data from the four Brunei censuses between 1921 and 1960 (1921, 1931, 1947, 1960) and Annual Reports that the Iban population, though in absolute terms was still low in this period of 50 years, the rate of increase in population (obviously from a low base) in comparison with other populations in the category 'Other indigenous', was 'extraordinarily high' (1976: 65). The increase, especially between 1947 and 1960 was the result of 'unregistered (i.e. illegal) immigration' (ibid.: 68, 1977b). In his careful analysis of the statistics, Austin suggests that, conservatively, three-quarters of the increase in the Iban population in Brunei was due to illegal immigration, and that 'jungle paths were a commonly, albeit illegally, used route for entry into Brunei' (1976: 68). 'Brunei's [land] borders were "a soft barrier (in terms of permeability)"' (1977b: 5). Yet the numbers in Brunei were still small in 1960, amounting to 3, 900 Iban (1976: 65). Austin concludes that, in this early period, the increase in the Iban population was the result of male migrant labour, primarily entering Brunei illegally, who did not return to Sarawak (ibid.: 69).

Austin then examines the period from 1960 to 1971 and notes that up to 1964 there was a small annual increase in the Iban population in Brunei in that movements into Brunei and returnees to Sarawak were more closely in balance but after 1964 there was 'large volume migration and major net increases in the Brunei Iban population' (1977b). Between 1950 and 1970 the net change in the female Malaysian Dayak population (around 95% of the category 'Malaysian Dayak' comprised Iban) due to legal migration was modest and between 1960 and 1970 the female population had increased to 182. However, the male Malaysian Dayak population increased dramatically; for example, between 1965 and 1970 Brunei 'gained 12,858

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<sup>11</sup> Sutlive, for example, has captured the importance of rural-urban migration in Sarawak and more general changes in Iban society (1973, 1978), and Ryoji Soda has provided a more recent account of Iban rural-urban interactions in Sarawak (2007).



persons through legal migration' (ibid.: 2). This was due, in no small part, to changing economic conditions in northern Borneo between Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah (ibid.: 4).<sup>12</sup>

### **Citizenship, Identity and the Iban**

Motomitsu Uchibori has addressed the issue of Iban movement across the borders or boundaries of Brunei (2002, 2004). He conceptualises these in two ways: external or state borders, which are 'geo-physically demarcated' and it requires individuals to move physically across them; and 'internal borders' which are politico-legal, socio-economic and cultural and rather more complex to cross, particularly in the attempt to acquire citizenship in Brunei (2004: 82-83). The different ethnic categories in Brunei are defined in 'racial' terms, and although the Iban are an indigenous population in Borneo, their claim to this status in Brunei is somewhat ambiguous.<sup>13</sup> Uchibori (2002) notes, as does Austin, the difficulty of monitoring the land borders between Brunei and Sarawak and the fact that there are frequent illegal Iban movements along forest trails outside the limited number of immigration and customs posts, especially from the middle and upper Baram river and from Limbang (ibid. 86-87).

Although 'racial' identity in Brunei is officially defined in terms of clearly demarcated categories and set down in print on an identity card, in practice there is a significant level of cross-boundary interaction, and considerable acculturation of the minorities, including the Iban, to the majority Brunei Muslim-Malay culture. Racial identities have been constructed in Brunei since the promulgation of the 1959 Constitution (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2006, with subsequent amendments), and then the Brunei Nationality Act 1961 (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2011, with subsequent amendments). However, the qualification for citizenship focuses primarily on cultural factors, parentage and residence in defining those within the nation-state whose credentials deem them to be Bruneians. Thus, the term 'race' in

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<sup>12</sup> During the early 1970s there was a global boom in oil-and gas-rich countries and Brunei experienced a significant increase, not only in its prosperity but in the influx of foreign labour at all levels, though Austin notes a temporary reduction of Iban population numbers in Brunei in 1973 when many migrant workers left the country as a result of a change in regulations relating to 'alien work permits' (ibid.: 5). However, Iban migration and settlement subsequently picked up again so that by the 1990s the size of the population was estimated at around 15,000, and more recent estimates suggest it is nearer 20,000.

<sup>13</sup> Uchibori divides Iban into four categories in regard to residence in Brunei and their status in terms of the requirements and permissions of the state: (1) Brunei citizens; (2) permanent residents who, in politico-legal terms, are stateless; (3) temporary residents with work permits, who are invariably Iban from Malaysia; and (4) visitors on a long-term or short-term basis, usually visiting friends and family, or crossing the border for shopping, business or other economic activities (ibid.: 91-93). He omits those who cross the border illegally, unless these, or at least some of them, are included in category 4.

this connection is misleading and is often used inappropriately in place of ethnicity (Lian Kwen Fee 2006, 2020). In regard to ethnic identity such as that which defines the Iban, we are concerned with socio-cultural and not physiological/biological and genetic similarities and differences.

It should be noted that in constitutional terms Bruneians do not have the status of ‘citizens’ as such, they are ‘subjects [*rakyat*] of the Sultan’ (Maxwell 2001: 175). In addition, the Constitution and the 1961 Act establish the principle of *jus sanguinis* rather than *jus soli*. Dual citizenship is not permitted in Brunei (Ullah and Asiyah, 2019: 15), nor is dual racial identity; only one race (*bangsa*) is designated on an identity card, determined by the race of the father. The Nationality Act also transforms ethnicity into race which then provides Brunei with a common, ‘essentialist’ racial, or more correctly national ethnic identity, based on Malay culture, in what is a multi-ethnic polity. It does this primarily through the criteria which determine who is ‘a subject’ of His Majesty. The Act in section 4(1)(a) states that ‘a subject’ is defined as:

...any person born in Brunei Darussalam before, on or after the appointed day [1st January 1962] who is commonly accepted as belonging to one of the following indigenous groups of the Malay race, namely, Belait, Bisayah [Bisaya], Brunei [Barunay], Dusun, Kedayan [Kadayan], Murut or Tutong [Tutung] and any person born outside Brunei Darussalam before, on or after the appointed day, whose father was, at the time of birth of such person, a subject of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan by operation of law under this paragraph or paragraph (c)(i) and was employed outside Brunei Darussalam in the service of the Government, by any company registered in Brunei Darussalam or in such special circumstances as His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan thinks fit, if the birth of such person was registered at a Brunei Darussalam Consulate or in Brunei Darussalam within 6 months of its occurrence, or such longer period as His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan may in any particular case allow (2011: 4).

Paragraph (c)(i) refers to ‘any person born outside Brunei Darussalam before, on or after the appointed day (i) whose father was, at the time of birth of such person born, in Brunei Darussalam before, on or after the appointed day and was a person commonly accepted as belonging to one of the following indigenous groups of the Malay race, namely, Belait, Bisayah [Bisaya], Brunei [Barunay], Dusun, Kedayan [Kadayan], Murut or Tutong; or (ii) whose father and mother were both born in Brunei Darussalam and were members of any of the groups specified in the First Schedule’ (2011: 5).

With reference to the seven ‘indigenous groups of the Malay race’ (*puak jati*) recognised for purposes of citizenship in Brunei which excludes the Iban, a further list is appended to the Nationality Act entitled ‘Members of Groups of People who are Considered to be Indigenous to Brunei Darussalam within the Meaning of the Act’ (2011: 22). These number a further 16 groups which are found primarily in Sarawak:

Bukitans, Dayaks (sea), Dayaks (land), Kalabits, Kayans, Kenyahs (including Sabups and Sipengs), Kajangs (including Sekapans, Kejamans, Lahanans, Punans, Tanjongs and, Kanowits), Lugats, Lisums, Melanaus, Penans, Sians, Tagals, Tabuns, Ukits.

The Act adds that it also includes ‘any admixture of the above with each other, or with a subject ..... [who is a member of one of] the seven recognised *puak jati*’ (ibid.).

It is a curious list, based on out-of-date ethnic classifications for Sarawak’s indigenous populations (Welyne Jeffrey Jehom, 1999; and see Zawawi, 2008), most of whom are no longer evident in any numbers, if at all, in the territory of what is now Brunei.<sup>14</sup> Some of these categories have some historical resonance for Brunei, particularly up to the 1880s, when many of these indigenous populations came within the embrace of the wider sultanate. In other words, it has no particular relevance to post-independence Brunei, and is not used, in any obvious sense, for determining nationality but it does indicate a certain flexibility in terms of state assessment of indigeneity.

Trigger and Siti Norkhalbi binti Haji Wahsalfelah Wahsalfelah, in their examination of the meanings and interrelationships between ‘indigeneity’, ‘nativeness’ and ‘autochtony’, also draw attention to the problematic status of ‘indigenous’ in Brunei (2011: 74-80; and see Ullah and Asiyah Az-Zahra Ahmad Kumpoh 2019). In regard to the Iban (and Penan), who reside in Brunei and are classified as ‘indigenous’ in the Nationality Act, they are not members of the seven specified *puak jati*. They are considered to be relatively recent migrants from Sarawak, and along with other indigenous non-*puak jati*, are included primarily in the population statistics for 2001 onwards as ‘Others’.

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<sup>14</sup> It includes several small groups which have largely or completely been absorbed by others and are no longer recognisable as separate ethnic entities. Some terms have been rejected by the people themselves. The Iban appear in the list under a nineteenth-century European-derived exonym ‘Dayaks (sea)’ or ‘Sea Dayaks’, which is no longer a term used by the people themselves or by the neighbouring Malaysian government or by any external observers, including the immediate neighbours of the Iban in Borneo. The same applies to the ethnic term ‘Dayaks (land)’ or ‘Land Dayaks’; the people so named have adopted a now generally acknowledged and agreed ethnic name ‘Bidayuh’. Some of the classificatory categories are no longer recognised as viable and useful, such as Kajang. Other terms are used loosely for a scattering of former hunting-gathering populations, for example, Bukitan, Ukit, Punan, and Penan.

One of the major dilemmas which the Iban of Brunei face is whether or not they can acquire citizenship expressed by holding a yellow identity card ('Yellow IC'), as against a red card ('Red IC') which defines a permanent resident who is not a citizen and therefore does not qualify for a passport and other benefits that citizenship provides. Two of the methods are exceedingly difficult for the Iban. The Nationality Act provides for a person who is not a subject of His Majesty the Sultan and Yang di-Pertuan to apply for registration 'in the prescribed manner' (2011: 6-10) if he demonstrates that, within the period of 15 years which immediately precede the application, he has resided in Brunei for not less than 12 years in aggregate and that he has resided in Brunei throughout the two years immediately prior to the application. Further requirements are that he is examined by a Language Board and that the Board and His Majesty are satisfied that he 'has a knowledge of the Malay language to such a degree of proficiency as may be prescribed and is able to speak the Malay language with proficiency or is unable to speak such language with proficiency by reason of a physical impediment of speech or hearing'. Other requirements are that the applicant be of 'good character' and that he swears an oath of allegiance to Brunei and its Sultan and renounces and abjures all loyalty entirely to another country, state or sovereign (2011: 8, 23). The language requirement in particular is demanding, and it is not a route that many Iban have been willing or able to take.

There are separate requirements for a woman in that she has to be either married to a male citizen of Brunei or was married to one. If she is no longer married and has married someone who is not a subject of the Sultan then she is not eligible to apply for registration (2011: 9). A second means of acquiring citizenship is by naturalisation. Some of the requirements are the same as those for registration but the applicant has to be 'of full capacity' and 'not likely to be a charge on Brunei Darussalam' and have resided in Brunei for 25 years immediately preceding the application with an aggregate of not less than 20 years, and for two years immediately before the application (2011: 10-12). Some Iban who have settled in Brunei have met this requirement, though the figures for the number of Iban who have become citizens is unavailable.

