Beyond Romance

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Beyond Romance

Fieldwork In Sarawak

Edited by

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Chapter Six

Fieldwork with Molly: Musings on Motherhood and Anthropological Research

Monica Janowski

Molly aged two carrying a 'baby' on her back, July 1987. Photo: Sally Greenhill.

From my diary, 7 October 1986:

> The great advantage as well as the great difficulty to our existence and to mine, especially as an anthropologist, is little Molly. She opens doors, provides a ready excuse for anything and a constant source of

> conversation – as well as opening people's hearts to us! But she is a responsibility and an ever-present thought … Perhaps it was crazy to deliberately have a baby to bring here. But then she provides another side to existence – a real, tangible, living little being. The hours of boredom that many anthropologists experience (I've been reading *The Innocent Anthropologist*) do not crop up for us!

From my diary, 20 May 1987:

> Having Molly along compounds all problems a thousandfold. Where I am vulnerable I am made much more vulnerable – in all ways, in every way, constantly. In being her mother rather than her father particularly. It's not just the physical and practical problems but the fact of my manner of mothering, my feelings about it and reactions to it, being made so public …

Entering the field as a mother

When I became pregnant shortly after starting my Ph.D. in social anthropology in 1984, my supervisor, Maurice Bloch, was rather dismayed. His concern was that having a baby would interfere with the progress of my research. In this, of course, he was right. I had to take time off after I gave birth to Molly in August 1985, and didn't go out to Sarawak until June 1986, a year later than I was meant to have gone with my husband Kaz and baby Molly. The fact that I was taking my baby daughter to a remote place in the interior of Borneo also worried my family. They wondered how I would cope if Molly became ill, perhaps catching malaria or some other tropical disease, or if there were some other kind of emergency. I, however, was blithely unconcerned. Kaz and I took a chestful of medicines to cover all eventualities; and I felt sure all would be well.

When I returned from Sarawak it took me three years to write up my thesis. At the time, and for many years afterwards, I felt guilty about these delays. Molly and Kaz were in no way part of my research plan. The focus of my research was to be Kelabit rice agriculture; Kaz and Molly were part of my personal life. I did my best not to let their presence interfere with the 'real' work I was doing.

Now, looking back, I have begun to think about the relationship between motherhood and research in a different light. I realise now that being a mother not only affected the way in which I carried out my research; it radically affected the research itself. In this chapter, I hope to provide an entertaining 'story' relating to my personal experiences; and to use this to show how closely related motherhood was to my research findings. In doing this, I will refer to a number of my publications. I will return to this at the end of this chapter, where I will also do a little musing on the nature of social anthropology.

Arrival in Kuching

Kaz, Molly and I arrived in Kuching in Sarawak in June 1986, and stayed there for a month. My most important Kelabit contact in Kuching was Robert (Bob) Lian-Saging, whom I had contacted because I had read his BA dissertation on the history of his own people, written in the 1970s.[1] He and his English wife Katherine (Kit) Pearce (the couple was also known as Balangelibun and Sinah Balangelibun, their Kelabit names) had three small children at that time, Garnet, Sarah and Apui. We later stayed with Bob and Kit many times when we were in Kuching, and they became good friends. Kit, who is a botanist, worked with me on the Cultured Rainforest Project, gathering data on fruit trees.[2]

I spent a lot of time at the Sarawak Museum during that first period in Kuching, including long periods in their excellent library. As per my agreement with Brian Durrans, I was to make a collection of Kelabit handicrafts for the British Museum and I agreed with Lucas Chin, the director of the Sarawak Museum at that time, that I would make a parallel collection for the Sarawak Museum.[3] When we left the highlands on 8 March 1988, it was in a huge Nuri helicopter which Lucas had arranged through contacts with the Malaysian army. As there was no road to or within the highlands at that time, it would have been impossible to get out the collections I had made for the two museums, totaling about 250 items, in any other way!

1 Lian-Saging 1976/77.

2 See Pearce 2013.

3 Catalogues of the two collections are included in Janowski 2003a.

In Kuching, between June and August 1986, Kaz looked after Molly, who began to walk while we were there, while I went around offices going through the paperwork for my application to carry out fieldwork in the Kelabit Highlands. Jayl Langub, another contributor to this book, was the officer at the State Planning Unit who gave approval to my application to carry out fieldwork. He too became another good friend and professional colleague, later working with me on the Cultured Rainforest Project between 2007 and 2011.[4] Initially, Kaz, Molly and I stayed at the Anglican Guest House, but then Jayl kindly offered to lend us his flat for the rest of our time in Kuching.

Arrival in the Kelabit Highlands

Ipoi Datan, now director of the Sarawak Museum (2016) had, in 1986, recently been appointed as government archaeologist. He accompanied us up to the Kelabit Highlands. We flew on 11 September 1986 in a Twin Otter propeller plane from the town of Marudi, after having been delayed there for many days due to bad weather. When it rained, the then-grass airstrip at Bario, the main area of settlement in the Kelabit Highlands, used to become waterlogged, causing people to become stranded in Marudi for long periods.

