Kinship and Food in South East Asia

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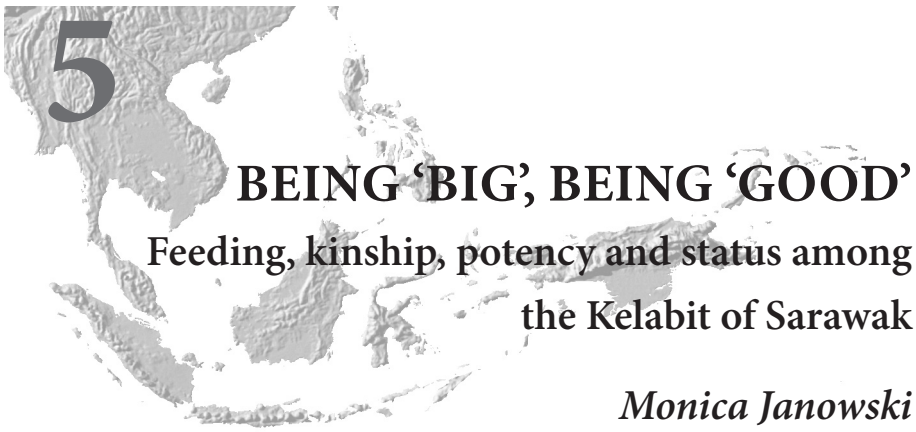
Cover photograph: Prayer before rice meal at the hearth headed by Balang Pelewan and Sinah Balang Pelewan, Pa' Dalih, Kelabit Highlands, February 2005.



5

BEING 'BIG', BEING 'GOOD'

Feeding, kinship, potency and status among the Kelabit of Sarawak

Monica Janowski

During my fieldwork among the Kelabit, a group of about 8000 people[2] whose home is in the headwaters of the river Baram in Sarawak on the island of Borneo, my attention was very soon focused on the term and concept of *lun merar*, literally 'big people', who are also described as *lun doo* ('good people'). I soon understood that this concept is fundamental to understanding the dynamics of Kelabit society. The term *lun merar* was used to refer to any married couple with children (who may also be described as *diweng ruma'*, literally 'they two of the house'); but it is also the basis of status differentiation, which is based on what the married couple achieves through their role as parents and grandparents. This achievement was, I found, measured and described in terms of how 'strong' (*kail*) a couple's 'human life force' (*ulun*) is, expressed in such comments as *kail ulun diweh* – literally 'their *ulun* is strong' (the pronoun *diweh*, which is also contained within the term *diweng ruma'*, refers to two people). In this paper I want to explore the central link between the married couple, or 'big people' and notions of potency, life force and fertility, and to suggest that this is central to understanding Kelabit notions of kinship.

The Kelabit

In the Highlands, the Kelabit live in longhouses of about 50–100 people which are usually grouped, sometimes in large groups as in Bario, the main population centre in the Highlands, sometimes in groups of two or three longhouses, as in the community of Pa' Dalih, my field site (see Figure 5.1). Wet and dry rice cultivation is the main agricultural activity (see Janowski 2004); Kelabit rice cultivation is very successful. The fact that certain varieties of rice which are grown in wet fields

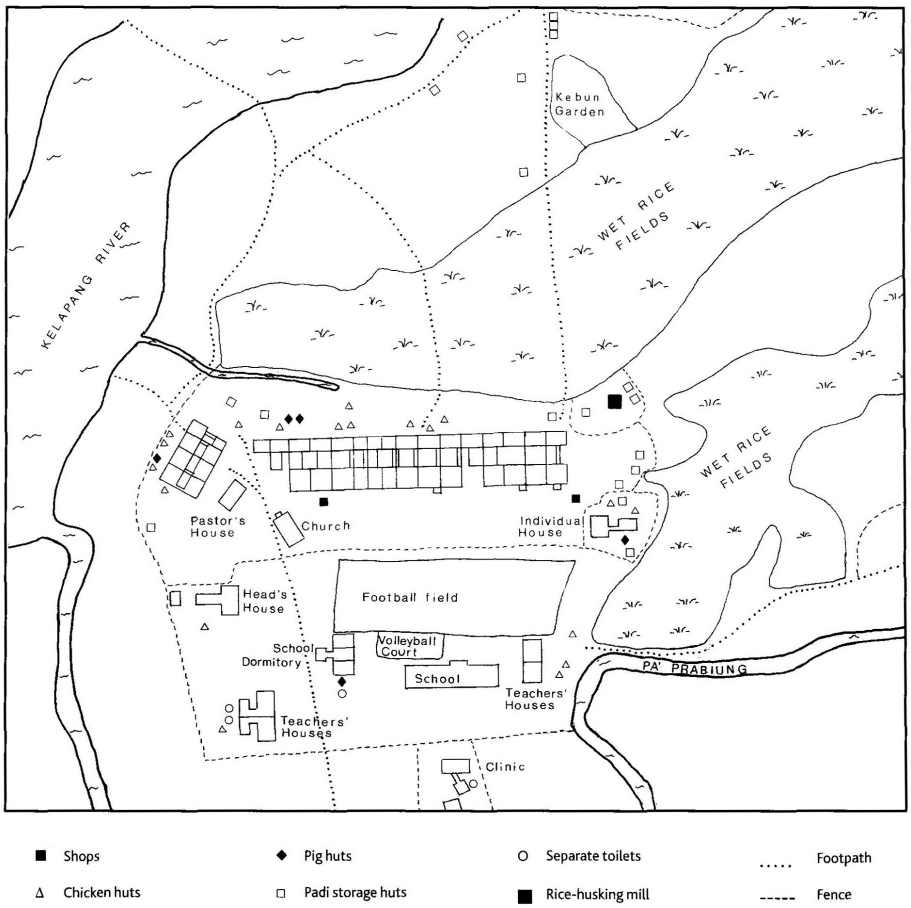


Figure 5.1 Plan of the community of Pa' Dalih, 1988

(known as *pade adan* and *pade dari* in the Highlands) have become very popular in the lowlands, and regular flights into the Highlands nowadays have meant that rice has become a cash crop (Janowski 2005a). The Kelabit also grow crops other than rice, either in dry rice fields or in gardens specifically made for this purpose; these include vegetables eaten as side dishes at the rice meal, secondary grain crops, fruit trees, sugar cane and root crops including taro, sweet potatoes and cassava.

Longhouses are, nowadays, made up of two parallel structures which are described as the *dalim* (the main living and kitchen area; literally, 'inner' area) and the *tawa*', which contains a public gallery used in the past for receiving visitors (not much used now) and private rooms for sleeping and storage, *telong* (see Figure 5.2).

The longhouse (*ruma' kadang*) is made up of a number of units which I describe as hearth-groups. Each is focused on a hearth (*tetal*) and is known as a *uang ruma'* ('flesh of the house'), *lobang ruma'* ('house-cavity', probably meaning 'what is contained within the house'), *tetal* (hearth), or *ruma'* ('house'). Each hearth-group builds and owns a slice of the longhouse consisting of part of the *dalim*, containing the hearth, and part of the *tawa'*. Until the 1980s, most hearth-groups were made up of three generations, with one married couple with children in each generation; nowadays, however, with a high level of migration to town, few hearth groups contain three generations . There is one senior couple in each hearth-group, who are described as its *lun merar*, literally 'big people'. This couple is responsible for rice production and for maintaining the longhouse apartment. Until they become too old to be fully active economically, the oldest couple is the senior couple. In fact, however, couples gradually become 'bigger' until they become the senior, 'big people' couple of the hearth-group in which they reside, taking over from their parents/parents-in-law.

I describe the basic unit of Kelabit society as a 'hearth-group' both because *tetal*, hearth, is one of the terms the Kelabit use for it, and also because it is focused on the hearth itself. This is true physically; the hearth area is the only truly private area in the open-plan longhouse, and it is the area to which members gravitate when they are in the hearth-group apartment. The hearth is also where rice meals are cooked, and rice meals are what constitute the hearth-group, being the only activity which is always shared by members.