However, the most obvious route to citizenship for the Iban is marriage with a citizen who is a member of one of the *puak jati* or, of course, marriage with an Iban who has managed to gain citizenship status, or conversion to Islam.<sup>15</sup> Many Iban have taken these routes. Mahirah Nazatul and Lian Kwen Fee, in their study of the Iban longhouse of Melilas in the Ulu Belait state that many Iban there and in other areas of the upper Belait have ‘successfully negotiated and managed their acceptance as full citizens of Brunei while retaining their Iban identity’ (2020: 3).<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Iban of Melilas, Ulu Belait, and Conversion to Islam***

In the case of Iban in the Seria-Belait region, and based on some of the findings of Mahirah Nazatul and Lian Kwen Fee (2020), a direct route to citizenship is conversion to Islam. Their study of the Iban longhouse in Mukim Melilas indicates that some Iban families which originated from Marudi and the Baram River in Sarawak, having settled there from the early 1900s, then moved to the middle and upper Belait in the 1940s (2020: 23). It is a short distance between Marudi and the Belait (*ibid.*: 20). At that time, they occupied land for rice agriculture and other crops, and some families continued to farm until the 1970s. But even from the early 1960s Iban were gaining employment in the government sector (as teachers and civil servants, for example) and in the oil and gas industries and were increasingly drawn into the modern sector (*ibid.*: 13). Furthermore, when the Department of Education built a permanent primary school in Melilas in 1975, it channelled those who qualified for further education to the secondary school in Kuala Belait; the younger generation of Iban were therefore increasingly likely to move from the longhouse, and certainly abandon agricultural activities. Currently, most of the Iban of working age and younger people in education from Melilas live in Kuala Belait and Seria during the week and only spend some weekends or public holidays in their home longhouse. Sercombe noted the same pattern in his study in the 1990s of Teraja, an Iban

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<sup>15</sup> Anecdotally, it has been suggested that administrative officers may have extended a degree of discretion over IC registration before Brunei’s full independence in 1984, especially with receptive village heads (*ketua kampung*) in remote settlements. This may have involved the issuance of Yellow ICs to Iban, with their names changed to Malay-sounding ones or using ‘bin’. In contrast, other Iban did not make the effort to register during this interregnum period and became stateless as a result, as did many Chinese. Of course, these anecdotal claims are difficult to verify empirically with any great degree of accuracy.

<sup>16</sup> There are obvious benefits for the Iban in conversion and becoming citizens. But even without citizenship there are still advantages in staying in Brunei, given its provisions in housing, healthcare, general welfare, education, and employment (also see Li Li Pang 2018a, 2018b on the Iban in Belait).

longhouse in the Upper Belait, where workers and young Iban in education spent much of their time in the coastal towns of Seria and Kuala Belait (1999: 613).

In the 1970s the Department of Immigration and National Registration was encouraging the residents of Melilas to become citizens if they were able to meet the requirements set down in the Nationality Act or to consider naturalisation, again with the appropriate qualifications. Apparently, they were offered an easier passage to citizenship in that they could continue to engage with certain elements of Iban culture (the longhouse, modified traditional dress and material culture, and celebrations [*gawai*]) and retain their language and their identity as Iban), provided their behaviour and practices did not run counter to Islam. This required them to observe religious requirements in relation to food and drink prohibitions, modesty, particularly for females in their dress, appropriate behavioural relationships between men and women and modify a range of ancestral rituals and practices or elements of them; some had to be set aside altogether (ibid.: 26-33).

On 28 June 1992 there was a large conversion to Islam and some 85 per cent of the residents of Melilas became Muslim, including the head of the longhouse (*tuai rumah*); ‘the rest live their lives like Muslims’ (ibid.: 28). Conversions continued in the Upper Belait through the 1990s (ibid.: 20). At that time the policy that the government pursued was to establish a prayer room (*surau*) and a worship hall (*balai ibadat*) in every *mukim* and *kampong*. This required local residents to work in the hall and to do so, if they were not already Muslims, they had to convert to Islam (ibid.: 29-30). In 2017 His Majesty’s government sponsored a complete reconstruction and modernisation of the Melilas longhouse which had originally been built in timber and other natural materials. It was rebuilt as ‘a fully cemented longhouse’ (ibid.: 9-10, 45). Conversion does provide additional benefits. However, Mahirah and Lian suggest that ‘conversion to Islam and full citizenship’ does not necessarily result in a loss of Iban identity and an absorption into Malay culture. Muslim converts still identify themselves as Iban; many still speak the Iban language in that the role of language in the retention of Iban-ness is vitally important (ibid.: 45; and see Rabinah Uja 1994).

However, this does not seem to be the case in another study of the Iban, though based on a limited sample (Nur Asmah Najiah binti Jufriza, 2021). The focus was on one Iban family, all citizens of Brunei (yellow IC), from the Belait district. It comprised seven members, an Iban man who married a Malay Muslim woman; he therefore converted and they had five children (two sons and three daughters). The father and the five children were designated as Iban on

their identity cards. Other than the father none of them spoke Iban, and they did not participate in Iban culture. The two sons clearly identified with the Malay side of their identity; the three daughters were more ambivalent about their hybrid identity (ibid: 12). Nonetheless, it was clear from the data collected that in the next generation the grandchildren would be absorbed into Malay culture.<sup>17</sup>

## **Language and Identity**

Carrying on this theme of identity and language, a general claim is that the majority of Iban residents in Brunei have retained their identity ‘as Iban’ and continue to speak the Iban language (see Farahfatin, 2018). But this is so in a qualified sense, in that much else of what might be termed ‘traditional’ Iban culture has been lost, particularly religious beliefs and practices and livelihoods associated with the forests, the land and the rivers. Not so with language. There has been considerable attention to the issues of language diversity, shift and loss in Brunei, much of it emanating from research undertaken specifically in the Department of English and Applied Linguistics at Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) from the late 1980s into the 1990s, and in other programmes at UBD (Coluzzi 2010, 2011, 2012; Martin 1995, 1996a, 1996b; Martin et al. 1996; Noor Azam 2005; Nothofer 1991; Sercombe 1996, 1999). The focus is on linguistic diversity and the possibility that, with the emphasis on Standard Malay as the official language of Brunei, and English as the de facto official language, and Mandarin Chinese as a robust minority language which will survive in the substantial Chinese community and its Chinese-language education system, it is anticipated by all those researchers who have addressed these issues that the minority indigenous languages of the *puak jati* will progressively decrease (especially Dusun/Bisaya, Tutong, Belait) and eventually, in time, might well disappear from the linguistic inventory as languages in everyday use. Belait, for example, is already virtually extinct as an active language. The younger generations of Dusun and Tutong increasingly use Malay and English and not their mother tongues.

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<sup>17</sup> In addition, there were seven other Iban informants, all of whom were not Muslim, two were Christian and five were ‘freethinkers’ from Belait and Temburong (ibid: 6). Here there was a definite resistance to absorption, strong views from other senior members of their families that they should not marry a Malay Muslim and convert to Islam, but rather maintain their Iban identity and language (ibid: 22). There was evidence in the interview material of Malay discrimination against Iban who were perceived as ‘aliens’ because they are not *puak jati*, and the view that Iban, because of their headhunting past and their ‘animist’ religion, should abandon their culture and convert to Islam (ibid: 25). However, the informants emphasised that, if they were to resist this process, a crucial element in the maintenance of identity was a continued use of the Iban language, in that Malay (and English) posed ‘an existential threat to their own language’ (ibid: 21).

In the case of the Iban and to a lesser extent the Murut (Lun Bawang), there is more room for optimism (Coluzzi 2010; Martin 1995, 1996b; Sercombe 1999) in that from Martin's linguistic survey of the early 1990s these two indigenous languages demonstrated a degree of 'vitality', based on such criteria as rate of language transmission to offspring, media and institutional support and the existence of a geographical core of speakers (1995: 49). Coluzzi (2010) makes reference to Martin's findings in his later survey on the Iban and Lun Bawang languages and Martin's 'vitality rating' (on a scale from 0 to 6 [highest]).<sup>18</sup> He confirms Martin's vitality rates, though for the Lun Bawang he suggests that the rate 'may need to be adjusted slightly upwards' (ibid.). Farahfatin too, on the basis of research in Kampong Amo and the Sekolah Rendah there, noted that young Iban in school had 'poor writing and speaking skills in English and Malay' because they spoke Iban at home and in school and maintained close kinship and other relations with Iban-speakers in neighbouring Limbang and Lawas. The language 'is still widely spoken amongst the population living in the rural district of Temburong (2018: 4, 13, 16-17, 24).

Coluzzi provides four reasons for this vitality in the maintenance and use of the Iban language: (1) the Iban tend to choose partners within their own community, and even when outsiders marry Iban they usually end up learning and speaking Iban; (2) the Iban have cohesive and close social networks, and a significant number have retained longhouse domicile; it is an important element in their identity (and see Metcalf 2010); (3) the Brunei Iban are part of a much larger cultural and linguistic group which resides primarily in neighbouring Sarawak. Martin (1995) and Sercombe (1996, 1999) have also emphasised this factor. Sercombe, in his comparative study of an Iban longhouse in Marudi and one in the Upper Belait notes that there are strong and frequent inter-family and inter-community relations which are maintained across the border, and also regular, illegal crossings to maintain communication (1996: 603). He points out that Iban is a lingua franca in the inland areas of Seria-Belait and Temburong (1999: 613); and (4) the Iban language is supported by associations and institutions in Sarawak.

As we foregrounded in our introduction, Iban is a firmly recorded language with its own written literature, regular publications and grammars and dictionaries; there are Sarawak radio and television programmes in Iban, as well as CDs and DVDs. In a detailed study of the relationship between the media and the Iban, John Postill has examined the strengthening and

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<sup>18</sup> Martin assigned Brunei Malay 6, and then the following: Iban 5, Murut (Lun Bawang) 3.5, Bisaya 3, Kedayan 3, Tutong 2.5, Dusun 2, Penan 2 and Belait 0.5 (Coluzzi 2010: 120-121). Coluzzi also undertook a survey, focused on Temburong, intermittently from March to November 2009 comprising 168 Iban speakers and 68 Lun Bawang. He concluded that, on the basis of his survey, it can be affirmed that both Iban and Lun Bawang are 'in a relatively healthy state, even though Lun Bawang appears a little less so than Iban' (ibid.: 134).



dissemination of the Iban language through Radio Sarawak from 1954 and the Borneo Literature Bureau in Kuching from 1960 (2006: 46-64). It may be that in the mid- to long-term the younger generations of Iban will progressively converse and use Malay and English on an everyday basis. But at the present time and in the foreseeable future the Iban language in Brunei, with its strong presence in neighbouring Sarawak and with the continued relationships which have been retained and developed in cross-border relations, would seem to be sufficiently robust to counter the influence and expansion of Malay and English as official languages.

To recap, our focus here is to examine issues of identity and minority status among Iban in Brunei. An important consideration is to keep in mind that the core of Iban culture is in Sarawak. Where they are in the minority, as in the borderlands of Brunei, Sabah and West Kalimantan, they have to adapt to the requirements of the state within which they are located, and in Brunei, they have to respond to the national ideology of Malay Islamic Monarchy (*Melayu Islam Beraja*). This raises the issue of whether or not the Iban there are becoming different kinds of Iban, and we are investigating this through ethnographic material we have gathered in Temburong.

## **Iban Communities in Temburong: a Case Study**

### ***Temburong***

Temburong was separated from the rest of Brunei in 1890 when Rajah Charles Brooke of Sarawak annexed the Limbang District dividing the sultanate into two segments (Crisswell 1971; Maxwell 1996: 161). Temburong therefore became a spatially separate, forested outlier of the main populated areas of Brunei, though it remained closest to the Iban and Lun Bawang populations of Sarawak to the east, south and west. Mangrove and peat swamp forests dominate the lowland areas between the main town of Bangar and the Brunei Bay. Mixed dipterocarp, heath and montane forests cover much of the higher terrain, in the southern region in particular where the Ulu Temburong National Park is located. Up until the opening of the bridge and causeway (since named the Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien Bridge) between the districts of Brunei-Muara and Temburong in March 2020 the connection between the two districts was by water and not by land. Temburong therefore remained relatively undeveloped for a considerable period of time. Its population is the lowest of the four districts of Brunei, but in areal extent it is the second largest district. In 2020 Temburong had an estimated population of

11,200 living in an area of 1,306km<sup>2</sup> (504miles<sup>2</sup>), with a population density of just over 8 per km<sup>2</sup> (just over 20 per mile<sup>2</sup>) (Wikipedia 2021a; Department of Statistics 2020).