The arrival of the MAS plane in Bario at that time was a major event and the penghulu (chief) of the Kelabit at the time, the late Ngimat Aio', was always at hand to greet an arriving plane. Ipoi introduced us to him and we stayed with him and his wife Sinah Ngimat Aio' at Ulung Palang longhouse in Bario for three days before setting off for the southern part of the Kelabit Highlands. We arrived in Pa' Dalih on 18 September 1986, accompanied by a bevy of boys who had come over to Long Dano to help carry our things from there. The headmaster of the primary school, Baye Ribuh, had been informed by Robert Lian-Saging, his classmate at school, that we were on our way. It seemed to have been decided that it was in Pa' Dalih that we should settle!

The journey to Pa' Dalih, about 20 miles, was on foot; it was only in the mid-2000s that it became possible to travel by road to Pa' Dalih. The

4 See Janowski and Langub 2011.

distance could be covered by fast local walkers in six or seven hours, and we would eventually manage it in eight hours ourselves, but that first time it took eight hours just to get to the longhouse community of Long Dano (now renamed Pa' Mada), which is about an hour and a half's walk from Pa' Dalih. We stayed for two nights in Long Dano, with the headman, Maren Balang, and his wife Sinah Maren Balang, before going on to Pa' Dalih.

From my diary, 18 September 1986: 'We have been made very welcome. We feel quite overwhelmed.'

We stayed with Baye Ribuh and his wife Sinah Bayeh Ribuh for a month. They had four children at the time – Jacob, Miriam, Lipang and Gerawat (their twins, Vicki and Michelle, were born later). Molly quickly took to Sinah Bayeh, who remained very close to her.

A hearth of our own

On 2 October 1986, we moved into one of the two longhouses in Pa' Dalih. When we met with the headman, Lawe Padan, the need for us to have an apartment in the longhouse, a hearth of our own, was brought up straight away. It was decided that we would rent the hearth from the 'school mother', Sinah Raja Siren, as she was living in one of the separate houses which formed part of the school buildings 100 metres away.

Monica, Kaz and Molly at our hearth in Pa' Dalih longhouse, July 1987.
Photo: Sally Greenhill.

Having our own apartment in the longhouse was a challenge. We bought a mattress, mosquito net, sheets and a few other obvious essentials in town, and we also brought a travel cot all the way from the UK. Penghulu Ngimat Aio's son-in-law, Peter Aran, had arranged for these to be brought up on a charter flight, to the tiny mission airstrip at the longhouse of Long Dano. We had a bedroom! More challenging was getting our kitchen going. At the beginning, the challenges of getting hold of firewood, obtaining raw materials for our meals and then cooking them (we had never cooked on an open fire before!) seemed considerable. So, for the first eight months, we employed firstly Sinah Belan Belan, then Sinah Rang Bala and then Sinah Maren Guna to cook for us. Sinah Bayeh Ribuh and Sinah Rang Bala kindly lent us some cooking equipment and in due course we bought more in town, sent it up by plane, and carried it to Pa' Dalih through the forest. After those first eight months, Kaz and I took over responsibility for our own hearth and we cooked for ourselves for the rest of those two years we stayed in Pa' Dalih.

It was made very clear that we needed our own hearth because we had a child, which afforded an important insight into Kelabit society. I quickly began to call the household a 'hearth-group' as I realised that it was having one's own hearth which defined the household among the Kelabit. The Kelabit word for household is either *lobang ruma* (the hole of the house – implying that which is contained within the house) or *tetel* (hearth). This was the beginning of my realisation of the central significance of being parents and grandparents and of feeding and looking after others in the structure of Kelabit society, something which has been central to my research conclusions (Janowski, 1995, 2003a, 2003c, 2007a). I quickly developed a pride in being able to run my own hearth. Once I managed this, I felt that others in the community regarded us differently – that we began to be accepted as 'ordinary' people, members of the community, albeit rather incompetent in many arenas, most importantly, of course, in our lack of any rice fields of our own – and Kaz's lack of hunting skills or any desire to acquire these! We had, however, become master and mistress of our own hearth, and this, together with our parenthood, was the beginning of being 'proper adults'.

New names

As well as a hearth of our own, being parents meant that we had to have new, parental names. We could not, we were told, be addressed by our 'child names', Monica and Kaz. Among the Kelabit, it is the custom that all parents and grandparents, when they achieve this status, take names with a meaning (Janowski, 2016b). Mother and father take the same parental name, with the prefix Sinah (mother) for the mother, to reflect aspirations at the beginning of their journey as adults where they begin to provide for others. Grandmother and grandfather take different names, reflecting their achievements in life. Normally, new names are taken at an *irau* feast, to which anyone and everyone is invited and for which all of the rice and all of the meat, from slaughtered domestic pigs and buffaloes, is provided by the hosts. However, we knew nothing of this, and we didn't realise that we would be given new names at this event, which was an 'eating together' gathering (*kuman peroyong*) for which every hearth-group donated some rice and a hunting expedition provided the meat from wild pigs. Ours was not the usual format for changing one's name, but we simply went along with it all. We were given the choice of two names – Balang Kelapang (Spirit Tiger of the Kelapang River) and Batang Kelapang (Kelapang River). We chose Batang Kelapang, I see from my diary, 'because so many people seem to be called Balang'. Molly was given the Kelabit name Supang, though she continued to be called Molly most of the time. We, however, were called by our new names immediately – or were addressed using 'parental titles' – Sinamo' (mother of a little girl) and Tamamo (father of a little girl) (Janowski, 2016b).