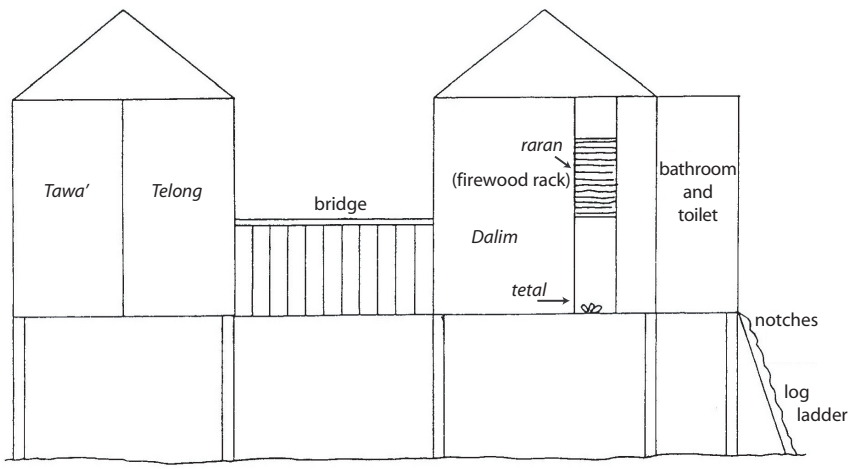


Figure 5.2 Cross-section of Pa' Dalih longhouse, 1988

Since the 1960s, there has been a heavy concentration of population within the Kelabit Highlands in the northern part of the highlands at Bario, where there used to be just one longhouse settlement called Lam Baa (literally 'in the wet rice fields'). There are now nine longhouses (nowadays with associated individual houses; since the 1970s an increasing number of hearth-groups are choosing to build individual houses for a variety of reasons which I will not explore here) at Bario, with another eight communities (some of them made up of more than one longhouse and with associated individual houses) outside Bario. The concentration of population at Bario is at least partly due to the concentration of government services there, including an airstrip. Many Kelabit, perhaps half of the total population, now live, either temporarily or permanently, in towns in Sarawak, particularly in Miri at the mouth of the Baram, to which there is a direct air service from Bario.

Kelabit Kinship

Kelabit kinship is of the bilateral, 'cognatic' type characteristic of much of insular SE Asia, and which is typical of the part of SE Asia which has been described by Errington (Errington 1989) as 'centrist'. It has persistently come across as rather bland in the literature – almost as though it were some kind of watering down of what kinship *can* amount to elsewhere, including in other parts of the geographical area. While kinship in Eastern Indonesia (Errington's 'exchange archipelago') has seemed to be at the core of understanding what these societies are about, the cognatic kinship system of the 'centrist' area has seemed to hold few clues to understanding the fundamental dynamics of societies in that area. It has, I would suggest, been essentially taken that kinship is not an important organisational principle in 'centrist' SE Asian societies. I hope to show that, through taking the notions of 'big people' (*lun merar*) and of *ulun* (which I gloss as 'human life') as central to Kelabit kinship, it becomes clear that far from being characterised by a lack of structure or significance, Kelabit kinship is at the core of the dynamics of this 'centrist' society.

The most obvious Kelabit term which can be translated into the English 'kinship' is *lun royong*, which means literally 'people together'. This term is founded in biological relatedness. Relations between people classed as *lun royong* are of two sorts: a) between siblings (*kenanak*, literally 'children together') and b) between *lun merar* ('big people', the leading couple of a hearth-group) and their descendants/dependants. This latter relationship is equivalent to that between ascending and descending generations (between *tepoh* – grandparents – and *tetepoh* – ancestors – on the one hand and *anak* – children – and *mupun* – grandchildren/great-grandchildren/descendants – on the other)[3].

However, not all those who are described in terms of biological relatedness by the Kelabit would be defined as related in the context of Euro-American kinship. For the Kelabit, all those who live together are defined as *lun royong*, and all those who are *lun royong* are only so describable because they live together. Thus the biological defines the social and the social defines the biological. The term for sibling (*kenanak*) is used not only to refer to those who have the same parents as ego and to those who are very distant cousins, but also to those who cannot be shown to have any biological relatedness. The term for grandparent (*tepoh*) is used to refer not only to one's biological grandparent and to someone who is one's distant great-uncle but also to someone who is the leader of the longhouse to which one belongs. Those of high status were in the past – and sometimes still are – described as fathers, mothers or grandparents by those who are not in that relation to them biologically. In addition, as occurs in many other societies, where someone comes to live in a community entirely non-biological ties with him or her are described using terms which are founded in biological relatedness – as children, mothers, fathers or grandparents. In the Kelabit context, this is through the use of parental names and titles (see below and Janowski 2005b), the use of affinal terms, and through actual adoption.

I would like to suggest that the relations upon which the terminology is founded – between siblings and between ascending and descending generations – are, among the Kelabit, *not* conceptually purely 'biological' (in the sense that this relates to the procreation of children through sexual intercourse), although there is no doubt in my mind that the Kelabit do have a concept of 'biological' kinship. However, to suggest that these ties are simply based on regular interaction, on having a common social life, does not take us much further. I would suggest that there is a conceptualisation of the relationship between siblings and between ascending and descending generations which is based on the transmission of something which is not the result of sexual reproduction, although its transmission usually occurs between people who are biologically related. This something is, I would suggest, something which the Kelabit call *ulun*, which I translate as 'human life' because it appears to be something the possession of which differentiates humans, for the Kelabit, from other life forms.

The transmission of *ulun* is symbolised and may also, I suggest, be seen as effected, in Kelabit eyes, through the rice meal (*kuman nuba'*). It is, I suggest, the sharing of rice meals which makes people *lun royong*; it is this, the core event in a common social life, which constructs 'proper' human kinship, which I shall describe as 'rice-based kinship'. Although biological kinship is often coterminous with 'rice-based kinship', it is, I suggest, distinct not only conceptually but in terms

of its relative significance. There is little explicit emphasis or value placed on biological kinship, while rice-based kinship is emphasised and valorized.

I would agree with Carsten's suggestion (Carsten 1997: 281–292) that, rather than rejecting kinship as an analytical notion (Schneider 1984), we need to redefine it, using the term to describe ways in which people actually relate to each other, whether these are founded in biological relatedness or in social ties. For the Kelabit, I am suggesting that there is not a unitary but a dual conceptualization of relatedness – in other words, of kinship. One of the two notions of kinship is explicit and the other is veiled and implicit. The explicit concept is the one which is *not* biological (i.e. which is not based on sexual reproduction), that which I am calling rice-based kinship. The implicit concept is that which is founded in 'biology' – in sexual reproduction.

The existence of both notions comes out in the way in which adopted children (*anak nalap*) are handled by Kelabit society. A child who is adopted is presented with two conflicting modes of behaviour to choose from once it discovers that it is adopted (which always happens when it is quite young because other longhouse members cannot resist 'spilling the beans'). One is to remain with its adopted parents and the other is to return to its biological parents and siblings (who often live in the same longhouse). The message it receives from society appears to be that it will *want* to return to its biological parents and siblings but that it *ought* to remain with its adopted parents – because they have fed it rice. In other words, the child is presented, at a young age, with a choice between rice-based kinship with its adopted parents and biological kinship with its biological parents and siblings. The choice is perceived by the child as a difficult one which he or she has to face up to, and where he or she knows that the correct decision is the hard one. Thus, this decision is presented as a deliberate, human-generated decision, *against* biology, defining rice-based kinship as something deliberately engineered and difficult to construct[4]. The child often ends up to-ing and fro-ing but the correct ultimate choice is to remain with (and care for in their old age) its adopted parents.

'People Together': Kelabit Kin Terminology[5]

Kin are *lun royong*, 'people together'; close kin are *lun royong monung*, literally 'people close together'. What matters in determining closeness of kinship is, in practice, closeness of regular contact, including farming in close co-operation – but above all it is living in the same longhouse and eating rice meals together. Despite the fact that *lun royong monung* are usually fairly close biological kin, if

Photo 5.1 *Lun royong monung* (close kin) sharing a breakfast rice meal: the hearth-group headed by Lawe Padan, the headman of Pa' Dalih, and his wife Laba Awa in 1993. The rice is *nuba laya* or 'soft rice', which is cooked until the grains collapse and then packed in leaves. (Monica Janowski)

individuals do not live in the same longhouse or there is a feud with them then even close biological kin are not likely to describe each other in these terms.

For the Kelabit it is not possible *not* to describe oneself as *lun royong* with those with whom one has regular social relations. When a newcomer comes to live in a longhouse, kin ties are always traced, and, if none can be found, will be implied through the use of affinal terms or parental names and titles or constructed through adoption. As time goes on and co-residence persists further reshaping takes place which readjusts the perceived closeness of kinship to accord with actual closeness. If a person has no relatives, or none that anyone knows, then he or she would be *lun bekan*, a term which means 'other' or 'strange' person. This is a category which cannot persist with co-residence. Even those captured in the past in raids, taken into a household as *demulun* or slaves, are described as the 'grandchildren' (*mupun*) of their owners. Not to have any relations at all is tantamount to being of the lowest status possible and to say that someone has no *lun royong* is the grossest insult.