### ***The Iban: Early Settlement and Ethnic Relations in Temburong***

Some of the Iban elders in Temburong are considered highly knowledgeable about kinship ties and family origins and are active in passing on this genealogical knowledge (*tusut*) to new generations. Misa Juliana Minggu, a Temburong Iban, in her final year undergraduate research for her dissertation in Sociology and Anthropology (2016), interviewed local *tusut* experts on the origins and history of her people in Temburong. According to one highly respected *tusut* expert, 82 years old at the time of the interview, the Iban began settling in Temburong in the 1890s. He had also travelled to Sarawak and Kalimantan to learn more about the origins of the Temburong Iban. According to oral tradition, they first built a longhouse at Kenua River, a tributary of Sungai Pandaruan. These original settlers traced their ancestry to the Batang Ai, a region in the upper Second Division of Sarawak, to a place called Menoa. Iban in Temburong used to refer to Kenua River as Sungai Menoa. Menoa (or *benoa*) in Iban means ‘country’, ‘home’, ‘abode’, ‘territory’. They settled there in search of new lands for rice cultivation using their traditional methods of swidden agriculture (clearing and burning the trees and undergrowth and planting hill rice [*padi bukit*]), and for hunting and gathering in the forest, and river-fishing.

The Iban elder acknowledged that the Murut (or Lun Bawang; ‘people of the land’) had lived in Temburong long before the Iban entered the area (Misa Juliana Minggu 2016: 21; and see Deegan 1973). The Muruts had named various places in their own language, such as Amo, from the Murut word ‘Amuh’; the meaning of this word is difficult to determine. Some informants suggested that it referred to an animal which the Murut saw when they first discovered the land; another that it referred to a characteristic of those who first settled there as being ‘stingy’ or selfish or unwilling to lose power and control of their domain. Several Iban longhouses are now located in Mukim Amo (a Brunei administrative division or sub-district). The Murut and Iban became close neighbours in Temburong, sharing lifestyles to some extent, particularly in farming and sometimes intermarrying. Gradually, several place names were changed from Lun Bawang to Iban, and over time some Murut changed their ethnic identity and ‘became Iban’ (and see Kedayan below).

Being sparsely populated, Temburong provided the Iban with new land for farming, as well as abundant food supplies from the forest and rivers. They continued to use their traditional methods of shifting agriculture, clearing and burning areas of the rainforest and planting hill rice (*padi bukit*). During the first decades of the twentieth century, some Iban families branched off from the origin house and cooperated with other Iban from Sarawak to establish longhouses elsewhere in Temburong. The Iban built their longhouses mainly above the upper limit of tidal influence, in the freshwater sections of the river system (in Mukim Bukok and Mukim Amo). With boat-building skills and ecological knowledge to exploit the wide range of resources of this environment, they were self-sufficient to a high degree. The location of residence can also been seen as strategic for trade with Kedayan settlers in Temburong, to access items such as sugar and salt.

Up to the early 1980s some Iban households continued to be involved in rice farming, as well as hunting and fishing. Since then these activities have declined in importance, and whilst swidden agriculture more or less disappeared some 40 years ago, hunting, fishing, forest collecting and gathering, and gardening remain important as a part-time or sideline source of food and income to a significant number of rural Iban communities. Government restrictions on shifting agriculture, the availability of alternative occupations, particularly in the public sector, the increasing importance of education for the younger generations, and the means to buy imported rice and other foodstuffs in the local markets have resulted in a dramatic shift in local Iban economies and in the social and cultural practices which accompanied rice farming. Nevertheless, in limited locations in Temburong, the growing of rice, though mainly swamp rice (*padi paya*), continues; in one longhouse small areas are also cleared for the planting of hill rice for use during the major annual Iban festival (*gawai*). Special rice (*padi pun*), which traditionally was seen as sacred and the centre of an elaborate fertility cult focused on the deity of the earth and fertility, Pulang (or Simpulang) Gana, and his children, the spirits of rice (*antu padi*), are still required in *gawai* for the giving of offerings (*miring*) (Freeman 1970: 154, 189, 301; Sandin 1967b). However, much of the knowledge related to swidden agriculture, on which Freeman reported, has been lost, including the fertility cult, sacred rice of secondary importance (*padi sangking*), and the various stages of forest regrowth following clearance and farming (*krukoh*, *dijap*, *damun*, *pengerang*) and how to identify them (ibid: 306-307).

Figure 1 below shows the approximate location of some Iban resource uses in Temburong. The map covers roughly Mukim Amo and Bukok. The resource use pattern documented in the map was common until the 1980s.

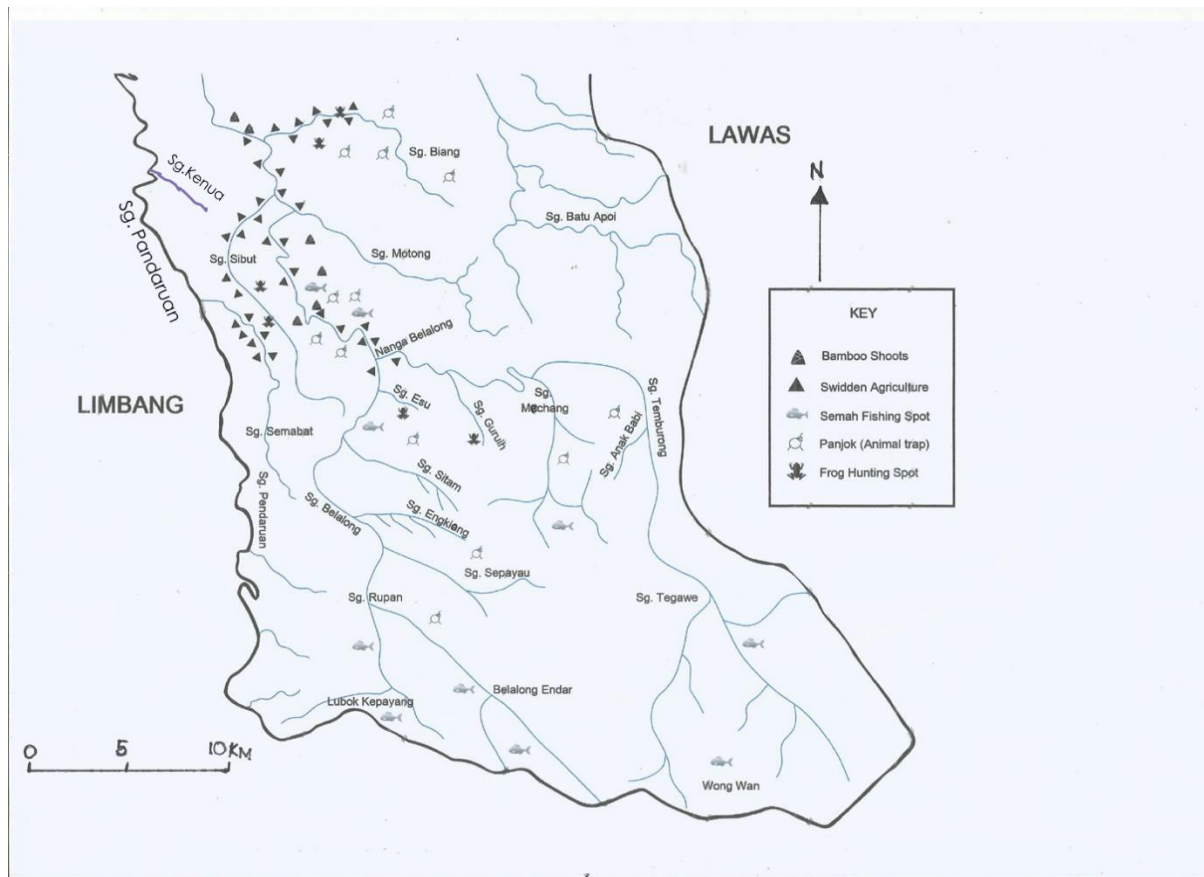


Figure 1: Resource use map. The map is from Magne Knudsen's research project "The life of the Temburong River: An ethnographic perspective" funded by Universiti Brunei Darussalam from 2018 to 2020 (UBD/RSCH/1.2/FICBF(b)/2018/005). Knudsen and his research assistant Misa Juliana anak Minggu are preparing a separate paper on past and present human uses of the Temburong River, including all the sections of the river system from the headwaters ('ulu') to Brunei Bay.

Returning to the historical context of settlement in Temburong, the Kedayan, a Malay-speaking, Muslim population of Brunei, and of neighbouring areas such as Labuan, settled in Temburong in larger numbers at the turn of the twentieth century (Maxwell 1981, 1996). Traditionally, they settled in non-nucleated, dispersed houses on 'dry land' (*tanah karin*) near, but very rarely above, 'the upstream limit of the tidal influences...' (Maxwell 1981: 35). They built boats that allowed them to travel and trade with Brunei [Barunay] Malay who lived clustered together in stilt-house villages on inundated mud-flats or 'wet land' (*tanah basah*) at or near river mouths (Brown 1970; Maxwell 1981: 35). The Iban and Kedayan thus occupied two different ecological niches in Temburong. The indigenous Murut (or Lun Bawang) groups have to a significant extent been absorbed by the Kedayan and Iban. Murut men tended to

marry Kedayan women and live in Kedayan settlements, and over time and particularly with the birth of children Murut ‘became Kedayan’.

## Recent Developments

The Iban remain a significant ethnic group in the relatively small population of Temburong.

Ethnic category	Population	Comments
Malay	5,852	Muslim-Malay Kedayan and Barunay classified together
Iban	2,092	23% of total population
Murut	811	Many Murut refer to themselves as Lun Bawang
Chinese	206	
Dusun	21	
Others	211	
SUM	9,103	Note a small discrepancy in the data (90 people) between the total (9,193) and the sum of all categories.

Table 1: Ethnic Composition of Temburong’s population, 2010 (Temburong District Office [Information Department] 2011).

Iban comprised approximately one-quarter of the total population in 2010. On current estimates of an overall Temburong population in 2020 of 11,200 (an increase of some 2,100 on the 2010 figures) and, on the reasonable assumption that the Iban population has increased proportionately to this (though official data on current ethnic composition are not available), we suggest that their numbers are now around 2,400 to 2,600 and that they continue to comprise between one-fifth to one-quarter of the district’s population. In regard to the indigenous constituents of the *puak jati* (here the Murut [Lun Bawang] only 811 in 2011) and the Dusun [Bisaya], only 21 in 2011), their numbers may well have decreased in the decade from 2010 to 2020 with continued absorption into the Brunei Malay-Kedayan and Iban populations. The Dusun might have disappeared altogether as a separate ethnic group in Temburong.

As a consequence of the geo-political division between Brunei and Malaysian Sarawak and stricter policing of borders, and the subsequent boom in the oil and gas sector in the post-WWII era, there was a degree of separation between the Iban in Brunei and their families and friends elsewhere in Sarawak, though cross-border relations persist. The post-independence period is marked by Temburong Iban efforts ‘to integrate themselves’ into the Brunei nation-state (Misa Juliana Minggu 2017: 24), and also by the state’s efforts to incorporate subject populations into its fold. The government invested massively in infrastructural development

including road construction, housing, domestic water supplies and electricity, and in education and healthcare in areas inhabited by the indigenous populations.

Iban parents made formal education a priority for their children. Many obtained salaried jobs in the public sector, others in the private sector which took them away from their home communities. New housing schemes were introduced and Iban started to move into sites closer to roads, often in individual houses. At the same time, some Iban communities obtained government support for new long house construction. When one long house burned down in 1994, the government provided brick and cement to help the residents rebuild the longhouse. Iban were also focused on obtaining citizenship, so-called ‘Yellow IC’, which means access to free education and healthcare, as well as other government support. Permanent residents, those with ‘Red IC’, have far fewer entitlements. Islam and, in some cases Christianity, have entered the Iban communities in Temburong, mainly through intermarriage and missionary activity, as well as through the dissemination of the national ideology MIB (*Melayu Islam Beraja*) in the education system and the media.