Looking after Molly

Kaz and I both wanted to spend as much time as possible with Molly, and tried to include her in the things we were doing. Kaz wanted to go into the forest as much as possible; and I of course had my research to do! However, Molly was too small to take into the 'big forest' (*polong rayeh*), though Kaz carried her on his back into the 'small forest' (*polong i'it*).

I went to the rice fields almost every day, to work with others in cooperative groups; and I often went on foot to visit the small community of Batu Patong, further up the Kelapang River.

Monica carrying Molly across a bridge between Pa' Dalih and Batu Patong. Photo: Kaz Janowski.

However, listening and chatting to individuals and groups of people, which was a central part of my research methodology, required a lot of concentration as I was both learning the language and trying to work out what was going on around me! I found it very difficult to concentrate if I was responsible for Molly at the same time. I needed someone to help look after her. This turned out to be a complex issue and was a constant worry which caused me a lot of stress, as I can see from my field diary entries. While Sinah Rang Bala and Sinah Belan Paran were cooking for us, they minded Molly when I was out. After the first four months, we employed Lyn Doo Puun and then Sinah Belan Paran to look after Molly

for part of the day, at their own hearths. This worked quite well as Lyn lived with her parents in the only separate house in Pa' Dalih and Sinah Belan Paran lived in the other longhouse (there were two in Pa' Dalih at that time), so there was less likelihood that Molly would catch sight of me, as she would have done if she had been based in the longhouse in which we lived, as the longhouses were (and are) open-plan!

Molly with Sinah Belan Paran, Agan and Marta. Photo: Kaz Janowski.

Settling in

The process of settling into life in the Kelabit Highlands was not an easy one. Looking through my diary I see that Molly took a while to feel at ease there. Kaz and I were very isolated from all that we knew, and felt that we had little control over much of our lives, in particular access to food other than rice. I often felt that my mothering style was being watched and potentially judged. I was willing to be instructed in the best way to do things by more experienced Kelabit mothers and grandmothers. For example, I bowed to pressure to take Molly out of nappies much earlier than would be usual in the UK; but we tried to maintain certain 'English' habits. This included putting Molly to bed earlier than us, in the separate travel cot we had brought. This was regarded as quite strange by other people, who took babies and toddlers to bed with them when they went themselves. I was told a 'horror story'

about an English couple someone knew in Miri who put their child to bed in a separate room at the other end of a corridor from their own bedroom!

By February 1987, about six months after we arrived, things had settled and were becoming easier. At that time, Sinah Maren Guna was cooking for us and Lyn Puun was looking after Molly at her house.

From my diary, 10 February 1987:

> I'm feeling much better … Mornings I harvest or at least go to the fields. Then lunch either in the *daan* [field house] or back at the longhouse. Sometimes Lyn has Molly here at that time; if she's at Lyn's house I go over to see her before settling down to write. On and off I go into the longhouse while I'm writing etc. and I spend some time doing other odds and ends. Then around 4 or 5 S. Maren makes some tea, people have come back to the longhouse (some) and things get gradually livelier. I usually spend some time chatting to people. Then Kaz gets back from his jungle trip and we go over to get Molly and take her for a walk about Pa' Dalih until the sun sets. Then supper, Molly's bath, bed for her and then fo+r us.

Molly as 'our child'

Molly eventually became very happy in Pa' Dalih. Although at the beginning she would wail for me if she spotted me in the distance, she soon began to be attached to the people there. By the time we had been there about eight months, the people of Pa' Dalih would often say that Molly was 'our child' (*anak tau*). She could be left with anyone. Children in Kelabit longhouses were, I found, seen as belonging in some sense to the whole community, although they belonged most to their own biological parents and to the grandparents with whom they were also likely to be living. In some ways Molly was treated even more 'our child' – the child of the community – than other children of her own age. She was treated by everyone in Pa' Dalih as a very welcome visitor. While other toddlers would be sent back to their hearths if they strayed down the longhouse on their own, Molly would be invited to sit down, as though she were an adult.

From my diary, 5 February 1987: 'Molly as usual had most of her supper at other people's hearths!'

Molly was just over a year old when we arrived in Pa' Dalih, with just a few words. From that point on, she began to acquire Kelabit rather than English words, and her first language was Kelabit. She would speak to us in Kelabit although we spoke to her in English. She suddenly began to speak English in December 1987, when she was two years and four months old, when we visited Scottish friends in Brunei and she wanted to play with their children, who obviously didn't speak Kelabit!

My own feelings in response to Molly's growing absorption into the Pa' Dalih community were complex. I found it comforting because it gave me a sense of co-responsibility for her with people who were obviously very good at bringing up children. However, it was also confusing and sometimes threatening. By mid-1987, when we had been in Pa' Dalih for nearly a year, I sometimes felt that Molly was not very much my child at all.