Not only people who live together but those who regularly relate to one another, for whatever reason, are considered to be *lun royong*, at least in affinal terms. The

affinal term *aja*' is often used to imply that even someone who belongs to another ethnic group (such as Chinese traders) is in some untraceable way distant kin.

Basic consanguineal terms and their rough English equivalents are: *mupun* (grandchild), *anak* (child), *tama* (father), *sinah* (mother), *tepoh* (grandparent), *tetepoh* (ancestors), *kenanak* (sibling) and *kanid* (cousin). The terms for grandparent, *tepoh,* and ancestor, *tetepoh* (which is the plural of *tepoh*), and for grandchildren or descendants, *mupun*, are used to refer to anyone at the appropriate generation level, however they are related. At the generation levels immediately above and below ego, there are separate terms for collateral kin – *sesinah* (plural of *sinah*) *menakan* and *tetama* (plural of *tama*) *menakan* for anyone of the next ascending generation, and *anak menakan* for anyone of the next descending generation. However, these are derived by using the lineal term with a qualifying adjective, and the lineal terms are very often (indeed always, in address) used in preference to collateral terms.

At the same generation level as ego, the term for same-generation cousin, *kanid*, is usually replaced by the term for sibling, *kenanak*, or the term *kanid kenanak* (sibling-cousin). These last two terms are used if the social relationship with the person concerned is intimate, or the speaker wishes to place emphasis on the relationship – for example if the person referred to is of high status.

Different generation cousins, in English terms, are referred to as *anak* ('child'), *mupun* ('grandchild') *tama* ('father'), *sinah* (mother') or *tepoh* ('grandparent'), depending on generational relationship. This underlines the importance placed on establishing relative generational position. Kelabit are quite explicit that this is very important. Although kin terms are in fact often replaced by parental and grandparental names and titles (Janowski 2005b), if a kin term is used it must mark generational separation, and the way that parental and grandparental names and titles should be used depends on generational relationship, as we shall see. Kelabit are almost always related in a number of ways to each other, and there is a tendency to emphasise certain links over and above others, based on age difference, status and emotional relationships. Which terms are used will follow either what is perceived as the closest relationship that can be traced or that which an individual wishes to emphasise. Age difference is a particularly important criterion, although where there is a considerable difference in status a generational gap is likely to be generated even where the closest link would not suggest one and where the individuals concerned are close in age.

Affinal terms, all of which are used reciprocally, are: *awan* (spouse), *langо*' (spouse's sibling or sibling's spouse), *aja*' (used between those connected by a marriage between their consanguineal kin – such as parents whose children are

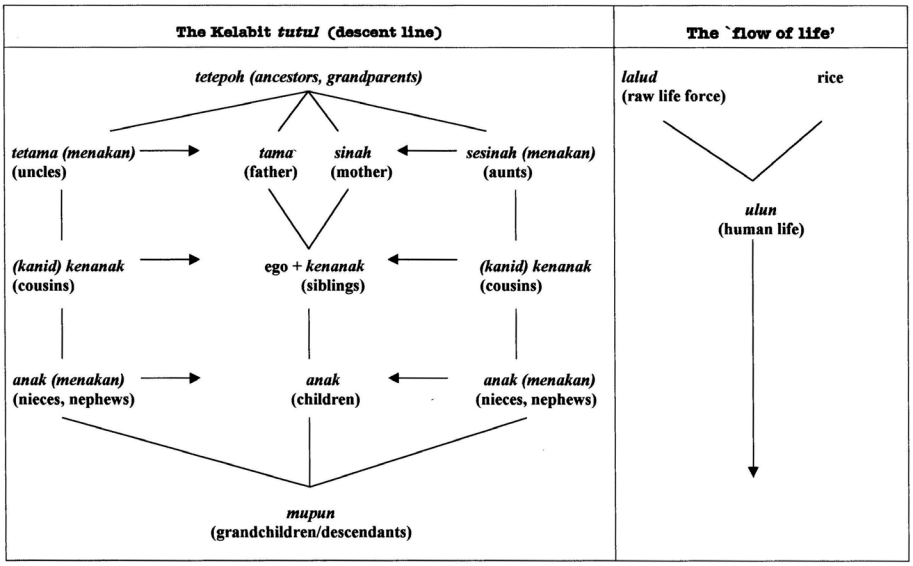


Figure 5.3 The Kelabit tutul.
N.B. The prefixes *te-* and *se-* make the prefixed words plural. The singular form of *tetepoh* is *tepoh*, of *tetama* is *tama* and of *sesinah* is *sinah*.

married or individuals whose siblings are married), *iban* (used between parent-in-law and child-in-law) and *ruai* or *ngeruai* (used between those who are married to two siblings, i.e. where the focal link is a sibling tie rather than one of marriage). The term for spouse, *awan*, is not used in address, only in reference, but the other terms are used in both address and reference. However, these affinal terms (even *awan*, although this is used more than other terms) are very rarely used among the Kelabit. Both in reference and in address there is a preference for using consanguineal kin terms or parental/grandparental titles and names; between spouses it is usual to use the parental or grandparental title. This is in contrast to the practice among the closely related Lun Bawang groups over the border in Kalimantan; here, parental and grandparental names are not adopted and affinal kin terms are commonly used.

Gender Marking in Kin Terminology

As can be seen in Figure 5.3, only at the generational level above ego is gender difference described by the terminology; the only terms carrying a gender message are those for mother (*sinah*) and father (*tama*). In other words, it is only marked in terms used vis-à-vis the generation whose reproduction produced ego.

It has been argued by a number of scholars that among Malayo-Polynesian peoples, males and females are not very 'different' from each other on an everyday level (e.g. Errington 1990; Karim 1992; Peletz 1996); this observation certainly applies to the Kelabit. Men and women tend not to spend a lot of time apart and their activities overlap considerably. There are few activities which are only ever performed by one gender or the other (probably the only one which is only ever carried out by one gender is hunting, which is restricted to men).

However, among the Kelabit gender difference is of considerable significance on a symbolic level, and is crucial to the construction of the role of the fully-fledged married couple in charge of a hearth-group, 'big people' (*lun merar*). The importance of gender difference is expressed particularly strongly in relation to food and especially the rice meal, arguably the central ritual of Kelabit life. The rice meal at *irau* feasts is particularly strongly ritualized, and here there are very clear gender roles and associations between the two genders and different foods (Janowski 1995).

It is very clear that, as is reflected in the terminology, separation and difference between the genders, on an everyday level, is most marked in the main reproductive years, from adolescence to about the age of 40. During this period males and females have a tendency to spend a lot of their time in same-sex groups, both socially and in terms of productive activities. This continues even after marriage. Gradually a couple begin to do things together, and as middle age and grandparenthood approach the couple becomes a really cohesive productive and social unit. The message seems to be that the couple grows towards economic, social and symbolic unity as their sexually reproductive years are left behind them. During the years in which males and females are most active in reproductive terms, on the other hand, they are not yet united in other terms. The fact that the kinship terminology only marks gender difference in the generation which is reproductive *vis-à-vis* ego fits clearly with this.

The distinction between sex and gender marking has been pointed to by a number of scholars (e.g. see Moore 1994; Strathern 1988). In relation to SE Asia, Howell has discussed this issue for the Lio of SE Asia (Howell 1995c). Among the Kelabit I encountered no instances of men taking on a female gender role or vice versa; in other words sex and gender are congruent. It seems to me that Howell's material on the Lio emphasises the importance of gender marking in the geographical area on a symbolic level: in ritual contexts the gender of participants is very important and it is essential that both 'male' and 'female' participate – whether these categories are filled by biological males and females or not (they are not always among the Lio, while as far as I know they always are among the

Kelabit). Thus the observation that on a day-to-day level – especially, perhaps (to use Errington's term (Errington 1989)) in the Western 'centrist' part of insular SE Asia – men and women are not very 'different' does not indicate that gender is not of central significance.