When the Ulu Temburong National Park was established in 1991, covering 40 per cent of the district territory (550 square kilometres), Iban lost easy access to some of their preferred timber for house construction and canoe-making. Instead of going through the bureaucratic process of obtaining permission to cut suitable trees, Iban began buying timber at a local sawmill. Nevertheless, the National Park gave some Iban the opportunity to move into the ecotourism sector, developing homestays in longhouses, providing exhibition spaces, and selling handicrafts and home-made souvenirs to tourists. Some serve as longboat crew to take tourists by river to and from the Park and to act as tour guides for forest walks.

## **Iban Traditions and Identity**

### ***The Longhouse and Social Organisation***

In our estimate, around 20 per cent of the Iban in Temburong live in longhouses today. This would amount to a population of around 500 to 600. Some have abandoned their longhouse and built individual housing units in their old longhouse site, or moved to a single housing unit near the longhouse. Others have relocated to a government housing site in Temburong, and many have settled in Brunei-Muara District for work. Some Iban live in their longhouse part of the week (for example 3 days) and the rest of the week in their new house. Some *bilik* are

temporarily empty. In these cases, the owners may reserve the apartment for their own retirement, or pass it on to one of their children.

Many Iban who live in Bandar and elsewhere (also Sarawak) visit longhouses during weekends, public holidays, school breaks, *gawai* festivals, weddings and funerals. On many of these occasions, the long-established concept of *pengawa beduruk* is still relevant. In their agricultural past it referred to the principle and practice of members of separate households coming together to cooperate in some of the important stages of the rice farming cycle, in clearing vegetation and felling trees, and in planting and harvesting. Freeman refers to it as a ‘labour-exchange system’ (1970: 234-238). This context for cooperation has now largely disappeared in Temburong but it lives on in other activities where coming together and cooperation remain significant. Misa Juliana Minggu records the comment of an individual she interviewed.

The practice of *pengawa beduruk* is still relevant and important to the Iban until today because some of us are still living in the longhouse and live together as a village community. Whether it is a sad or happy occasion, for example death or *Gawai* celebration, the Ibans always do *pengawa beduruk*.

*Pengawa beduruk tu agi dikena bala kitai Iban laban ea agi beguna ngagai yang diau ba rumah panjai tauka hidup bekampung. Nda nrira maya penusah atau maya lantang, contoh ea baka bisi orang udah nadai tauka nyambut hari Gawai, bala kitai rurun mengerjakai pengawa beduruk* (2016: 33).

By participating in and being active in *beduruk* in such events as weddings, funerals and *gawai* (*gawai*, as the celebration of the Iban harvest festival, is held annually on 31 May/1-2 June), Iban create and strengthen social bonds amongst themselves and reconnect with close and distant relatives living elsewhere (see later section on Traditional Religion). The longhouse continues to play a key role in this, symbolically and socially. It remains an important focus of Iban identity.

Observation of social relations in one longhouse in Temburong and informal interviews with many of its residents, in addition to briefer visits to other neighbouring longhouses, we conclude that there are still important elements of what we might term ‘traditional’ Iban social organisation that remain (Fig 2: Plan of the Longhouse). These are also evident, though in a more attenuated form, among those Iban who have moved into individual dwellings. By ‘traditional’ we are referring to the field materials on Iban communities in Sarawak provided by Derek Freeman in his research conducted some 70 years ago (1955a, 1955b, 1960, 1961a, 1970) and Vinson Sutlive from the 1960s (1973, 1978) among many others, including Francis

McKeown's work on the Merakai Iban in the West Kalimantan-Sarawak borderlands (1983; and see Chemaline anak Osup 2017). Three key sets of 'traditional' social relations were focused on: the *bilik*-family, the longhouse and the personal kindred. We examine these in the case-study by providing detailed diagrammatic materials on *bilik*-families with a commentary on kinship networks within the longhouse, and the use of kinship terms. A beautifully written sentence by Freeman captures the character of the traditional Iban longhouse, which is 'made up of a series of independently owned family apartments which are joined longitudinally one to the other so as to produce a single attenuated structure' (1970: 1). It was also raised off the ground on sturdy hardwood posts and entered by means of heavy hardwood ladders (*tangga*) onto the open platform or extended verandah (*tanju*).

From Figure 2, (the plan of a modern Temburong longhouse) we can see that the terms for the parts or sections of the longhouse are still used, but some of the uses of these parts are now rather different. In the traditional Iban longhouse described by Freeman, the *bilik* or family apartment is divided into four parts: the *bilik* or main living area; the *sadau* or loft; the *ruai* or covered gallery; and the *tanju* or open verandah (1970: 1-7). So the term *bilik* is used in two senses, to refer both to the whole apartment and specifically to the main living space. The longhouse was made of natural materials from the forest (wood, often hard-woods, bamboo, rattan, bark).

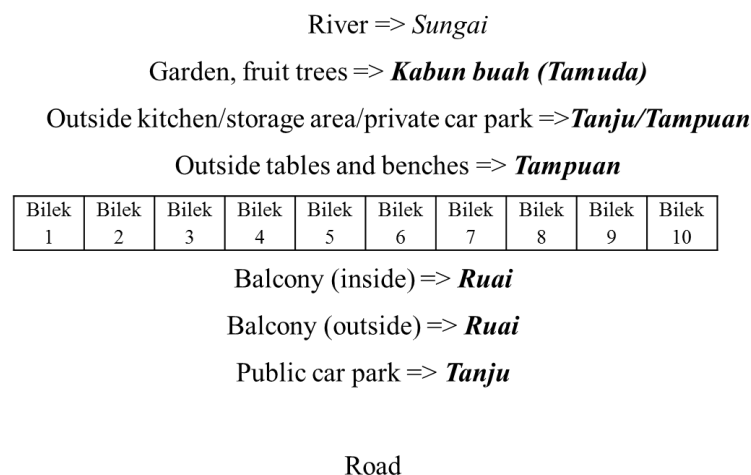


Figure 2: The plan of a modern Temburong longhouse; the *sadau* is still to be found above the ground-floor *bilik*.

Freeman describes the *bilik* as the family living room. This is where the family would usually spend much of their time in domestic activities, where they would cook, eat and sleep, and store and display their main property and keep their domestic equipment. The cooking place or hearth (*dapur*) was located here, situated at the wall dividing the living space from the



*ruai*, near the main door of the *bilik*. Eating food, sitting and sleeping would be undertaken on the floor on plaited mats.

In the case of the Temburong longhouse discussed here, the house is set on the ground, not raised (see Appendix B-1). This decision to build the longhouse on the ground was taken in 1994, after a fire erased their old longhouse. The residents received some government support to rebuild the new longhouse structure. Each family built their own *bilik* first before joining each unit together under a shared roof structure. The living space is substantial. Its floors are often tiled, but wood is also used. Ceiling and walls are usually of plasterboard. There is electricity and piped water. The *dapur*, located in the *bilik* living space, typically looks out over the rear of the house not towards the *ruai*.

Modern appliances and equipment are used: fridges, freezers, gas hobs, free-standing electric fans, air conditioning, and ceiling fans. There are televisions, radios, DVD players, and everyone except the very young has a mobile phone. Tables, chairs and beds and other furniture have replaced plaited mats.

Traditionally the *sadau*, a loft-like structure above the living space in the *bilik* and jutting out over the *ruai* was where the family's *padi* was stored in large bark bins (*tibang*), with smaller containers to store rice seeds for the next season and the sacred rice (*padi pun*, *padi sangking*), which was the focus of the rice rituals and the home of the rice spirits. Farming equipment, including a variety of baskets and winnowing trays would also be kept there. In Temburong the *sadau* is now the location of bedrooms and general storage space on the first floor of the *bilik*. For example, the main homestay in the longhouse has five bedrooms opening out onto a landing and reached by a manufactured staircase with handrails. Bedrooms have raised beds and bunk-beds, wardrobes, dressers, side-tables, easy chairs, air conditioning and ceiling fans.

In Freeman's study the *ruai* comprises the covered verandah, or the longhouse street, part of which was divided into sections, included the *tempuan lesong* immediately outside the main door of the *bilik* where *padi* mortars were kept and rice pounded. At the outer part of the *ruai* closest to the *tanju* was the *padong ruai*, an open rectangular space which was covered with rattan mats, where the residents, mostly men, spent their leisure time and where meetings were held; it was also the place where young unmarried men would construct bunks under the eaves and sleep there. The *ruai* was the centre of community life, domestic production, weaving, making baskets, mending fishing nets, holding meetings and performing rituals. It

was a busy place full of hustle-and-bustle, except in the busy periods of the farming season when families would stay out in their farm-houses (*dampa*) overnight.

In the Temburong longhouse it is a modern space, an open tiled gallery with no divisions, except an outer narrow gallery or walkway (the outer *ruai*). It is little used, often relatively empty, but children play there and elderly residents may sit there for a while outside their *bilik*, and pass the time of day. From time to time it is also a place where tourists are entertained; they can adorn Iban costume, participate in dancing or mat weaving, and have their photographs taken. It is also the focus of activities for the annual *gawai* celebrations and other communal activities (see Appendix B-2).

The *tanju*, which in a traditional Iban longhouse was the open verandah, usually faced the river at the front of the house, and was where, for example, rice would be layed out to dry, as well as various forest products which required drying, and clothes as well as cotton for weaving (see Appendix B-3). In Temburong the *tanju* is now the car park linked to the nearby main road facing away from the river, and the main entrance to the longhouse.

There is also a rear area to the longhouse behind the living space (*tanju tampuan*: *tampuan* is a passage which lies immediately outside the *bilik*) where activities which usually took place on the *ruai* are now sited. There are tables and chairs; residents sit there in the evening outside their *bilik*. Various domestic tasks, food preparation, and drying clothes are undertaken there. It is an area which is not in public view from the road. It is a private, domestic space. It also provides ample parking space for cars, vans and SUVs. The vehicles are protected by a large roof structure.<sup>19</sup> Between the parked cars in the back of the longhouse and the garden (*kabun buah*), there are some storage sheds, space for seedling production, growing ornamental plants, and barbeque facilities. In *bilik* where there are Muslim residents, pork and non-halal meats are typically cooked here, including *babi hutan* (wild boar), and not in the main kitchen within the *bilik*. From time-to-time, some of the men in the longhouse gather in this private, domestic space to barbeque wild boar and drink *tuak*. From there it is a three-minute-walk to the river.

Despite these major differences between the traditional and the modern house, another of Freeman's observations captures the character of both structures. A long-house then, consists of a series of discrete sections joined roof to roof so as to produce a single architectural unit.

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<sup>19</sup> In other modern longhouses in Temburong, the cars are either parked outside (see Appendix B-4) or, if the house is raised on stilts, the cars are parked beneath the living quarters (see Appendix B-5).

And each of these apartments is the private property of a particular family. A long-house community is thus, in essence a village consisting of a single street of attached houses (1970: 7) (see Appendix B-6).

### *The Bilik-family*

In this section, we give an overview of kinship and marriage relations in the Temburong longhouse. Appendix A presents detailed data on the ten *bilik* families.