From my diary, 23 July 1987:

> Getting the feeling that the Kelabit are trying to take Molly away from me! She is such a little Kelabit. I can't understand most of what she's capable of saying; her English vocabulary is far more limited than her Kelabit one. [Name removed] especially irritates me. I feel that she acts as though I'm incompetent as a mother, that the Kelabit (she especially) understand Molly much better than I do, that Molly doesn't understand what I say to her in English (which isn't true).

Keeping healthy

Kaz and I remained fairly healthy throughout the two years of my initial fieldwork, but we lost a great deal of weight. In my case, I think this was partly because I was breastfeeding, partly because it took a while for me to get used to Kelabit food and eat enough of it, and partly because I was working quite hard physically every day. Possibly we weren't getting enough protein, although wild meat, the only meat eaten on a regular basis in Pa' Dalih, came into the longhouse regularly and we had our fair share of this. Both Kaz and I had ulcers on our feet at one point which did not heal for a long time.

Molly's health was checked regularly by the monthly 'flying doctor' service, which included a baby and toddler clinic. Through these visits we met many doctors and nurses, who were often taken aback to find a little English girl among the Kelabit children they were checking! The doctors we met included Dr Dom (Balang Lam Baa), the first Kelabit doctor, adopted as a godson by Tom Harrisson as a small child.

There were a couple of frightening episodes in relation to Molly's health. One was when she came down with bacterial dysentery in July 1987, when she was 23 months old; it was picked up in the town of Marudi on our way up to the highlands when we had been visiting on the coast. She became ill the day after we flew into Bario. Fortunately I was still breastfeeding her. Here too I had followed Kelabit norms; the view was that a child should be breastfed until he or she is between two and three years old. It seems that breast milk is the only food that a person who has bacterial dysentery can process; Molly reverted to a diet consisting entirely of breast milk for a week or so and recovered quickly.

The other frightening episode involved a bad burn. At about seven o'clock on 4 December 1987 Molly knocked over a teapot full of just-boiled water, which went all over her. The event was seen all the way down the longhouse. My immediate reaction was to tear her pyjamas off. The reaction of all of my neighbours was to run out to the back of the longhouse and cut banana flower heads. This was because the sap which drips out of the tip of a cut banana flower head (*para ba'ong*) is used as a medicine for burns. Within minutes the sap was being dripped onto Molly's burn. Belan Iyo, the 'dresser' who was in charge of the small medical clinic in Pa' Dalih, assessed the burn as affecting one sixth of Molly's body, and he radio-called the flying doctor, who was in Bario that day, having just paid a visit to Pa' Dalih. Soon after, the helicopter came over to pick up Molly, me and Kaz, and took us to see the doctor in Bario. Before we left, our friends in Pa' Dalih warned us not to allow Molly to go to hospital, as they would put purple medicine (this was the antiseptic gentian violet, we realised later) on her burn and she would be scarred for life as a result. In Bario, the doctor thought she should go to hospital but we managed to persuade her that we could look after her ourselves and that we should go back to Pa' Dalih. She warned us not to use any local medicines. We kept quiet about the banana sap! The flying

doctor was not supposed to take people back home, only to evacuate them, but fortunately the pilot of the helicopter (whom we knew from our three-year stay in Kuala Trengganu years earlier) was willing to fly us back to Pa' Dalih, as of course the walk back to Pa' Dalih would not have been feasible with Molly's burnt body! The burn healed within ten days and Molly had no scars. I see from my diary, however, that I was quite worried about the burn and our decision to return to Pa' Dalih.

From my diary, 8 December 1987:

> Molly is getting better but very slowly (so it seems to me). Every night huge quantities of water drain off her burns, though they're fairly dry during the day. We are following the Kelabit system of treating the burns, using *para ba'ong* applied every few hours. This stings a lot and I feel so sorry for Molly. I hope we're doing the right thing. Kaz says 2000 Kelabits can't be wrong – but the odd thing is that it appears that it is only the Kelabits who use *para ba'ong* for burns. Even the Kerayan people 'don't yet know about it'. Molly is also taking two antibiotics, though, so at least she's hopefully protected against infection. She's sleeping between banana leaves, also a Kelabit idea, which is definitely a good one because they can't stick to her. Lawe Padan burnt the underside to remove the little hairs on the leaves.

Other people in Pa' Dalih blamed me for the burn; they felt that I should not have put the teapot in a place where Molly could knock it over. Their feelings reflected their sense that Molly was not just my child; she was everyone's child, although in my care, and it was my responsibility to ensure her safety on behalf of all Molly's mothers, fathers and grandparents within the community.

From my diary, 11 December 1987: 'S. Catherine told me her father was v. upset about Molly's burns and blamed me. I feel rather upset about this. So does Kaz.'

Leaving Pa' Dalih in 1988

A few days before we left on 7 March 1988, the people of Pa' Dalih held a big 'eating together' (*kuman peroyong*) party to say goodbye to us.