However, although men and women do not 'stand in' for the other sex among the Kelabit, it can be said that individuals are 'more' or 'less' gendered at different stages in their lives – or, more accurately, that they are gendered in different ways. Among the young, there is an emphasis on separation between the genders, in economic and social terms. One can take their sexual activity as emphasising their difference and separation, too, since this is necessary for successful reproduction. Among maturing couples, sexual activity becomes less important as biological reproduction wanes in significance, and there is a growing emphasis on unity and lack of difference on an everyday level – but co-existing with this is a ritual emphasis on separation, played out in the rice meal and especially at *irau* feasts.

The Descent Line (Tutul)

The emphasis in Kelabit kin terminology, and the tendency in practice, is threefold:

a) to fuse collaterals with lineals
b) to emphasise generational difference, and
c) to collapse affinals with consanguineals, with affinals being described for preference as consanguineals

As shown in Figure 5.3, cumulatively all of this has the effect of collapsing all kin relations *vis-à-vis* ego into a lineal relationship between *tetepoh*, *tepoh*, *tama* + *sinah*, *anak* and *mupun.* Thus all those in the same generation are described as 'siblings'; all collaterals in ascending generations as 'mothers' and 'fathers', 'grandparents', or simply 'ancestors'; and all those in descending generations as 'children' or 'grandchildren'. It will be remembered that even unrelated people with whom there are social relations are reclassified as kin. All living kin – in fact, everyone belonging to the social universe – can be described, then, as though they belonged to one descent line *vis-a-vis* ego, in which the only place where difference is brought out in any way is at the *tama* + *sinah* (father and mother) level, where gender difference is marked. It is as though all living persons might, momentarily, *vis-à-vis* one individual, be imaged as belonging to one huge hearth-group focused on the (living) generation in which male and female are differentiated and fertile.

At naming feasts, *irau pekaa ngadan* (literally, '*irau* for changing names')[6], the child 'for' whom grandparental and parental names are taken acts as focus for such

Photo 5.2 The hosts of a naming feast (*irau*) posing with a pig about to be slaughtered for the *irau*, with the children to be named in the centre of the group. The parental names being taken by the young couple are, as is usual, very 'big': Balang Ngeluun and Sinah Balang Ngeluun – 'Tiger Above All Others' and 'Mother Tiger Above All Others'. Bario, 18 April 1987. (Monica Janowski)

an image of society. The grandparents, parents and child/children are displayed physically in a prominent position during the *irau*, with the child or children in a central position. Almost all of those present who are in the second ascending generation from the child either take a new grandparental or 'renew' (*ngebru*) their existing grandparental name, and in doing so state their kinship as grandparents to the child. Through this, an image is generated of a huge hearth-group focused on the grandparents of the child, its parents, and the child itself. This family, or hearth-group, contains, of course, innumerable mothers/aunts, fathers/uncles, cousins/siblings, grandparents/great uncles/great aunts and grandchildren/great nephews/great nieces, but it is as if these were mapped on to one another and the fact that relationships are lineal, collateral and affinal did not matter.

A number of scholars have noted the fact that, in SE Asia, there is frequently an equation between different levels of 'house', where the higher levels are inclusive of the lower (e.g. see chapters in Carsten & Hugh-Jones 1995a; MacDonald 1987). In this context, Gibson has discussed the importance of siblingship for the Makassarese of South Sulawesi (Gibson 1995). He has argued that spouses

are transformed into siblings so that it can appear that the 'house' group, at the minimal level of household – and at higher, more inclusive levels too, by implication – reproduces itself without the need for affinity[7]. For the Kelabit, too, this image of a unified kin group is important, denying difference between members of the same generation – the unity of a classificatory sibling group which consists of all those at the same generation. However, among the Kelabit not only unity but difference, separation and division are important. This is expressed through the division of siblings into male and female, who are then united in marriage as spouses. For the Kelabit, both unity and the pull towards division, which is the basis of reproduction (both physical and social), are expressed in the concept of the *tutul*, or descent line.

Older people, particularly those of high status, are able to recite *tutul* to which they belong. I was usually told that there are two or three *tutul* in the Kelabit Highlands, based in different geographical areas. These follow a line of couples consisting of prominent male leaders and their wives. Because of the flexibility of kinship reckoning, everyone can tie himself or herself into one of these. Indeed, it is arguably vital that they do because this is one of the main mechanisms through which everyone is imaged as kin. As we shall see shortly, though, there is a sense in which there is conceptually only one *tutul*, into which everyone is tied. This unites all Kelabit as kin.

Status Differentiation and the Descent Line

The Kelabit are a group in which there is status differentiation, though no clearly delineated and named strata with different rights as in a number of other Borneo groups (King 1978) [8]. It is very probable that the Kayan/Kenyah system of three named classes (Whittier 1973: 109–110; Rousseau 1979) and the Kelabit system are related in their logic, although I have not heard Kelabit refer to each other as belonging to any named class, as would occur among the Kayan or Kenyah. Rather, they differentiate between people according to how 'good' – *doo* – they are. High status people are described as 'very good people' – *lun doo to'oh*. Such people were traditionally the leaders of longhouses and groups of longhouses and their wives, known as *la'ih raya* ('big men') and later as *ketua ruma'* (longhouse heads, using the Malay terminology used by the Malaysian government). Demonstration of 'goodness' within the Highlands is through effectiveness in providing for dependants within the basic commensal unit, the hearth group, through the rice meal. Hearth-groups exist at different levels – the longhouse, the group of longhouses, and the whole of Kelabit society may be seen as hearth-groups,

projected as such at communal meals and feasts; Carsten argues that in a similar way a higher-level hearth is projected at communal feasts in Langkawi (Carsten 1997). The hearth-group, at any level, is headed by a married couple described as its 'big people' (*lun merar*). The bigger the hearth-group provided for, the 'bigger' the couple (Janowski 1995).

The term *lun merar*, or 'big people', operates in two domains at once: rice-based kinship and status differentiation. It means, in the former domain, a married couple who have grandchildren (who should be co-resident) and who are able to run an effective hearth-group (*tetal*), grow adequate rice, and feed their co-resident descendants. In the domain of status differentiation, the term *lun merar* refers to the leading couple of a longhouse or a group of longhouses – *lun doo to'oh*, or 'really good people'. The term *doo* – good – has, like *lun merar*, two meanings: it is used to refer to a couple who are able to run their own hearth-group effectively and it also refers to leading couples, who are described as 'very good' – *doo to'oh*. *Lun merar* of a longhouse or group of longhouses, like those of a hearth-group, enable the entity they head to continue to exist by organising rice cultivation and hunting; this makes them responsible, in some sense, for the provision of the rice meal for all. They are treated and addressed as though they were in a parental or grandparental relationship with other members of the longhouse. Within a longhouse or larger group, the *lun merar* were, until about the 1960s, addressed by the vocative forms of the words for 'mother', 'father' or 'grandparent' (*sina'*, *tama'* and *tepo'*) by other members of the longhouse; the lower the status of an individual, the more likely he or she would be to address the *lun merar* of the longhouse as 'grandparent', indicating that he or she was also most junior in generational terms. They used the term *anak* – 'child' or *mupun* – 'grandchild' – to refer to other members of the longhouse, and would use the term *mupun* to refer to those of very low status, only marginally able to maintain a separate hearth-group. These were referred to generally as *anak katu* – literally 'children at the end of the longhouse'. The centre of the longhouse was where its 'big people' and their close relatives lived, and the ends were of lowest status (Lian-Saging 1976/77; Talla 1979).

Nowadays, with the coming of Christianity (which has discouraged emphasis on status differentiation) relative status – 'good'-ness – is often veiled, but continues to be very important. Among younger people, many of whom have migrated to town permanently or temporarily, assertion of 'good'-ness is not only through rice-growing but through success in town, through education, in government employment and in business (Janowski 2003b).

'Very good' couples are by definition in the main line of *tutul*, so that their names appear in recitations of the descent line. However, although the ability to

be 'good' is believed to be inherited, there is a lack of rigidity and predictability in the route which the *tutul*, as it is recited, takes down the generations. It does not always or even regularly follow a lineal route from parents to biological child. There is in practice (although not in theory) a good deal of potential for upward and downward mobility; a couple's children do not necessarily maintain the same level of 'good'-ness as their parents. 'Good'-ness has in each generation to be demonstrated. Relative success in demonstrating 'goodness' is reflected in the marriages which the couple concerned are able to arrange for their children. If a leading couple is not able to contract high status marriages for their sons and daughters, the *tutul* will move sideways to siblings or sibling-cousins who show themselves to be more effective.