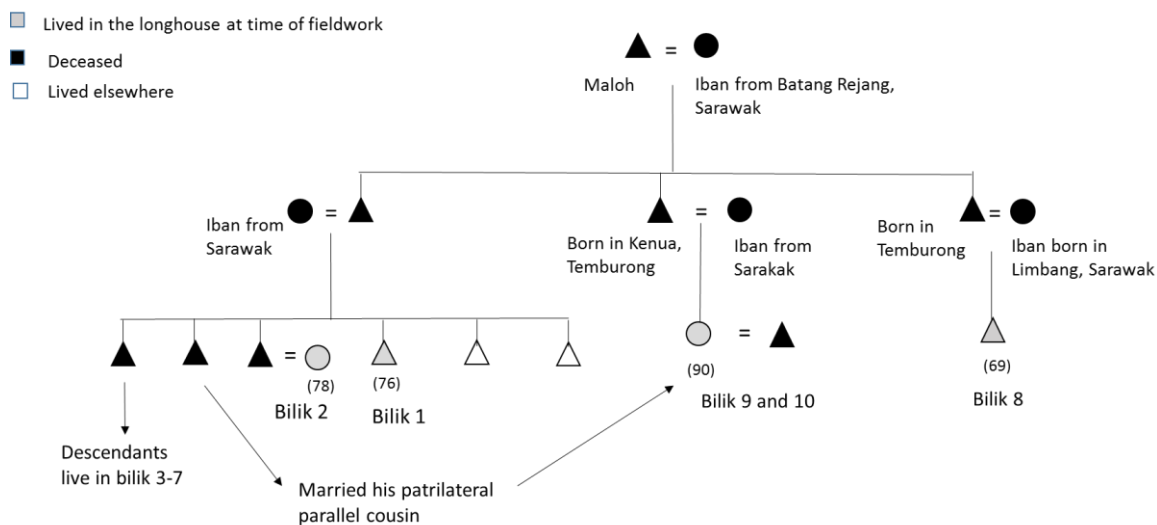


Figure 3: Kinship, marriage and residence relations in a Temburong longhouse

Figure 3 above shows the origin couple of the longhouse, a Maloh man and an Iban woman who moved from Batang Rejang in Sarawak to join relatives at Kenua River in Temburong around 1910. The Maloh, from West Kalimantan, enjoyed close relations with the Iban, both there and in Sarawak; they were known as skilful silversmiths who made adornments for the Iban, spoke fluent Iban and often married into Iban longhouses; significant numbers of Maloh craftsmen were itinerant and stayed for long periods of time in Iban communities making decorative silver items to order (King, 1985b). Soon after, the early Iban settlers of Temburong ‘branched’ off from the Kenua longhouse and established themselves along the Temburong River. All the *bilik*-owners today are descendants of the three sons of this origin couple. In June 2021, there were 67 residents in the longhouse. *Bilik* 8 had had most residents (14). *Bilik* 2 only had one resident. In terms of ethnic composition, approximately 50 residents identified as Iban. Eight of these were Christian converts. There were three Murut (or Lun Bawang) residents who had married into the longhouse, two men in *bilik* 1 and one woman in

*bilik* 2, all of them Christian. One offspring from these mixed marriages identified primarily as Iban, and two as Iban and Christian more than Murut despite their father being Murut and therefore having *bangsa Murut* on their Yellow identity cards. Growing up in the longhouse they learned to speak Iban, not Murut. Also living in the longhouse were six Iban Muslim converts (Muallaf) and six Malay Muslims. To arrive at a more comprehensive account of ethnic identification and learn about when and how such labels take on particular significance, longer-term ethnographic fieldwork is needed and planned.

The data in Figure 3 and Appendix A also reveal that marriage between cousins was accepted practice in the past and may have played a key role in consolidating and strengthening longhouse relations. Freeman noted that Iban married cousins of any kind, from first cousins onwards, usually up to third cousins (1961a: 207-209). Figure 3 shows the marriage between first-degree cousins (parallel patrilineal cousin marriage). Two more cases of cousin marriage took place in the next generation. In Appendix A, these can be found in *bilik* 7 and 9, both second-degree cousin marriages, one inter-longhouse cousin marriage and one intra-longhouse marriage. Since the 1990s, the preference for cousin marriage has diminished considerably and in certain longhouses, is no longer evident. With modernity, mobility, messages from the media and medical experts about the possible health risks of close intermarriage, and the disappearance of longhouses as a dominant form of residence among the Iban in Temburong and elsewhere in Brunei, then marriage preferences have changed. Young Iban now have a much wider range of options open to them and the decreasing importance of retaining close kindred networks have resulted in a movement away from intra-kindred marriage.

Adoption, too, is not unusual. In the Temburong longhouse, there are two cases of intra-longhouse adoption. *Bilik* 4 and 6 have adopted children from *bilik* 5. Temporary fostering arrangements are also in evidence. A woman who grew up in *bilik* 5 moved out and settled in her husband's household in Limbang, Sarawak. When she divorced her Iban husband and remarried a Malay man, her teenage son moved to Temburong to live with his uncle in *bilik* 5.

In Temburong, *bilik* are not sold to outsiders. The child or children who live together in the same *bilik* as the parent before their death and who is willing to take care of his or her aging parents earns a superior claim on inheriting the *bilik*. The *bilik* may also pass on to a son or daughter-in-law, if he or she resides with and takes care of the owner of the *bilik*. So while ties of kinship and affinity and the principle of bilateral inheritance are important, claims to ownership of a particular *bilik* must be pressed and conceded to. Co-residence is important in

this process, in order to earn rights of inheritance. Freeman made a similar point when he stated that the *bilik* is “primarily defined by the criterion of local residence” (1970: 9). More recent work on kinship in island Southeast Asia have added to this argument by demonstrating how ‘relatedness’ is produced through activities such as house-building, dwelling, cooking, sharing meals, breast-feeding and care-taking (Waterson 1995; Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995; Carsten 1997; Janowski and Kerlogue 2007; Aguilar 2013). Freeman also draws attention to the important institution of *pun bilik*, which provides a line of connection between successive generations of those who inherit the *bilik*.

As Freeman indicates, the *pun bilik* (he has *bilek*) is the senior member of the household/family who inherits or who is the ‘owner-member’ of the compartment in the longhouse and its property. Thus, ‘there is a person from whom ownership and inheritance rights of all the other members of the family ultimately stem...’ (1970:31). ‘The *pun bilek* may be looked upon as the nucleus of the *bilek*-family (ibid.: 32). This institution is still observed in longhouses in Temburong.

Another interesting feature of the kinship diagrams in Appendix A is the importance of siblingship. When interviewing residents about their family ties, siblings are enthusiastically remembered. While many siblings have moved out of some of the *bilik* units, the informants had considerable knowledge of their life-circumstances, including their place of residence and their civil status, as well as the birth order and gender of their sibling’s children.

### ***Kinship terms***

Iban terms of reference and address are remarkably constant and consistent, demonstrating a continuity in kinship relations, though with some more recent modifications, and in the language used to talk about kinship. In other words, it demonstrates the vitality of the Iban language and that it continues to express important kinship relationships. Comparisons were made between the terms used by the Temburong Iban and those listed in the Appendix ‘Iban Kinship Terms’ in Freeman’s Report on the Iban, which were in use 70 years ago among the Baleh Iban (1970:311-313), and they are remarkably similar. This is perhaps not so surprising because the Temburong Iban generally trace their descent from the Skrang and Saribas, the Batang Ai, the borders of Sarawak and West Kalimantan and the upper Rejang River region.

The limited number of differences are indicated in the list below (unless specified as reference terms, most terms are used in address and reference). The system, as Freeman described, is ‘bilaterally symmetrical’ in that generally the same terms are used to denote and

address paternal and maternal kin; kinship relationships ‘whether through males or females are of equal value’ (1970: 66-67). Kinship terms are also ordered by generation and most of the terms for cognatic kin are extended to affinal kin. This system persists in Temburong (see Table 2 below).

<i>aki</i>	maternal or paternal grandfather; his brothers and male cousins; spouse’s grandfather; uncle of a parent-in-law
<i>ini</i>	maternal or paternal grandmother: her sisters and female cousins; spouse’s grandmother; aunt of a parent-in-law
<i>apai</i>	father, father’s brothers and male cousins; spouse’s father; spouse’s parents’ brothers and male cousins; parents’ sister’s husband
<i>indai</i>	mother, mother’s sisters and female cousins; spouse’s mother; spouse’s parents’ sisters and female cousins; parent’s brother’s wife
<i>aya</i>	parents’ brothers and male cousins; parents’ sister’s husband; spouse’s father; spouse’s parents’ brothers and male cousins
<i>ibo:</i>	parents’ sisters and female cousins; parents’ brother’s wife; spouse’s mother; spouse’s parents’ sisters and female cousins
<i>menyadi</i>	brothers and sisters and male and female cousins of any degree
<i>aka</i>	elder male and female siblings; elder male and female cousins of any degree; spouse’s elder siblings and cousins
<i>adi</i>	younger male and female siblings; younger male and female cousins of any degree
<i>petunggal</i>	male and female cousins; first cousin, second cousin, third cousin, fourth cousin etc. can be specified as satu kali, dua kali, tiga kali, empat kali respectively
<i>anak</i>	male and female children; sibling’s and cousin’s children; children’s spouses; nephew’s and nieces’ spouses
<i>uchu</i> (Freeman has <i>ucho</i> )	male and female grandchildren; sibling’s and cousin’s grandchildren; spouses of grandchildren (Freeman also includes great-grandchildren in the term which does not appear to apply in Temburong)
<i>ichit</i>	great-grandchildren and sibling’s and cousin’s great-grandchildren (usually a reference term)
<i>mentua</i> (Freeman has <i>entua</i> )	spouse’s parents (reference term)
<i>mentua mata hari</i>	spouse’s parents’ siblings and cousins (reference term)
<i>laki</i>	husband (reference term); personal names or nicknames used in address; sometimes wai is used
<i>bini</i>	wife (reference term); personal names or nicknames used in address; sometimes wai is used
<i>ipar</i>	spouse’s siblings and cousins; sibling’s and cousin’s spouse
<i>ika</i>	spouse’s elder siblings and cousins; sibling’s spouse
<i>duai</i>	spouse’s sibling’s spouse
<i>isan</i>	children’s spouses’ parents; children’s spouses’ uncles and aunts
<i>menantu</i>	children’s spouses; nephews’ and nieces’ spouses (reference term)
<i>wai</i>	relative or kinfolk; can be used as a form of address in a person’s own generation, or if relatives are distant; it is not usually used for the parental generation or for one’s children’s generation

Table 2: Temburong Iban Kinship Terms

The address terms (in Freeman 1970) which do not seem to be used among the Temburong Iban, though they are known, are *aki tampil* (spouse's grandfather) and *ini tampil* (spouse's grandmother); *ucho [uchu] tampil* (grandchild's spouse; sibling's grandchild's spouse). The terms for nephew (*akan*) and *endo* (niece) seem not to be used; instead they use the term *anak menyadi*.

We can see from the diagrams of the longhouse *bilik*-families that there is a network of close relationships between the separate households. Between very close households there are doors and small windows in the adjoining walls for ease of contact and conversation. Freeman notes that in a longhouse the several households are interrelated through a relatively dense kinship network which he terms a '[personal] kindred' (*kaban*) which he defines as 'that cognatic category which embraces all of an individual's father's kin, and all of his (or her) mother's kin'. He continues 'We may think then, of a kindred as radiating out bilaterally, to include all those persons to whom relationship can be traced through either male or female links. It is, therefore, an uncircumscribed grouping, extending indefinitely outwards' (ibid: 67, and see Freeman 1961). Its status is as 'an undifferentiated bilateral category' and not 'a group'. But importantly it has a moral basis and kindred members have the obligation to support one another in a range of activities, and, in so doing, they form 'kindred-based action groups' (1961a: 213).

Freeman is clear, in his highly regarded paper 'On the Concept of the Kindred' (1961a), that the kindred comprises 'cognatic kin' or 'consanguines' descended from 'the same cognatic stock'. He supports this, among an impressive range of other evidence, with reference to the origin of the term in 'Early Middle English', and from the Old English *cyn* (blood relations) and *ráeden* (a condition or reckoning) (ibid.: 192). In his view, 'affines are specifically excluded from the kindred' (ibid: 201). He notes too that cousins within the kindred (usually from the first to the third degree) are 'preferred marriage partners' (ibid: 209). Therefore, cognates who become affines are apparently no longer kindred members; their status changes. This does not appear to be the case among the Iban of Temburong where there is certainly clear evidence of cousin-marriage (though this traditional marriage preference has diminished considerably) in that it appears that the term *kaban* embraces cognates and affines, and even friends in a 'fictive kinship' relationship. Whether this is a more recent change in definition and conception is difficult to establish definitively.

There is another difficulty. Freeman explained the dilemma of trying to set defined boundaries and associated terms to degrees of cousinship when addressing ‘an uncircumscribed grouping [category]’. We experienced the same dilemma in Temburong. He suggests that the term *kaban* is not used within ‘the elementary family’ (for example between siblings, their parents and children), therefore essentially within the limits of a *bilik*-family; nor is it generally used in regard to first cousins (*petunggal satu kali*), so it appears not to be used for those who are the descendants of the same grandparents. We found this to be the case in Temburong. He then continues that *kaban* are usually designated as such within the range of second to fifth cousins. So *kaban* appears to be generated downwards and outwards from the great-grandparental generation. Beyond that members of *kaban* become *juru* and beyond that, though the limits were almost impossible to define, they become *suku* (ibid: 68-69). In Temburong there was extended discussion about the definition of *kaban*. One man in one of our group discussions said ‘It can be a relative or a friend’. Turning to us he then said ‘You are our *kaban*’. The Iban were already using personal Iban names they had created for us and kinship referents. So that one of the co-authors of this paper is now Aki Dom and the other Wat (or sometimes when addressed by younger children Apai Wat). Another discussant evoked the head-hunting past referring to *kaban* as a *bala* (a ‘force’, ‘army’ or ‘multitude’) (Howell and Bailey 1900: 24).