From my diary, 14 March 1988:

> Baye, we discovered, provided the tea and sugar and also the minyak for the pressure lamps. Colin got one *baka* [wild pig] and Henry got another … Balang Pelaba was 'master of ceremonies' … Mada' Ulun gave a speech (as *wakil tua kampong* [vice headman]) … We ate straight after the speeches by Balang Pelaba and Mada' Ulun. After eating we two were asked to give speeches. Then Balang Pelaba sang to each of us and gave us glasses to drink from (separate episodes, since Kaz finished the glass first time; they gave me a glass of plain water – Kaz had had sweet tea – because people are now well aware I really find it hard to swallow sweet tea). Rinai and some of the *anak adik* [young unmarried people] and young married people, including S. Belan Paran, sang a song of farewell in English and S. Belan left the *uyut* [basket] she'd been making for Molly. Inside was a present from Juliet of a *bane* [bead necklace] for Molly made of *bee'* (tiny cowrie shells) and *ba'o bata'* [large blue glass beads] with some *lempudun* [another kind of bead] too. A *bane* of no value in fact, but special since the *bee'* are the last left in Pa' Dalih. S. Ellie unearthed them for Juliet, who made herself a *bane* and this one for Molly. S. Ellie previously told me Juliet wanted to adopt Molly (*nalap* Molly) by giving her a bracelet made of some of these *bee'*. After this the dancing began. As usual people were individually pulled up (including of course Kaz and me – Kaz did very well!) and then Balang Pelaba headed a *bosak pakui* [a chanted verse sung during certain dances] procession up and down the longhouse composed totally of small boys! Molly was entranced (she stayed up for most of the evening).

When we left Pa' Dalih in the big Nuri helicopter on 9 March, arranged by Lucas Chin at the Sarawak Museum in order to enable my two museum collections to be taken out of the highlands, the whole community lined up to shake hands and say goodbye. It was clear that it was the loss of Molly which they found particularly painful. Molly too found the departure very difficult. She was in tears as we left, crying for 'Mummy Bayeh' all the way to Lio Mato where we spent the night, clearly understanding that this was a momentous severance from the entire world of which she had become part.

Return to Pa' Dalih in 1992

Between November 1992 and March 1993, when Molly was seven years old, Kaz, Molly and I spent another four months in Pa' Dalih, when I had a postdoctoral fellowship at the University of Cambridge. We stayed with Bayeh Ribuh and Sinah Bayeh Ribuh, and Molly attended the school.

Molly and other children in class at the Pa' Dalih school, early 1993.
Photo: Monica Janowski.

Molly had a wonderful time, and remembers it as a golden period in her childhood. Even though she had forgotten how to speak Kelabit, she felt very comfortable in Pa' Dalih, and took up friendships with other children again easily, apparently managing to communicate with them. She spent a lot of time roaming around in the area around the longhouse with groups of children of different ages, ranging from four to 11. After school or on weekends, I often wouldn't see her for hours at a time, or even for the whole day. This contrasted sharply with the usual pattern in the UK; there, a child of Molly's age during that second visit would have been carefully watched and monitored, and allowed little autonomy. Molly, by contrast, was unsupervised and had many adventures, including falling into a pit with a toddler and having to haul the baby out; and once nearly touching a cobra, mistaking it for a branch, when crossing a stream!

Learning to behave

I did not observe Kelabit child behaviour in any organised way, but through casual observation of Molly and her friends. I now realise that I learnt quite a lot about what it means to be a child in the Kelabit Highlands. Especially during the first period there, between 1986-88, when she was a toddler aged between one and three, Molly became very much like a Kelabit child, with Kelabit behavioural norms.

Through my observation of Molly and her interactions with others in Pa' Dalih in 1986-88 and 1992-93, I understood that Kelabit babies and children in Pa' Dalih were treated quite differently from children in England, and that they had a different kind of relationship with each other and with adults. While Pa' Dalih babies were kept closer to their mothers than most English babies, as they grew bigger they were less close to their mothers than were babies in England. Other, older children were keen to look after babies and toddlers, and from the age of about 18 months babies were handed over more and more to older children to look after. It was the older children who socialised the toddlers, showing them how to behave and keeping them safe. Until they were about three or four years old, small children spent most of their time inside the longhouse, running around and playing with other children in the open-plan space, roaming from hearth to hearth – though they were also taken out regularly by older children and adults 'to see the buffaloes' or to visit in the other longhouse or at the school kitchen. Once a child reached the age of about four or five he or she spent most of the time with other children, in multi-age groups and outside the longhouse, and adults had far less to do with them.

It seemed clear to me, in Pa' Dalih, that the older children were very effective at socialising the little ones. They seemed to act as good teachers of what was considered good behaviour, presumably because an older child has a recent memory of what it was like to be little and knows how to communicate effectively with a smaller child. Pa' Dalih children shared very similar behavioural norms, with little divergence from child to child. However, individual character differences were accepted and indeed actively encouraged. Soon after we arrived, both Bayeh Ribuh and his wife Sinah Bayeh Ribuh commented on Molly's

strength of will. Bayeh Ribuh told me that Kelabit admire strength of will and independence in a child. Sinah Bayeh Ribuh told me once, with pride, that one of her daughters had made the decision to sleep under a separate mosquito net from her parents and other siblings. However, I never saw strength of will in children being turned to bullying. The differing competencies of different children were, as far as I could see, never the subject of teasing or ridicule on the part of other children. There was a strong sense of cohesion among the children, who seemed to support each other.