Whatever route the recited *tutul* take, everyone, even those who are never likely to be the bearers of the main line, can tie themselves into at least one of them through the kin ties (lineal, affinal or fictive) which they trace with leading couples, and can appear as 'siblings' of a leading couple, even if distant ones. Because of the prestige associated with the recited *tutul*, everyone wants to do this.

As I have said, there is more than one *tutul* in the Kelabit Highlands. Each group of longhouses had, traditionally, one, which tied it together around the persons of the current leading couple of the leading longhouse in the group; and there is a sense in which each longhouse had one focused on its own leading couple. Indeed, there is a sense in which each hearth-group is a mini-*tutul*, going down the line of senior couples. However, despite the multiplicity of *tutul*, those who tie themselves into the central *tutul* of a group of longhouses consider that other *tutul*, associated with other groups of longhouses in other parts of the highlands, are really tied into theirs as subsidiary. This is reflected in political struggles; nowadays, for example, there are complex jockeyings for position relating to affiliation to *tutul* deriving from different parts of the Highlands, made even more complex by the fact that many people belong to more than one of these. This has become particularly complex because of the fact that a large percentage of the Kelabit living in the Highlands now live in the Bario area. Underlying these tensions is the fact that on an ideological level there is only one *tutul* to which all Kelabit belong, 'possession' of which is at issue. The route this overarching *tutul* <u>really</u> takes is never going to be accepted by all – only that it exists, with everyone vying to be as close to the focus of it as possible.

At *irau* feasts – held in the past at the secondary funerals of prominent leaders and nowadays for the naming of the first child (sometimes the first two children) of young couples – all Kelabit are invited to a huge rice meal which presents the longhouse to which its hosts belong – and to some extent the entire Kelabit com-

munity – as one hearth-group. In doing this, *irau* can be seen as being a momentary crystallization of the current centre of a/the *tutul* – certainly the centre of the *tutul* of the hearth-group holding it, probably the centre of the *tutul* associated with the longhouse, and to a certain extent, momentarily, as the centre of 'the' overarching focal *tutul*. *Irau* place emphasis on the relationship between grandparent, parent and child, the essence of the *tutul*. At them, the host couple – the grandparents of the child 'for' whom the *irau* is held – present themselves as providing a rice meal for all guests, and everyone else is tied momentarily into a huge hearth-group with that couple as their 'mother' (*sinah*), 'father' (*tama*) or 'grandparent' (*tepoh*). I would suggest that the central couple hosting the *irau* present themselves, through this, as the *lun merar* of the entire community.

In the past, *irau* were only held by leading couples, and *irau* would have been the site of tensions between high-status couples vying for leadership of a longhouse or group of longhouses. Because there were limited possibilities for building up resources to host *irau*, only leading couples were able to hold them. Nowadays, *irau* express a more complex and more socially mobile reality. With increasing ability to bring in resources from the outside world through working in town and through selling rice to town, all couples have become able to compete for status, because they have the wherewithal to hold big *irau*. All hold *irau* for their first co-resident grandchild. The implied claim to being at the focus of 'the' *tutul* on the part of each and every couple is problematic (Janowski 2003b). However, the fact that such claims are made emphasises the importance of the existence of such a focal *tutul* , on a conceptual level; the very impossiblity of ever fixing its position makes claims worth making.

Life Force and Gender: Ulun and Lalud

There are two Kelabit terms – *ulun* and *lalud* – which are linked to the concept of a quantifiable 'something', a life force of finite quantity in the universe, which is of considerable significance in SE Asia. This 'something' is expressed in the Javanese concept of *kasektèn*, which Anderson describes as 'power' or 'primordial essence' (Anderson 1990), the Balinese concept of *sekti*, which Geertz describes as 'charisma' (Geertz 1980) and the Luwu (Sulawesi) concept of *sumangé*, which Errington describes as 'potency' (Errington 1989). Geertz (Geertz 1980: 106) has argued that the Balinese *sekti* may be equated with the Polynesian concept of *mana*. It would seem that the Ao Naga concept of *aren* (Mills 1926: 112) could also be included in this group of similar concepts.

Neither of the two Kelabit concepts of *ulun* or *lalud* exactly corresponds to these more unitary concepts which have been described for other SE Asian peoples.

While *ulun* refers specifically to human life, the term *lalud* refers to a raw life force deriving from places outside human control – the forest, and more recently, from Tuhan Allah (God) via Jesus. Tuhan Allah/Jesus can, however, also give *ulun*, specifically *ulun bru* ('new life'), which is associated with the end of the world and the second coming of Christ.

The word *ulun* is cognate with the two Kelabit terms for people (*lun* and *lemulun*) and to that for 'to live' (*mulun*). It is also cognate with the term for 'slave', *demulun*. However, while *mulun* can be used to refer to animals and plants, only humans seem to be able to possess *ulun*. Strength of *ulun* is related to high status and, in the Highlands, to rice-growing; hunter gatherers like the Penan are not described in terms of strength of *ulun*. This does not, however, mean that they are not admired and respected, for their forest skills – and for the *lalud* with which they are able to interact effectively in the forest.

Lalud, which does not have any obvious cognates, appears to be the chaotic life force which is present in realms which are not under the control of humans. Humans bring this life force into domesticated areas in order to tame it and channel it for human purposes. This process of bringing in has traditionally been the responsibility of men, who are associated with realms outside that under Kelabit control. On an everyday basis, this means the primary forest, where most men go almost every day to hunt, and which is full of spirits (*ada'*) (Janowski 2001). While women are very frightened of *ada'*, men say they are not; indeed some men have in the past had close relations with the most important of these spirits, Puntumid, known as the *ada' raya* or 'great spirit', who gave them the power of life or death over other humans (Janowski 2003a and Janowski 2005b).

Although I should emphasise that no Kelabit has ever explicitly told me that this is what occurs, I would suggest that *lalud* is brought into the longhouse through hunting. Wild hunted meat is then, arguably, brought together with rice and consumed at the rice meal, bringing together *lalud* and rice, associated respectively with men and women, to generate *ulun*. Most explicit references to *lalud* which I encountered were either in the stories which were traditionally told about mythical culture heroes like Tukad Rini (Rubenstein [1973: 967–1125] gives a version of this story, and Balang Pelaba of Pa' Dalih recited another version to me in 1993), who travelled into mythical realms and performed impossible feats like jumping from mountain to mountain or to the moon; such heroes are said to shimmer with *lalud*; or in the context of Christianity. Nowadays, the most important context in which *lalud* is encountered is Christian prayer. With the coming of Christianity, *lalud* has come to be associated very strongly with Tuhan Allah (God the Father) (who was identified by my older informants in Pa' Dalih with the pre-Christian

supreme deity, whom they named as Baru). It is believed to be accessible directly from Tuhan Allah through Jesus. However, *lalud* also continues to be associated with the wild, with the mountains and the forest; Kelabit show a predilection for praying on hills and mountains away from human settlements[9].

Both men and women can access *lalud* through Jesus, whereas only men bring meat in from the forest, and it is mythical male heroes who travel to realms full of *lalud*. With the coming of Christianity, women join men to pray on forested hills and on mountains such as Murud and Batu Lawi (a mountain consisting of a male and female peak which had pre-Christian significance as well; its name is echoed in the pairs of male + female monoliths sometimes erected at death *irau* until the 1950s, *batu lawi*). However, men continue to have a relationship with the forest which is much more intimate than that of women. Women are still reluctant to enter the forest except in company and along well-trodden paths. In other words, there are continuities between Kelabit pre-Christian and Christian beliefs and practices, including in relation to cosmological beliefs about the nature and gender associations of *lalud* (Janowski 2003a).

'Big People' and the Transmission of Human Life Force to Descending Generations

As I have discussed in more detail elsewhere (Janowski 1995), it is primarily upon the provision of rice meals that the relationship between 'big people' and their dependants is constructed. Through their provision of the rice meal, *lun merar* are the source (*puun*) of human life – *ulun* – for their dependants. This is so both at the level of the basic hearth-group and at the level of the symbolic hearth-group which is the longhouse. I would suggest that the point of the rice meal is to symbolise – and perhaps even to bring about – the transmission of *ulun* to dependants, to descending generations.