The Temburong Iban often used the term *kaban belayan*. *Belayan* refers to a a clump of trees, or grass etc’ which embraces the notion of connectedness (ibid: 31). But Howell and Bailey provide a series of meanings for *kaban*, some of which overlap with other categories of relationship and groupings (‘follower’, ‘kinsman’, ‘band’, ‘flock’, ‘herd’; and the verb ‘to have followers’) some of which seem to hark back to an Iban past of pioneering, mobility, and raiding parties. All we can say is that *kaban* is a flexible ideational category which embraces kinship and friendship, which can bring distant kin whose relationships are indeterminate and close friends into the realm of kinship, which is fluid and which has fluid boundaries.

The distinctions which Freeman made between *kaban*, *juru* and *suku*, though the boundaries were also difficult to determine, are or have become even more difficult to define. For those distant relatives the Temburong Iban referred to them in a combined category as *suku juru*. We think most, if not all Temburong Iban, with whom we spoke would see it in this way, and, though Freeman’s categorisations seem at least a little more precisely defined, in the Temburong they have become rather more imprecise. Perhaps this is to do with modernisation, movement into and living in towns, mixing with other ethnic groups in urban and educational



settings, and leaving the longhouse so that for many Iban these terms become increasingly difficult to pin down.

### *Socio-economic activities*

As mentioned above, the Temburong Iban have shifted out of primary sector work to mainly salaried jobs in government and private sectors. However, Kanza Aneeb has undertaken interviews of Iban at Kampong Amo and the Eco Village Sumbiling Lama to determine whether the Iban still use and exploit the forest (2020). It appears, that as a result of government restrictions through the Forest Preservation Act on access to primary forest (*rimba*), and even limits on the use of secondary forest (*tamuda*) where some activities are permitted, though several are subject to an annual licence and a payment, the Iban make much less use of forest resources (2020: 17-18).

In addition to government-imposed restrictions on forest use mentioned in Kanza Aneeb's study, the longhouse residents we worked with emphasised a lack of access to labour as a key reason for why they had abandoned rice farming entirely. As children stayed longer in school, families could no longer mobilise enough fieldhands to make rice farming a viable economic activity. In fact, rice farming, so central to Iban culture in many of Freeman's publications (1955a, 1955b, 1970), is becoming a thing of the distant past. Today, only a few older residents remember the rice varieties they planted back in the 1970s, such as *padi nibung* (black), *padi siam* (white), *padi pulut* (sticky) and *padi sayuk/sauk* (small). For several decades now, they have been buying rice in public markets and grocery stores, lately mostly Thai and Cambodian rice.

Iban in Temburong are now mainly employed in urban-based and government sector occupations. However, there is continuing exploitation, on a part-time basis, in hunting and fishing, animal rearing and foraging, wood for boat-building, materials for fish-trap making, and some collection of forest products for food and herbal medicines (Kanza Aneeb 2020: 23-27). Some Iban also have considerable knowledge of the forest environment (and see Franco and Misa Juliana Minggu 2019). Tourism and forest protection requirements also provide them with employment as tour guides, boatmen, rangers and forest police (ibid: 20-21).

For the residents of the longhouse which is the focus of our study, the pattern is quite similar. In March 2021, six residents obtained their main source of income from self-employed work in the longhouse, making handicrafts, organising activities and renting out rooms for tourists. Ten residents had government jobs, four in the District Office. Others had jobs in public schools, one teacher, a clerk and a janitor. Two women worked as landscapers in a

nearby public park and one man worked in a water-treatment plant. Some had salaried jobs in private companies, one working in the oil industry, one in sales, and one was a driver. Many of the men who had moved out of the longhouse worked as policemen in Bandar; others had retired from the policeforce. Appendix A has more data on work and other economic activities of the residents in the longhouse.

While rice farming has disappeared, gardening remains important for several *bilik*-families. Around the longhouse, many residents grow vegetables and other crops, such as long bean, corn, coconut, yam, banana, pumpkin, papaya, durian and lemon grass. Along the river, on both sides, residents collect ferns and edible leaves of various kinds. Much of this is for their own consumption, but also for selling in the market. On the other side of the river, on government land, residents belonging to nine of the ten *bilik*-units have established durian plantations on government land, many owning around 60 to 100 trees each. They grow several different species of durian. In a good season, 100 fruit-bearing trees can produce durian worth around B\$ 5,000. Lack of labour, however, is one explanation for why the harvest has been quite dismal for the last two years.

Although very few men hunt and fish on a regular basis, many fish and hunt from time to time. They set fish and animal traps. They utilise different kinds of hook-and-line and net fishing equipment. Currently, there are five boat owners and one boat-maker in the longhouse. Those living and working elsewhere frequently join hunting and fishing trips when visiting their origin house during weekends or on public holidays. They do so because they have a desire for traditional foods, want to re-bond with relatives and friends, and experience the excitement that fishing and hunting offers.

Despite the continuing importance of river-oriented livelihood and recreational activities, there has been a significant re-orientation from rivers to the roads. In April 2021, longhouse residents owned around twenty cars. The effects of the new bridge opening up Temburong to Brunei-Muara remains to be studied. So far, since the bridge opened last year, a few longhouse residents have begun commuting to work in Bandar. It is also easier for residents to go shopping in Bandar, and those who live in Bandar, Tutong and Belait have an easy drive when they visit relatives in Temburong.

## **Iban Identity**

We have already confirmed that there is an Iban identity that is maintained in Temburong, supported through the continued use of the Iban language. The longhouse under study, with an admixture of Iban, Iban who had converted to Islam, and Malay Muslims and Murut (Lun

Bawang) who had married into the longhouse, continued to demonstrate a high degree of Iban identity with the regular use of the Iban language. On our visits to this Iban longhouse the womenfolk were usually watching Sarawak television programmes in the Iban language demonstrating the importance of connections with Iban media beyond Brunei. Older generations, in particular, listen to Iban radio programmes from Sarawak. A local radio station across the border in Limbang is on air with Iban content five hours each day. A Sarawak-wide channel has Iban content from 2-4pm (88.70). Both channels focus on Iban music, folktales and news, including death announcements. Many Iban in Brunei are also members of a WhatsApp group that shares information on Iban events, such as Gawai festivals and funerals. Facebook, Instagram and Tik Tok are other social media that Iban use to promote their culture and re-invigorate, expand and maintain their social networks. Undoubtedly there is an increasing tendency to mix Iban with Malay words, but the dominant language in the longhouse is Iban.

### ***Traditional religion***

What is left of Iban religion, symbolism, ritual activities? *Gawai* is still performed but has been considerably modified. Mourning practices are still observed in funeral rituals. Elements of augury (*beburong*) still survive based on the interpretation of the movements, appearance, behaviour and sounds of seven specific sacred omen birds and selected animals, to determine whether or not an event such as marriage, going on a journey, setting out on a venture such as hunting, fishing, taking a particular job are auspicious and appropriate or not. The Iban hold to the belief that messages are sent to them by the ancient deities; they are divinely sanctioned; but they have to be understood and interpreted correctly (Freeman 1961b: 142-143). Dreams (*mimpi*) like augury provide signs (*petanda*) concerning future human actions and intentions and they also continue to be interpreted (based on field research undertaken in Kampong Amo in 2019; Azizzulfadli 2019: 6-7, 18). However, they are no longer used as extensively as in the past because they were associated especially with the shifting cultivation of hill rice and other crops, and this is no longer undertaken. Augury now depends much more on individual decisions and choice, and is not a more general cultural requirement.

In regard to mortuary ritual and mourning practices, elements of traditional culture remain, largely arising from Iban respect for the deceased and the desire to ensure that their soul or spirit leaves this world and finds its way to the otherworld (*Sebayan*) (Nur Rubiatulnabilah 2019). Major changes have been made in the scale and duration of the rituals and prohibitions; these have been much reduced, and there is no animal sacrifice or burial

property provided. Hardly any ritual specialists remain, who are knowledgeable in the proceedings for preparation and committal to burial nor in the oral deliveries which accompany the dead to the next world (ibid: 7-10). However, prayers (*sampi*) are offered, limited offerings (*miring*) are made and some prohibitions (*pantang*), such as restrictions on entertainment, behaviour and dress, are observed during the mourning period. There is also a process to prepare the body for burial and to conduct it (*ngesan*) to the graveyard (*pendam*). Conversion to Christianity or Islam and the requirements of employment do not permit extended ritual and observances. For example, the mourning period (*ngetas ulit*) has been reduced to 2 weeks, at the most 4 weeks (ibid: 16, 26). Nevertheless, when a death occurred in late December 2020 in an Iban longhouse which operates homestays all tourist bookings were cancelled on short notice to clear space for family members who wished to return to the longhouse and to ensure there was no inappropriate disturbance or behaviour during the mourning period.

We observed the major annual Iban *gawai* on the evening of 31 May/I June 2021 in one Temburong longhouse. It is difficult to disentangle ‘tradition’ from what is happening now in relation to *gawai*. A reconstructed *Gawai Dayak* was only officially recognised in Sarawak on 1 June 1965 combined with a public holiday; it embraced not only the Iban, but also the Bidayuh and Orang Ulu. It was also introduced in Kalimantan, and then in Brunei, among the Iban only (Wikipedia 2021b). This ‘feast’ or ‘festival’ was formulated in Sarawak in 1957, as a political move, to express the identity and aspirations of the Dayak or non-Malay-Muslim indigenous populations of the state. Traditionally the harvest festivals were usually performed, by the Iban at least, in April or May and not June, and the Iban *gawai* devoted to Pulang Gana comprised four separate festivals focused on house-warming, whetstones, rice seeds and storing the harvested rice after it has been processed (Howell and Bailey 1900: 47-49). These were then replaced for the Iban with one major festival in 1965 which, though still linked with the rice harvest, became a more generalised event oriented to Iban identity and well-being (Postill 2000). An important point should be made; Brunei Iban received and accepted this festival innovation from Sarawak (as did West Kalimantan Iban) which yet again confirms the close connection between the centre of Iban culture in Sarawak and its outliers.

Bearing in mind that this is ‘constructed (invented) tradition’ going back around 55 years, some Brunei Iban, particularly those resident in longhouses, still hold to some of this tradition in order to confirm their identity. The *gawai* has been transformed into an event which is no longer a ritual in a total sense; it offers thanksgivings and seeks blessings and support from deities, departed ancestors and spirits, and to this end it presents offerings to them. Its intention is also to chase away those malevolent spirits and spirits of greediness which cause

illness and misfortune. Its main purpose is to ask for health, success and prosperity on behalf of the community.

It uses various devices to do this and the Iban in this Temburong longhouse follow some of the more general practices of Iban elsewhere in Borneo, accepting that there will still be considerable variation between communities. The main agency of contact with the Otherworld is the offering (*miring*), undertaken the evening before *gawai* proper starts the next day. Ingredients of the offering may vary between Iban but usually these comprise, as they do in the longhouse under study, betel nut, sireh leaves, lime, rice flour cakes, glutinous rice (usually in packages), pop-rice, hard-boiled eggs, salt, sago flour, banana and rice beer (*tuak*). The offerings, as protection from the spirits, are put on plates and placed at various parts of the *bilik*, on the *ruai*, at the entrances to the living area, in the main rooms of the *bilik*, and in their cars. The ceremony also involves a senior person, accomplished in the ritual process, to wave a hen or cockerel over the offerings (*bebiau*), while presenting a prayer (*sampi*) for the well-being health and prosperity of the community, and then to sacrifice it, placing some of its feathers on the food offerings and to touch the main participants with the blood of the chicken.