Behavioural norms which were universal among the children included the rule that a younger child was always deferred to in any disagreement; sharing everything with others (whether adult or child); not expressing strong emotions, particularly anger; and not 'being a nuisance' in adult company, which meant that a group of children would sit at the edge of an adult group having a discussion which they found interesting without making any noise whatsoever.

From my diary, 25 November 1987:

> Kelabit notice and comment if a baby or child cries a lot. They don't like it. I even heard someone tell Molly she was *da'at serawe* [badly behaved] when she cried. I think this is part of teaching self-control with regard to emotions.

We were very struck by certain things in Molly's behaviour as a toddler which deviated clearly from what we expected, with our British background. One was that she never exhibited any of the 'terrible twos' behaviour which was common in the UK, where toddlers have temper tantrums if they cannot have something. I believed that this was because the Kelabit approach to a situation where a toddler wanted something which he or she could not have was to remove the child from the situation, distracting him or her with something interesting elsewhere. This was not the norm in the UK, where it was difficult to remove a child from the source of the problem because there were fewer places to go to in a British house than in a Kelabit longhouse. Also, it seemed to be considered a good thing in the UK to get a toddler to 'face up' to the fact that they cannot always have what they want.

Learning to share and give

Something else in Molly's behaviour which contrasted sharply with the behaviour of toddlers in the UK was that she would always share everything in her possession with anyone else in her immediate surroundings.

From my diary, 30 October 1987:

> I've been thinking about the way people always 'tease' Molly by asking her to give them anything she's got, saying it's theirs [*ueh wen*]. Perhaps it's the way they teach children to be generous, to always share. They've been successful with her, since she always gives part of whatever she's eating, or some other interesting article if it's not food but something else she's got, to the nearest 'eligible' person (she doesn't give toys to grownups). At the school kitchen the other day they were commenting approvingly how Molly doesn't like to eat alone. This, of course, is ideal Kelabit behaviour – always offering anything you're eating to other people.

Sharing and giving are fundamental norms among the Kelabit. When we lived in Pa' Dalih in the late 1980s and early 1990s; hospitality was absolutely the core virtue. It seemed to me that there was a sense in which people's entire lives were focused on providing for others. Respect from others was grounded in the level of hospitality and generosity which a person offered. I have explored elsewhere how providing for others is the basis of kinship and the source of hierarchical status, arguing that status was grounded in being able to feed rice meals to others, as biological parents and grandparents and, at a higher level, as the 'parents'/'grandparents' within a longhouse community or a group of longhouses (Janowski, 2003c, 2007a).

When we lived in Pa' Dalih in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the children there had practically no 'bought' toys. They played with domestic objects and, once they got a bit older and played outside, with objects from nature. However, they were fascinated by Molly's toys from the UK, when we opened the box of toys when we first arrived in Pa'Dalih.

From my diary, 27 September 1986: 'The children here are absolutely overwhelmed by Molly's toys and have been playing with them solidly since they were opened!'

Most children had no experience of possessions of their own, and assumed that playthings were for sharing. At just over a year old, Molly was too young to have developed a sense of possessiveness when we opened that box; and she never did develop any while we were in Pa' Dalih.

As a first-time mother, I internalised many Kelabit norms about how children should behave, which remain with me to this day. For example, I find myself impatient with small children who talk too much, monopolising adult attention (something which is not uncommon in the UK); I expect them to be quiet and respectful in the company of adults, and if a baby fusses, my instinct is to take it out of the room and look for something to distract it, rather than simply comforting it. Molly herself gradually became more possessive when we returned to the UK in 1988, which I found quite distressing.

Molly's second birthday party

A situation where the difference between English and Kelabit toddlers was underlined, as well as highlighting, for me, the nature of the rice meal and its role in the community, was Molly's second birthday party in August 1987, about a year after we had arrived in Pa' Dalih. At that time, my brother Johnny and his partner Jenny were visiting us. We decided to have an English-style birthday party, made cake and tea to serve, and invited all the mothers with children below school age to come to our hearth at 5 p.m. The kind of party we were trying to generate was, in fact, something quite strange to the Kelabit. Both the idea of inviting only mothers and small children to any event, and the idea of the event not involving the consumption of a rice meal, were (and still are) alien to Kelabit culture. So what happened was that although only those we had invited came to the party, they came at seven, which is a more usual time for an *irau* party or a communal shared rice meal (*kuman peroyong*) to begin, and the mothers brought gifts of uncooked rice – something which is usual at a Kelabit *irau* feast. This all brought home to me that

getting together to eat means, for the Kelabit, sharing a rice meal. I also realised how strange it seemed to the people of Pa' Dalih that I had only invited certain people – mothers with small children – to the party. A Kelabit *irau* party in the highlands was, by contrast (and still is, although *irau* held in town are now by invitation), open to all.