It was a noticeable feature of everyday life among the Kelabit when I lived in Pa' Dalih in the late 1980s and early 1990s that remarks were regularly passed – out of the hearing of those being discussed – about the strength of people's *ulun*. Such remarks were only ever made about *lun merar* – couples who were heads of hearth-groups. Their *ulun* would be said to be relatively *kail* ('strong') or *kaya* ('weak'). It seemed that only *lun merar* were 'qualified' to be discussed in terms of strength of *ulun*; I never heard anyone make such a remark about an unmarried person, an *anak adi'* (nor did *anak adi'* make remarks about the strength of other people's *ulun*).

All such remarks that I heard were phrased in relation to success in rice growing. This might suggest that strength of *ulun* relates not to the rice meal as

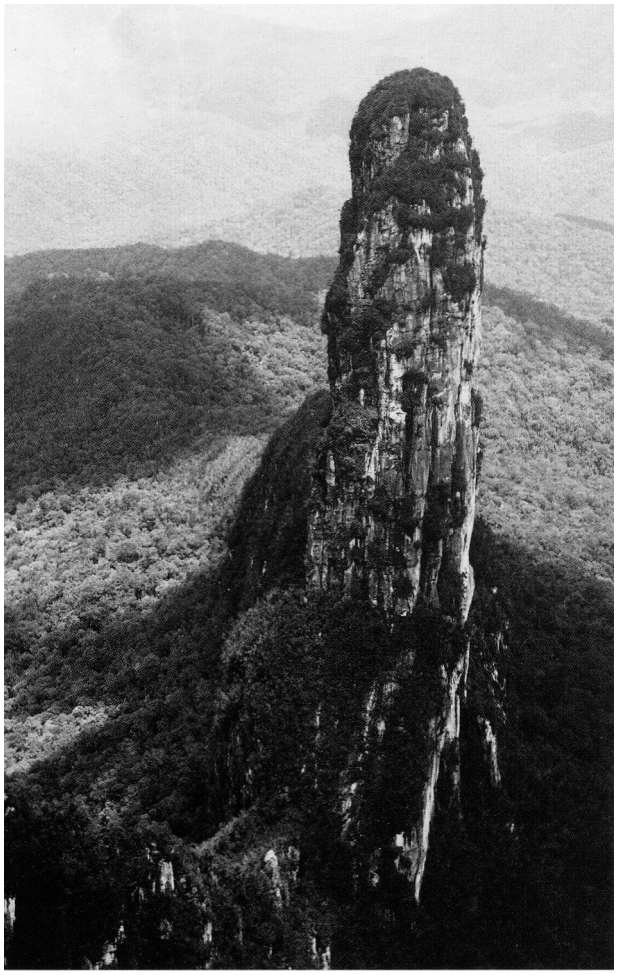


Photo 5.3 Batu Lawi, a mountain of central symbolic significance for the Kelabit and related Lun Bawang and Lun Daye peoples. The two peaks of the mountain are said to be male and female respectively and were in pre-Christian times paralleled in the erection of paired megaliths in the forest for leading couples at huge *irau* feasts. (Photographer unknown; copyright Sarawak Museum, accession number KH150)

a whole but to rice only. However, it must be remembered that the rice meal is described as just that – *kuman nuba*' or 'eating rice'. In the context of the rice meal, rice does not only represent itself but also, at another level, the entire meal, both rice and side dishes. Though there is a tendency to veil the importance of wild foods in everyday contexts, at *irau* there is, on the other hand, an emphasis on the importance of wild foods and on the association of wild foods with men. Association of strength of *ulun* with success in providing rice needs to be understood with reference to successful provision of the rice meal in its entirety, both rice and side dishes (*penguman*).

I am suggesting that the rice meal represents a bringing together of rice (female) and meat (male). Together, these make *ulun*, proper human life, possible, and

represent the transmission of *ulun* to dependants and descendants within rice-based kinship. Thus, not only the unity of the couple but also its division into male and female is important. This is essential not only to its biological fertility but also to its ability to generate and transmit *ulun* to its dependants/descendants through feeding appropriate food at the rice meal. *Lalud*, associated with men, is vital to the generation of *ulun*; so is rice, which makes the difference between being simply a living being and being a true human.

I am also suggesting that generation of *ulun* is associated with closeness to the descent line, the *tutul*. As shown in Figure 5.3, the *tutul* is the main line down which the ability to generate *ulun* flows; it represents its continuity and unity. This is true even with the lowest level of *tutul*, that within an existing hearth-group. In their relatedness to 'the' overarching *tutul* (see above), all Kelabit are tied in to a unitary source of *ulun*, which is represented in living form in the persons of the high status couples who are in the main line of the *tutul* – even if it may be difficult, especially in the more complex and dynamic situation of the present day, to say who these are. One can, perhaps, talk of the existence of a 'flow of life' down the generations, parallel to the 'flow of life' which has been widely discussed for Eastern Indonesian societies and which also proceeds down the generations, although via a route involving the exchange of women (Fox 1980a). This might be seen as the 'centrist' version of the 'flow of life'.

It should be clear by now that there is an association between *ulun* and prestige. It is parenthood and grandparenthood which are the sources of social status among the Kelabit. The 'more' of a grandparent one is, the higher one's status, in terms of how *doo* ('good') one is considered to be. An individual is 'more' of a *tepoh* or grandparent by having lots of grandchildren – and this refers not just to lineal descendants but, and more importantly, to the grandchildren of those of ego's own generation who accept and emphasise their position as grandchildren *vis-à-vis* ego by stating this openly at *irau* feasts (by changing their grandparental names – see Janowski 2005b). It is those who are the living site of 'the' overarching *tutul*, 'grandparents' of all descendants, whether their own or those of related people who tie themselves into the *tutul* as their siblings, who are of the highest status – even though it may not be possible, especially nowadays with rapid social mobility, to say which couple this is. It is through this hypothetical couple, too, that *ulun* may be said to be transmitted to all Kelabit. Thus all *ulun* is, conceptually, ultimately from the same source and follows one path – the 'flow of life' is unitary. The fact that it is not possible to say at which *irau* this 'truly' occurs does not really matter – each couple, in hosting an *irau*, is, in 'saying' that this is what they are doing, asserting that ultimately all *ulun* is one.

In some senses, *lalud* too is associated with high status. This seems to relate to ability to manage and manipulate it, which is an ability associated with high-status men. Young men who are good hunters are respected and looked up to, and usually go on to become respected *lun merar* when they are older. Mythical heroes like Tukad Rini are high-status young leaders. Shamans who had relations with forest spirits in the past acquired great *lalud* in that way (Janowski 2003a: Chapter 7). However, the status associated with *lalud* does not transfer well unaltered into the world of men + women, the rice-growing world. Meat has to be eaten with rice; *lalud* has to be harnessed to a useful end, tamed and channelled. Pure, untamed *lalud* is inappropriate in the world of humans (who live, in the story of Tukad Rini, *luun atar*, 'on the flat land', differentiated from peoples with whom Tukad Rini of *luun atar* battles, who live in other, mythical realms – such places as 'outside the sky' (*palai'i langit*), in 'the cave of the great rock' (*bupu batu agung*), in 'the valley of the steepest mountain cliff' (*taruk mayar agung*) – realms full of *lalud* [Rubenstein 1973: 967–1125]).

Kelabit Names as Expressions of Big Person-hood

The Kelabit use a complex system of parental and grandparental names and titles (Janowski 2005b), which express and illustrate the Kelabit concern with 'big person'-hood, its nature, the need to prove it, and the generation of *ulun* through it. Male names also exhibit the significance, traditionally, of the male association with and access to *lalud*. All of these names are taken at *irau* feasts, underlining the link between the names taken and *lun merar*-hood.

There are three kinds of name: 'little names' (*ngadan i'it*), which are given to children when they are born or shortly after, parental names (*ngadan inan anak*, 'names when one has children') and grandparental names (*ngadan inan mupun*, 'names when one has grandchildren'). Grandparental names emphasise the full *lun merar*-hood of the leading couple of a hearth group; parental names are given to the young couple by kin of the generation above, primarily their parents/parents-in-law who are hosting the *irau* and taking grandparental names, and mark their setting off on the road to becoming fully-fledged *lun merar* when they become grandparents.

Kelabit parental and grandparental names normally consist of two 'name elements', which are words with meanings, with the prefix *sinah* ('mother') for a female parental name. Such words are often 'deep' or 'inner' (*dalim*; the same word is used to describe the kitchen and living area where the rice meal is prepared and eaten) words, with meanings at different levels which require exegesis. The term

ulun itself, which is considered very 'deep', is used very often as a name element. Many names also incorporate the word *doo* (which I am translating as 'good'), words (such as *paran* and *maren*) which are used in neighbouring tribes for those described in the literature as 'aristocrats', or words which imply looking after or feeding others. All of these terms imply parenthood/grandparenthood and the transmission of *ulun* to descendants/dependants.