After the offerings have been completed for each *bilik* (in the case of the longhouse under study some Christian and Muslim Iban did not participate), the head of the longhouse or his representative waits until midnight and then proposes a toast (*Ai Pengayuh*) when all those present drink *tuak* (as a request for health and a long life). Then the open house commences, participants are invited to partake of food and drink from each *bilik*, and there is dancing, singing and music which goes on into the small hours and can continue for the rest of the day. Home cooked Iban food, characterised by clean, simple tastes, was served. Some dishes were cooked in bamboo stems, including glutinous rice and chicken dishes. Ferns, green leaves, bamboo shoots, wild mushrooms and other produce harvested in the forest and along river banks were key ingredients in many of the dishes.

In the case considered here the *sampi* was brief, no one was dressed in 'traditional' costume, there were a few short traditional dances by men, invariably older men, and women, some of them younger. There were no invocations (*pengap*), processions around the longhouse, ritual shrines (*ranyai*), the remembrance pole (*tiang pengingat*), or live percussion music (with gongs and drums) (Postill 2000: 173-174).

It also provides a major opportunity for cooperation and reciprocity (*beduruk*) to prepare for the *gawai*, and close members of the *bilik* family who lived outside the longhouse came a day or two before the ceremony to help with the work. Preparation of the food was an especially important part of the cooperative activities (*ngemparu*). It also presented an occasion

for members of the *kaban* and their friends to return to the longhouse. Although visits were somewhat reduced because relatives could not come from outside Brunei, particularly Limbang, because of Covid restrictions, we found that there were family visitors from elsewhere in Temburong, from Bangar, Brunei Muara, Tutong, and Kuala Belait.

### ***Material Culture***

Although there are still longhouses in Temburong, their structure and architecture have been transformed significantly from those observed in Sarawak in the 1950s to 1980s. Modern materials are used in construction. Our earlier description of the longhouse demonstrates the changes which have taken place. But the essential point is that the Iban longhouse in Temburong where they still exist, though modernised, demonstrate a desire for closely related families to continue to live in adjacent compartments under one roof.

It goes without saying that Iban traditional costumes are rarely worn, and they were not in evidence in the *gawai* on 31 May/1-2 June 2021. In the homestays there are costumes which are used to provide performances and entertainment for tourists. But these are not strictly traditional if we compare them with costumes, especially those worn by females in Sarawak in the 1950s and 1960s. They are also worn for national day celebrations in Brunei. Tourists can also dress in costumes for photographic opportunities. In other words, Iban costumes have undergone ‘touristification’ and ‘national cooptation’, but are rarely worn.

Some Iban also retain skills in weaving simple baskets and trays, principally for the tourist market. But these skills are rapidly disappearing. What is more, no women in Temburong retain the skills of weaving *ikat* cloth and the dramatic and complex ritual cloths (*pua kumbu*) for which the Iban are renowned. There is no evidence that Iban men in Temburong have skills in wood carving. It is unlikely that they would see this as a priority in that the traditional religion that required the carving of images is no longer practiced. One cultural marker that identified the Iban, specifically men, was tattooing. This too has disappeared, or if it is still practiced it is hidden and not overt (Misa Jualina Minggu, 2016: 30). Having said this, one of the main craft skills that has been retained among a few Iban men is boat-building.

### **Conclusion: Whither the Iban of Temburong?**

Field research undertaken by students at UBD among the Iban of Temburong confirm some of the conclusions reached by Coluzzi (2010) about the persistence of Iban identity even though Iban constitute a minority population. Misa Juliana Minggu, based on her study of Iban ethnic identity in Temburong, suggests that it is ‘strong interdependence’ and closely knit kinship relations within the community in conjunction with levels of ‘fictive kinship’ which draw friends and acquaintances into the orbit of kinship circles; even if they are non-kin. There is a continued importance of genealogical knowledge of kinship connections (*tusut*) and origins; the role of the village head (*tuai rumah*) in coordinating the community also supports identity, reinforced by continued residence in longhouses of some Iban (Misa Juliana Minggu 2016: 2, 33-34, 19, 28, 36-37). One institution, *pengawa beduruk*, is especially important, based on gathering together, sharing and offering mutual support at such events as marriage, death and the annual *gawai*, which also embraces Iban who have converted to Islam and reside in individual family dwellings separate from the longhouse. Another significant element of identity is the Iban language still widely spoken in Temburong and Belait and shared with the substantial Iban population in Sarawak, where the language has been recorded, developed and regularly used in the media.

Nevertheless, there is a tension between being a member of a much wider cultural-linguistic Iban grouping of Borneo and living as a minority population in a dominant Muslim-Malay state. There has also been considerable modernisation in Brunei since independence in 1984 and, based on oil and gas wealth, the development of infrastructure including roads, housing, schools and medical centres; and the provision of salaried government employment, education and welfare, in the context of a politico-legal and cultural environment which is oriented to Islam and the Malay language (and English), all of which have had a significant effect on the Iban and resulted in the disappearance or modification of much of their culture. Tourism too and the development of homestays have brought changes to Iban culture and economy but has also served to sustain a modified Iban identity, through cultural performances, a simplified craft manufacture to sell items to tourists, and exhibition rooms displaying Iban material culture in longhouses (Misa Juliana Minggu 2016: 25). The Iban have responded actively to the politico-legal, economic and cultural environment, and adapted to it, which may suggest that a specific kind of Brunei Iban identity is in the process of formation, though in what form it will persist into the future in Brunei is more difficult to predict (ibid: 39).

A final observation is on a discernible degree of ambiguous flexibility in the Brunei Nationality Act 1961 over the concept of indigeneity. Although Sea Dayaks (Iban) are designated as indigenous under the Act's appended list, they are not *puak jati*. Yet, interestingly, we find that in our case study of an Iban longhouse around 90 per cent are now citizens, holding Yellow Identity Cards. Moreover, if their father is Iban then they are designated as *bangsa Iban* on their Identity Card. Overall, our estimate is that about 50 per cent of Iban in Temburong are citizens and the rest carry permanent resident cards ('Red IC'), but they will continue to reside in Brunei and commit themselves to the nation-state, perhaps ultimately to become citizens. It seems from our research that the nuances of the Iban of Temburong's lived experience in Brunei Darussalam is a welcome addition to the annals of Iban Studies.

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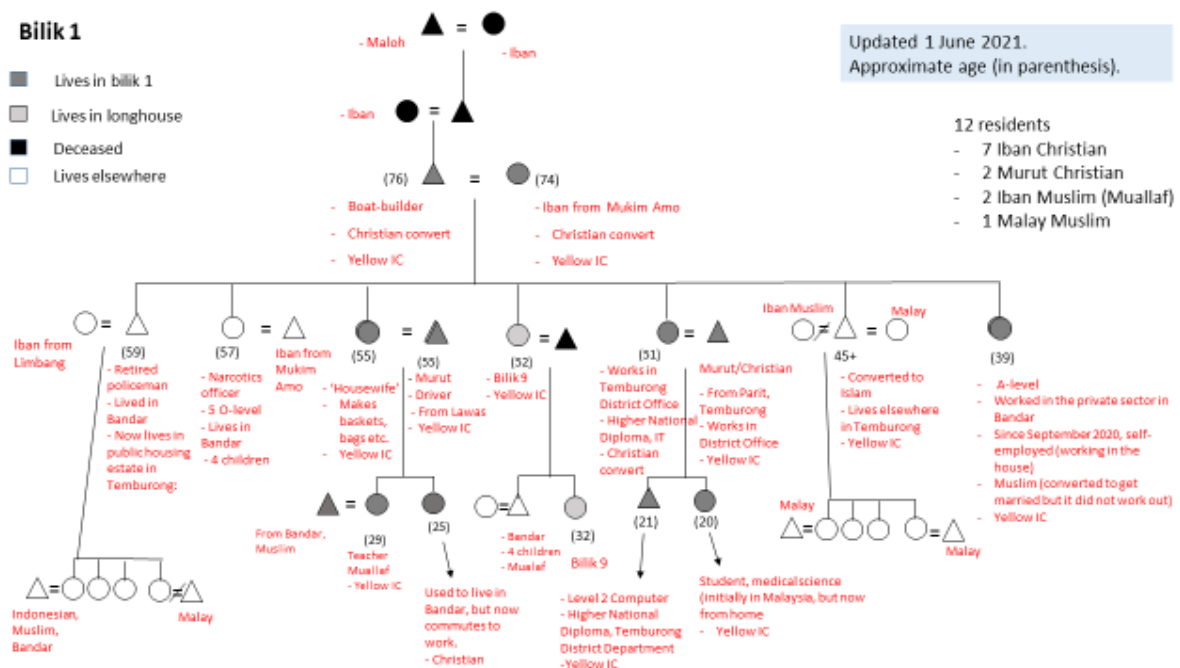
## Appendix A

### Bilik 1

- Lives in bilik 1
- Lives in longhouse
- Deceased
- Lives elsewhere

Updated 1 June 2021.  
Approximate age (in parenthesis).

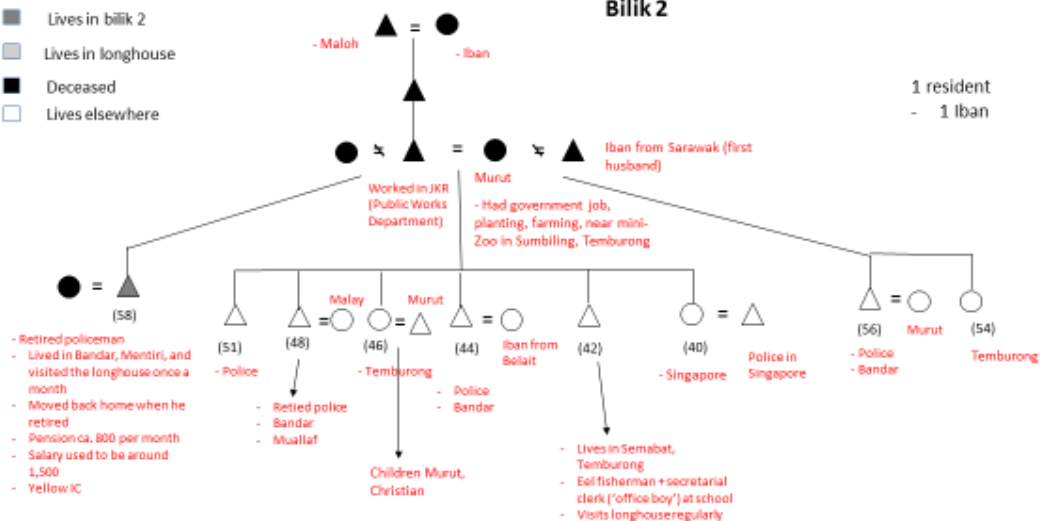
- 12 residents
- 7 Iban Christian
  - 2 Murut Christian
  - 2 Iban Muslim (Muallaf)
  - 1 Malay Muslim