At the party, the children behaved with great composure. They sat quietly by their mothers and said nothing. Molly too was composed. She distributed the cake and tea to her guests and afterwards sat quietly and ate and drank her own. Games did not feel appropriate. Games are, in fact, played at Kelabit *irau* – while in the UK party games are for children. Among the Kelabit, adults and children partake in games. However, games at a Kelabit *irau* take place after the formal part of the event has been completed, usually late at night. Our party did not last that long – and was probably seen as rather too weird an event to allow people to relax and play games!

Food

Molly's second birthday party also underlined to me the importance of the rice meal as the means by which not only the basic hearth-group but also larger groups of people were brought together. We should have held a rice meal for the whole community to celebrate her birthday – as suggested to me beforehand, but I was determined to have an English-style event! The cake and tea we provided were not the right foods for a celebratory event; and we had only invited mothers and small children. Cake and tea were snack foods, and snack foods were consumed casually in contexts which were not celebratory. A formal celebration should bring the whole community together and should revolve around a rice meal. At both *irau* feasts and *kuman peroyong* a huge rice meal would be shared. At the former, the meal would be provided by one hearth-group, while at the latter all hearth-groups contributed. Both events underlined the fact that it is the rice meal which cements the community; and the *irau* feast underlined in addition the importance of providing the rice meal for others as the foundation of both kinship and hierarchy.

I did, of course, understand even before we arrived that rice was central to the lives of people in any community in Borneo, and the

significance of rice was a central focus of my research and publications (Janowski 1995, 1997, 2001, 2004, 2005, 2011); but this quickly became something which I felt as well as knew, after we arrived in Pa' Dalih. We quickly internalised the centrality of the rice meal (*kuman nuba'*) and took up the habit of eating rice at least twice a day, at lunch and suppertime. In the early morning we made either rice or oat porridge and often shared *mirup* (drinking) with neighbours. *Mirup* often included drinks other than tea or coffee (which for most of our friends in Pa' Dalih was very sweet, while we favoured it unsweetened). This usually went with snacks made from cassava or town-bought wheat flour, or town-bought crackers or biscuits made from wheat flour (these were described as *roti*, a word used to describe anything (except cake) made from wheat flour, including bread). As drinks and snacks can be more freely shared than rice, *mirup*, which can take place at any time during the day but is most common in the early morning and late evening, was an opportunity to sit and chat with neighbours. Our hearth was a favourite site for *mirup*, as we made a point of having town-bought delicacies to share with others, and we also offered cocoa!

We found that we could buy rice from others in the community; but a rice meal has to include side dishes, *penguman*, (that which is eaten with rice). It was much more difficult to get hold of the raw materials to make these. We found that it was only rice that it was seen as 'OK' to sell: foods other than rice should be shared and given, without payment and without any sense of debt. There was a sense that it was actually wrong to sell them. Occasionally people sold fish (in a rather embarrassed way which seemed to indicate that they shouldn't really be doing so). The only other context in which we could buy raw materials for our *penguman* was at the church, where people would bring in cultivated vegetables, wild vegetables, hunted meat, fish from the river and sometimes packet foods from town to auction for the benefit of the SIB church *sidang* (parish).

Usually, we had plenty to eat. It was usual for hearth-groups to share *penguman*, sending over plates of what they had prepared to neighbours, and we frequently benefited from this. The raw materials for making *penguman* were also shared. Molly and other children would turn up at our hearth on a regular basis with a little packet of raw wild meat

or a bundle of wild palm hearts or cultivated beans, sent over from another hearth. I learnt where I could get certain wild vegetables, such as fern shoots. I was invited on gathering expeditions with other women (gathering wild vegetables, or vegetables in someone's field, was regarded as a fun outing). But I never became very good at gathering, and the small vegetable garden we made didn't produce much. Kaz went to the forest every day, but he didn't hunt. We tried to reciprocate the generosity we benefited from during those first two years in Pa' Dalih by making donations to the SIB church parish whenever we could. We could always be relied upon to buy vegetables donated to the church for auction, or to stand as sponsors at cake festivals (*pesta kek*), held to raise money for the church.

While we had had difficulty in persuading her to eat solid foods before we left England, Molly became a keen eater of anything and everything the Kelabit ate. Kaz and I have a vivid memory of her avid consumption of roasted bats one morning, when a clutch of these were caught in a neighbour's mist net. She was particularly fond of the small rice-field snails, and when we returned in 1992 she liked collecting these.

Being a little girl: insights into gender

The photographs I have of Molly with adults when she was a little girl in Pa' Dalih mainly showed her by the hearth, helping with grating cassava or watching the winnowing of rice. On the other hand I also have photos of her watching with great interest while a pig was being butchered by a group of boys.