Kelabit 'big people' names display primarily the unitary nature of the couple, in emphasising *ulun* and through the fact that man and wife take the same core name as parents. However, the understanding that *ulun* cannot be generated without division into male and female is emphasised by the taking of separate grandparental names by couples. The use of names implying *lalud* underlines the importance not only of *lalud* but also of the male input which is associated with it. *Lalud* is implied mainly through the incorporation into male grandparental names of the names of powerful animals. Some of these do not exist in physical form in the Kelabit Highlands (e.g. the tiger, *balang*, and the crocodile, *baye*); they are believed to be present in spirit form, and as spirits (*ada'*) have particularly high levels of *lalud.* The names of heroes in the stories about heroes like Tukad Rini emphasise *lalud* particularly strongly, referring to the heroes' superhuman abilities .

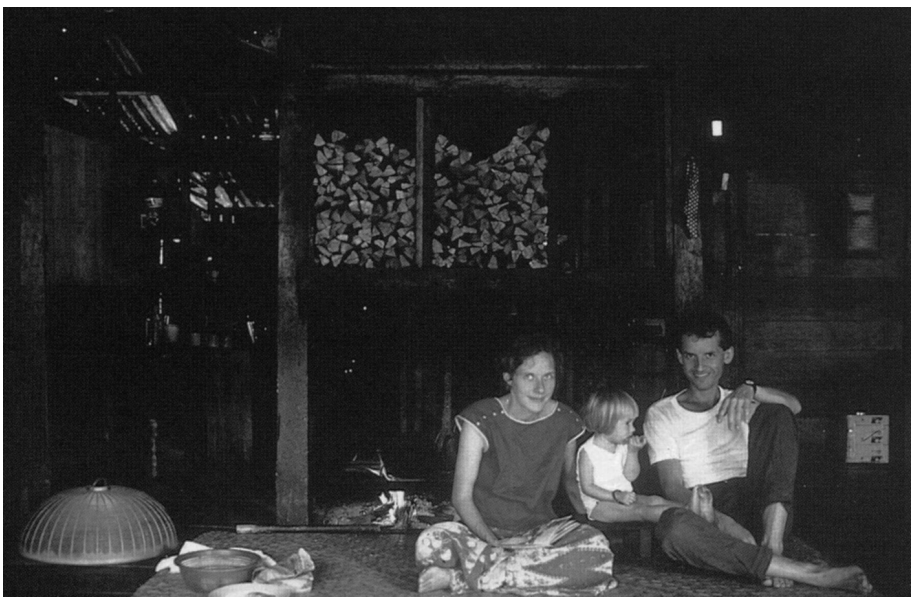


Photo 5.4 Achieving parental status: Batang Kelapang ('Kelapang River') and Sinah Batang Kelapang ('Mother Kelapang River') (Kaz and Monica Janowski) at their hearth in Pa' Dalih, with Molly, 1988.[10] (Monica Janowski)

Siblings into Spouses

I have said that Kelabit parental and grandparental names underline the unity as well as the division of the 'big people' married couple. The married couple is divided, in fact, in two ways – in terms of gender and because spouses are classificatory cross-siblings.

To be appropriate and ideal marriage partners, two individuals should be, firstly, of the same status (should have acknowledged ancestors thought to have about the same level of 'good'-ness), and secondly, cousins – ideally third cousins (*kanid keteloh*). It is stated as desirable never to allow people to become too distantly related but to 'make marriages' (*naro' pawa'*) between cousins in order to avoid this. While first cousins cannot marry and second cousins should not, third cousins are considered ideal marriage partners. A significant proportion of marriages, even now, are suggested/arranged by the first and second ascending generation *vis-à-vis* marriageable youngsters, and this has the aim of setting up ideal matches between related individuals of the same generation. It is essential that they be of the same generation; it is considered wrong for people of different generations to marry. This reflects the concern, already mentioned, that generations should be kept distinct.

When two cousins are being considered as marriage partners, they will not explicitly be described as *kenanak*, or siblings; however, it is arguably the very fact of their classificatory siblingship that makes them appropriate partners. Thus, in effect the Kelabit aim to transform siblings into spouses. The bond between husband and wife may be said essentially to be a bond between classificatory cross-siblings; this echoes the way in which Malay husband and wife refer to each other as elder brother and younger sister.

Gibson has argued that, for the Makassarese, married couples must become, symbolically, siblings (Gibson 1995). I would suggest that, for the Kelabit, classificatory siblings (cousins) must become married couples. There must be a constant tying in through marriage of those who have become too distantly related.

The image of society as a huge hearth-group, displayed in particular at the rice meal at *irau* feasts, reflects, I believe, a Kelabit concern with the same static image of reality which Gibson found to be important among the Makassarese. I would suggest that this static ideal demonstrates, through the power associated with unity, the concentration of *lalud* brought in from the uncontrollable realm outside that controlled by humans, which makes the generation of *ulun* possible. However, in order for the truth of the static ideal to be demonstrated – that *lalud* is *really* concentrated, and that *ulun* can *really* be generated – the reproductive power of

the *lun merar* must be harnessed. This is *not only* biologically, but also, and arguably *above all*, in terms of the generation of what I have called 'rice-based kinship' – through feeding with appropriate food, generative of *ulun*. This appropriate food is the rice meal, which consists of elements which are associated with female (rice) and male (wild foods, especially meat).

Kelabit spouse-siblings represent the most absolute unity possible (echoing the mythical origin couples in many Southeast Asian societies, who are both spouses and siblings) and for this reason hold the key to the generation of *ulun*. However, the extent to which *ulun* is actually generated by a given couple varies, and this may be seen as the logical source of hierarchical differentiation.

Spouses, Siblings and Status

I would suggest that an analysis of the status of 'big person' among the Kelabit is essential to understanding what being *lun royong*, whom I have defined as being related through the production and consumption of rice and have described as rice-based kin, means to the Kelabit. In essence, all relations between *lun royong* – which means all social relations, since all Kelabit are by definition kin – can be seen either in terms of that between the two members of the 'big people' couple or that between the couple and their dependants/descendants – between the generations.

All members of the *same* generation are classificatory siblings (*kenanak*) and where they are of different gender are also potential spouses, unless their classificatory siblingship is extremely close (first or second cousins). The relationship between husband and wife is *both* that between the genders *and* that between siblings. As siblings, husband and wife shared the receiving of *ulun* from the same source; as spouses, they represent the bringing together of that which was parted through earlier conjugal unions, to transmit this *ulun* to descending generations, something which is only possible because of the difference between them.

The relationship between the generations, which is so centrally important in terms of relations between Kelabit individuals, is between those who are the origin (*puun*) of *ulun* and those who receive it – who then go on to become its origin. The 'big people' are, through being male and female, able to generate *ulun* for their dependants and descendants. Their reproduction means the dissipation of *ulun* to their descendants, which must be brought back in again through the re-unification of further spouse-siblings, who then again dissipate *ulun* through their own reproduction. Each time a couple is formed, however, it must bring in *lalud* again

from the forest in order to achieve the regeneration of *ulun*. This is mainly the job of the male member of the couple, through hunting.

The two dyads associated with the status of *lun merar* – between the spouse-siblings on the one hand and between the 'big people' couple as a unit and their dependants and descendants on the other – are different in quality. It is not because one relationship is affinal and one consanguineal that there is a difference, however: in the absence of descent groups and in the context of the imaging of all society as one hearth-group, the distinction between affinal and consanguineal kin is of little significance. It is because the relationship between spouse-siblings epitomises *both* division *and* total unity and stillness, which is the source of *ulun* and of kinship itself; while that between 'big people' and their dependants exemplifies the potential for human life which is the product of that unity and stillness.

The dyad between the 'big people' and their dependants and descendants is fundamental not only in the kinship system but in hierarchy. The 'big people' of a longhouse are simply the 'big people' of a hearth group on a grander scale, writ large (Janowski 1995). I would not, then, at least as regards the Kelabit, agree with the position adopted by a number of writers on Bornean societies, that kinship is of lesser importance in those Borneo societies where prestige differentiation exists (King 1978; Morris 1978; Rousseau 1978). There is no 'choice' between kinship and prestige differentiation; they are congruent.