### Bilik 2

- Lives in bilik 2
- Lives in longhouse
- Deceased
- Lives elsewhere

- 1 resident
- 1 Iban

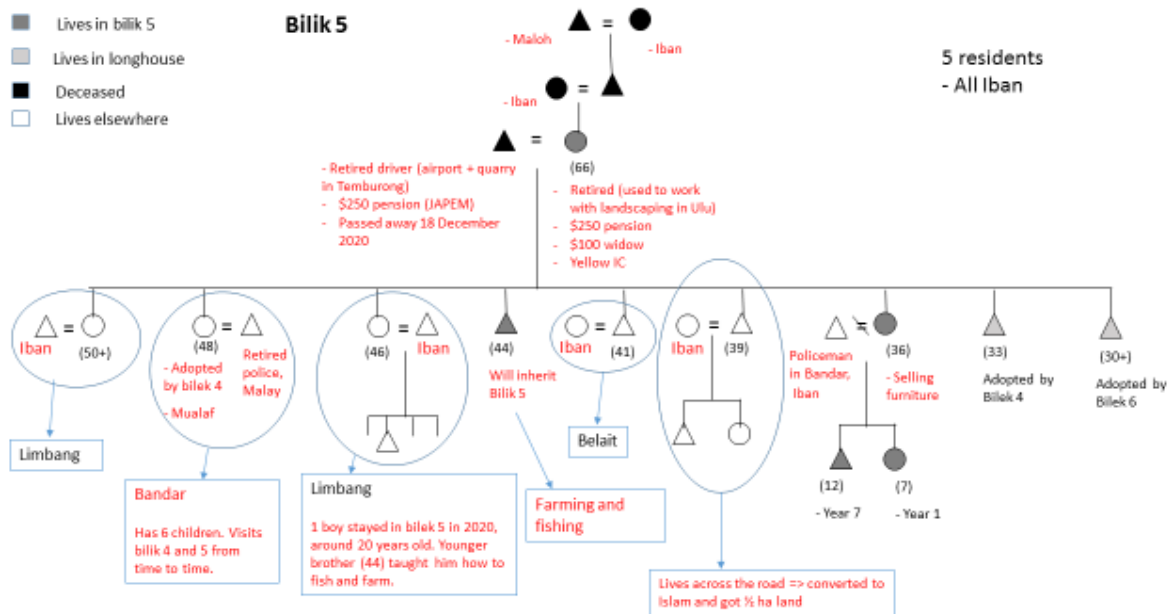




- Lives in bilik 5
- Lives in longhouse
- Deceased
- Lives elsewhere

### Bilik 5

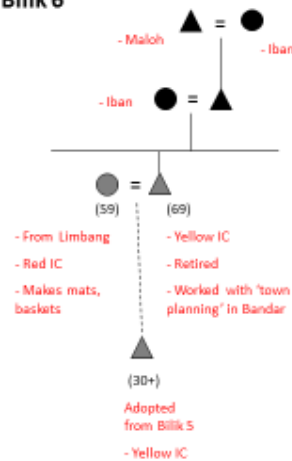
5 residents  
- All Iban



- Lives in bilik 6
- Lives in longhouse
- Deceased
- Lives elsewhere

### Bilik 6

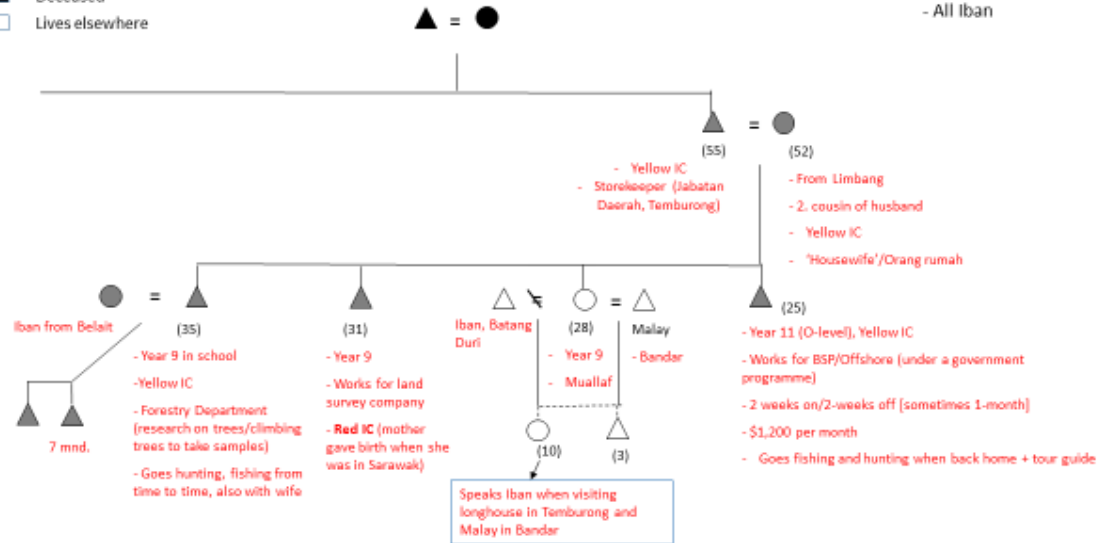
3 residents  
- All Iban



- Lives in bilik 7
- ▣ Lives in longhouse
- Deceased
- Lives elsewhere

### Bilik 7

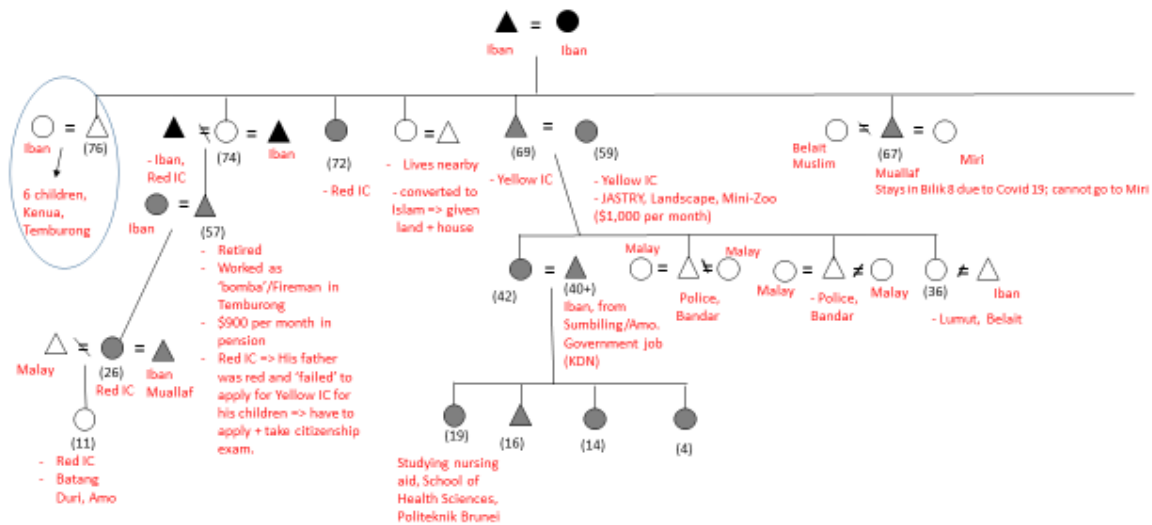
8 residents  
- All Iban

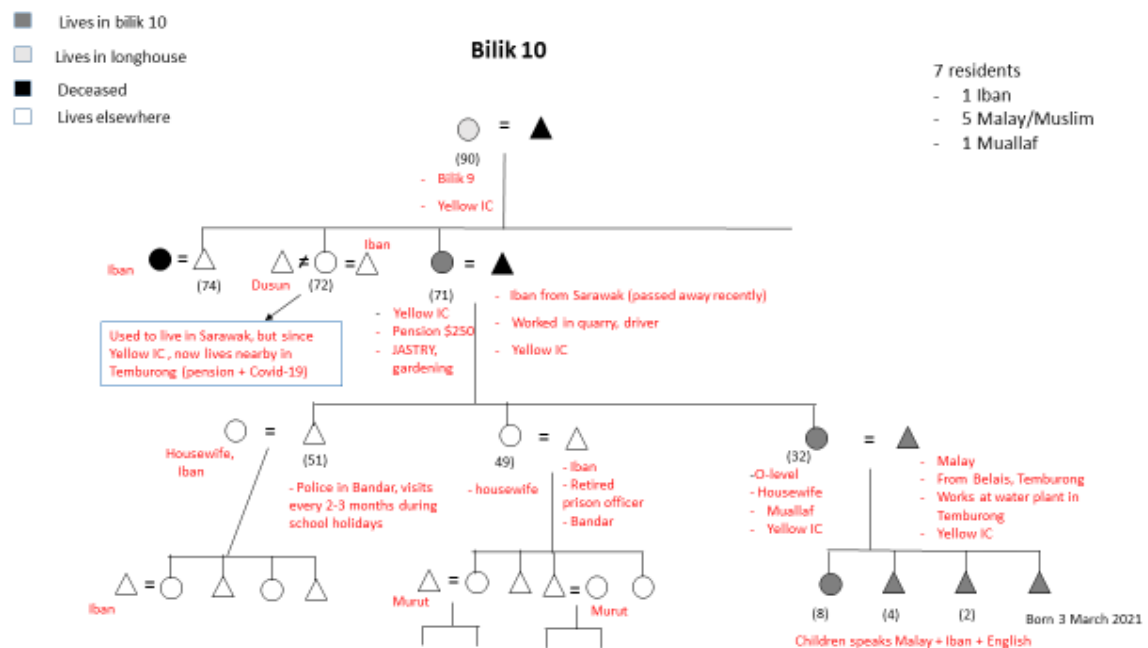
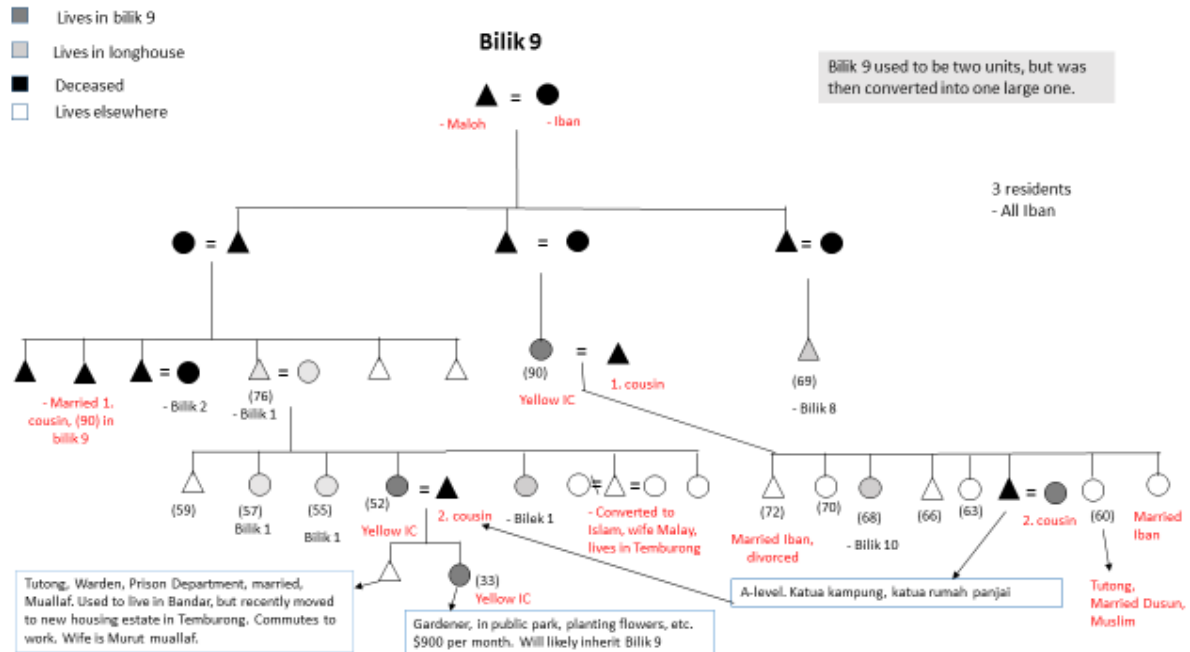


- Lives in bilik 8
- ▣ Lives in longhouse
- Deceased
- Lives elsewhere

### Bilik 8

14 residents  
- 11 Iban  
- 3 Iban Muallaf





## Appendix B



Appendix B-1: A modern longhouse in Temburong constructed from bricks, breeze blocks and plasterboard. The house is not raised above the ground on stilts and the *tanju* is a public carpark facing the main road. Source: M. Knudsen, September 2020.



Appendix B-2: The *ruai* with tiled floors in a modern Temburong longhouse. Source: M. Knudsen, September 2020.





Appendix B-3: The *tanju* of a traditional Iban longhouse constructed of natural forest materials, including bamboo, ironwood and tree-bark, Upper Embaloh, West Kalimantan. Source: VT King, January 1973.



Appendix B-4: A modern longhouse in Temburong constructed in wood. Source: M. Knudsen, March 2021.



Appendix B-5: A modern longhouse in Temburong raised on stilts with space for parking cars below the dwelling units. Source: M. Knudsen, March 2021.



Appendix B-6: An Iban longhouse in Betong, Sarawak, showing some modifications to the traditional Iban longhouse and demonstrating from variations in the roof material that the longhouse comprises separate *bilik*-families. Source: VT King July 1985.