Both kinship and the status differentiation which is associated with it hinge on the generation of *ulun*, which I have translated as 'human life'. This, the possession of which differentiates humans from animals, also differentiates them from other humans who do not grow rice, such as the Penan hunter gatherers who share the primary forest with the Kelabit, who are never described in terms of 'strength' of *ulun*, and who remain in Kelabit eyes, despite the respect in which they are held for their forest skills and their association with *lalud*, 'forever children' because they do not grow rice and provide the rice meal for their descendants and dependants (Janowski 1997). It is very clear that the Kelabit are aware that the choice between a Penan-style life on the one hand and the growing of rice, the generation of *ulun*, and the construction of rice-based kinship on the other is available to them. It is also clear that they know what the choice must be. Despite the difficulty of tearing young men, who are strongly drawn to the forest, away from hunting as a way of life, they, like young women, must enter into rice growing in order to be able to provide for others, generate *ulun*, and become full parents and eventually grand-parents within the rice-based kinship system. Like the choice to remain with one's adoptive parents rather than return to one's biological parents, this is an explicit

statement of a decision to define rice-based kinship as constructed by humans, a difficult choice but one which, for the Kelabit, defines true humanity.

It is noteworthy, however, that rice-based kinship could be said to be founded in a paradox. It is based in the ability to generate and transmit *ulun* on the part of 'big people' couples, which generates status for them. However, the ability to do this is believed to be inherited, although one can never predict whether it will be inherited or not in the case of a given individual. Thus, rice-based kinship itself, which defines humanity and differentiates humans from the animals of the forest, is based on something which is nevertheless inherited through 'natural' kinship, between individuals linked through sexual reproduction and not through the feeding of rice.

Conclusion: Hierarchy and Kinship in Southeast Asia

I have argued for a central significance for kinship among the Kelabit, and that kinship is inextricably tied up with status differentiation. I have suggested that the Kelabit are concerned to construct a 'rice-based kinship' which is clearly different from the sort of biological kinship which exists among the animals of the forest – and among the Penan. This involves the transmission of *ulun* from ascending to descending generations through the rice meal. It ties all humans together who eat together, in that they all have, ideologically, the same source of *ulun*, which is transmitted down a central hypothetical overarching *tutul* or descent line to which all are tied in as siblings at some generational level. The concept of *lun merar*, 'big people' – parents/grandparents – is key to understanding the way in which both rice-based kinship and hierarchy are conceived and constructed. At the focus of 'the' overarching *tutul*, if one could locate it (its existence being more an ideological imperative than a necessary reality), would be, at any point in time, 'the' (living) central couple, in other words the couple with the highest status, the 'really good people' *par excellence*, the *lun merar* ('big people') of all lower-level *lun merar*. This couple, the living couple closest to the source of *ulun*, would embody (as do all couples, but this couple most of all) both complete unity and stasis and the constant interplay, down the descent line, between unity of the genders and of divided siblings on the one hand and their separation and division on the other. Both unity and division are vital to the regeneration in each generation of *ulun*, through the bringing in of *lalud*, to be tamed, channelled and processed into proper human life. In practice, however, there is no full consensus among Kelabit about relative status positions – and so the identity of this central couple at any one time can never unanimously be agreed upon.

I would like to suggest that this approach to hierarchy and kinship might be found to be relevant to other SE Asian groups, and particularly to other Bornean groups. In Borneo, it has been argued that *either* kinship *or* hierarchy is the basis of social organization – that where one is the organising principle of society, the other is not (King 1991; Rousseau 1990). However, groups which are described as being distinguished along these lines – lines which tend to coincide with a distinction between so-called 'egalitarian' and 'hierarchical' groups – are sometimes very similar linguistically and culturally. I would suggest that it may be more useful to see hierarchy and kinship as two sides of the same coin, and as being founded in the kind of relationship between generations within the hearth-group which I have presented here. This would allow us to approach an understanding of the 'hierarchical' and 'egalitarian' societies of the island – which are often closely related in other respects – in the same terms.

Notes

1 This paper is based on fieldwork carried out in the community of Pa' Dalih in the southern part of the Kelabit Highlands in Sarawak, Malaysia between 1986 and 2005, with short periods in other parts of the Kelabit Highlands and among Kelabit living in the town of Miri in Sarawak. 21 months of fieldwork were carried out in 1986–88 with funding from the UK Economic and Social Research Council. Subsequent shorter periods of fieldwork between 1991 and 2005 have been funded by the Evans Fund at the University of Cambridge and the British Academy Committee for Southeast Asian Studies.

2 There were estimated to be 5,059 Kelabit in 1987 and a growth rate of 4% from 1970 to 1980 (Ko 1987, p. 35). If this growth rate is assumed, this would imply that the total would now be about 8000. Just under half of these are probably in the Kelabit Highlands and half in the town of Miri, with the rest mostly distributed around other towns in Sarawak. Martin (Martin 1992) estimates only about 1000 in Miri in the early 1990s, but admits that there is no way of assessing the numbers other than by guesswork. The number of Kelabit in Miri is constantly increasing.

3 Carsten (Carsten 1997: Conclusion) suggests that for Langkawi it is siblingship which should be seen as the basis for kinship, and she suggests that for other South East Asian societies, in particular swidden and hunting and gathering groups, this is also true. However, I would suggest that *both* siblingship – horizontal ties – *and* vertical ties between generations are of significance for the Kelabit. For hierarchical 'tribal' groups in Borneo this is widely true; vertical kin ties are vital to constructing inherited differentiation.

4 This presents an interesting comparison with what Carsten found among the people of Langkawi, who see feeding of rice as actually altering the substance – specifically the blood

– of what she describes as fostered children (Carsten 1997). Such an alteration in substance was never mentioned to me by my Kelabit informants.

5 Two Kelabit writers who have written dissertations on their own people, Lian-Saging and Talla, provide kin terms and analyses of their use (see Lian-Saging 1976/77: 149–153 and Talla 1979: 145–156). My description and analysis here, which is based on my own observation and discussions with informants in Pa' Dalih, differs in some respects from Talla's and Lian-Saging's descriptions of kin terms and the ways in which they are used. This is undoubtedly related to the fact that Talla's and Lian-Saging's dissertations are based on data from the northern part of the Kelabit Highlands, which is many ways distinct from the southern part of the Highlands where Pa' Dalih is situated. This includes differences in pronunciation, which are reflected in different spellings for kin terms used here and by Talla and Lian-Saging .

6 Until the 1950s, *irau* feasts were held at the secondary funerals of people of high status – the *lun merar* of a longhouse or group of longhouses.

7 Carsten (Carsten 1997: 92) also suggests that in Langkawi spouses are transformed into siblings.

8 Talla (1979a: 76–90), Lian-Saging (1976/77: 115–125) and Bulan (n.d.) suggest that until the Second World War there was stratification among the Kelabit; however they differ as to what form this took and the terms used for the different groups.

9 Despite the opposition of many pastors, who point out that one can pray anywhere and indeed assert that the best place to pray is the church which has been built by every community; while I was in Pa' Dalih in 1987 a letter was sent by the SIB authorities – the Sidang Injil Borneo church to which the Kelabit belong – and read out during the Sunday service, instructing that people should pray only in the church. The people of Pa' Dalih had recently constructed a rudimentary open-air church in the forest on a nearby hill by clearing vegetation and putting in some benches and a preaching table. It was clear that there was a debate going on within the SIB itself, however, as they have subsequently sponsored the pilgrimage to Murud mountain, which attracts huge numbers of Kelabit and related Lun Bawang.

10 We were given our names at a *kuman peroyong* ('eating together', to which all longhouse members contributed rice and for which a communal hunt was held; this was not an *irau*, as it was communally hosted) held on 2 October 1987, the same day we moved into the longhouse to run our own hearth. The Batang Kelapang is the river upon which Pa' Dalih, my field site community, is sited. The appropriateness of this name to us was explained to me as being at various levels, as follows: 1) that we came from far away and so we should be named after the main river in the Pa' Dalih area since this is visible from afar; 2) that the Kelapang eventually flows into the sea which connects with the sea around England from whence we came; 3) that we were important as is the Kelapang, which is the source of the mighty Baram river, and that everything flowed through us as it does through the Kelapang. 3) should be understood in the context of the fact that parental names always, nowadays, incorporate boastful, 'big' meanings.

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