This expressed the way in which gender operated and the way in which children were encouraged to develop their own awareness of what gender meant. I didn't have a strong sense that Molly was experiencing a process of being nudged towards more female activities in Pa' Dalih. However, looking back, she was being encouraged to 'help' with tasks which were female rather than male. Kelabit children were, I think, gently encouraged to develop a sense of the tasks which were associated with their own gender, but were not prevented from engaging in tasks and activities which were associated with the other gender, if they wanted to. They spent most of their time in mixed-gender groups up

to the age of about five, and even after that mixed play groups were common. Molly spent most of her time in mixed-gender groups.

As small children grew up in Pa' Dalih in the late 1980s and early 1990s, I saw that most of them became more and more involved in activities which were regarded as appropriate for their own gender – girls in rice growing, rice processing and the gathering of wild vegetables, and boys in hunting and gathering in the 'big' forest. This underlined for me that on a symbolic and cosmological level and on a practical level too, there was a close association between women and rice and between men and wild foods, particularly meat (Janowski, 2001, 2003b). I noted soon after arriving in Pa' Dalih that most women shuddered at the idea of killing, and most would not even kill a chicken.

From my diary, 19 October, 1986:

> When we were at Batu Patong, Sinah Bayeh was quite reluctant to participate in killing the chicken, and when I said that when I saw that young pig killed I felt as though it were Molly, she darted a quick glance and said yes, that's how she felt.

This expressed the fact that women, as nurturers of life, were uneasy about contact with death. This was the responsibility of men (Janowski, 2001, 2003b, 2007c, 2014/16). This related both to the death of animals for meat and, in pre-Christian times, to the transition of dead people to the place of the dead, the megalithic cemetery. The association between men and death related to contact with life force or cosmological power, as I've argued elsewhere, and the dangers as well as benefits of this contact. The reluctance of women to go into the *polong rayeh* ('big forest'), which was believed to contain many spirits, was related to this.

Christianity and spirits

Molly was a gateway for me into Kelabit spiritual beliefs and practices, both old and new. She was drawn into Kelabit Christianity and was a regular source of stories about spirits, particularly those inhabiting the longhouse!

Kaz and I were reluctant churchgoers when we arrived in Pa' Dalih. We found the evangelical nature of the SIB church strange and rather

offputting, having been brought up as Roman Catholics and having, in fact, moved away from much interest in religion. However, we were gently but firmly urged into attending the Pa' Dalih church. I noted in my diary that our first attendance was on 2 November 1986, and that Lawe Padan, the headman and our next-door neighbour in the longhouse, actually gave us ten cents each to put in the collection plate! Shortly afterwards, in that same month, a *sekolah pelayan* (deacons' school) was held in Pa' Dalih, in the *tawa'* section of the longhouse just behind our bedroom. This initiated us to the mystical nature of Kelabit Christianity, as we heard people *karo lun beken* ('speaking in tongues').

Molly was an enthusiastic attendee at Kelabit church services, like all the children in Pa' Dalih. She and other small children would often entertain themselves by singing hymns, using any nearby props as 'guitars'. She began attending the children's Sunday school from July 1987, when she was just under two years old. As a family, we soon began to attend church every Sunday morning, and sometimes I would also attend the *kaum ibu* ('women's circle') service on Sunday afternoon. I witnessed speaking in tongues, exorcism and healing, both in the church and on a nearby forested hill, where the people of Pa' Dalih had created a church in nature.

As a toddler in Pa' Dalih, Molly was also a believer in the presence of spirits (*ada'*).

From my diary, 4 June 1987:

> Talking of *ada'*, Molly seems obsessed by them. I think the children must talk about them a lot. A couple of days ago she was talking about a 'pig *ada'*' which roared (she demonstrated)!

Molly often talked about a spirit called the *ada' kok*, which she said lived in the *tawa'* or open-plan gallery section of the longhouse. When she heard a noise coming from the *tawa'*, she would click her tongue, lift her head and finger, and say '*Ada' kok!*'

This alerted me to the fact that although most of the people in Pa' Dalih, at that time, were reluctant to talk about their pre-Christian beliefs and practices, spirits were still considered to exist. Although these were not initially meant to be the overt focus of my research, I

see, looking back at my diary, that right from the start I was fascinated by both Kelabit Christianity and by their pre-Christian spirituality. It was interesting to note the number of times I mentioned my own ambivalence about this interest. I carried out some focused interviews with the late Balang Pelaba, who used to be a *dayong* (shaman) and was once friends with the 'Great Spirit', *Ada' Raya*, also known in its quasi-human manifestation as Puntumid (Janowski, 2014b). However, I wrote nothing about this topic in my thesis. It was only in recent years that I have become focused on understanding Kelabit spirituality, becoming particularly interested in the way in which this related to their relationship with the natural environment (Janowski, 2012, 2014a, 2014b, 2014/16, 2016a; Janowski and Barton, 2012; Janowski and Langub, 2011).

Although there was a sense in which it was impossible to ignore the significance of spiritual matters to the Kelabit, in the context of their passionate and overt interest in Christianity (Lees, 1979), I would attribute a good portion of my growing awareness and interest in this to Molly's passion for hymn singing and her reports of spirits in the *tawa'*. Molly's involvement in aspects of Kelabit spirituality did not just enable me to gain access to 'data'; they interacted with something deep inside me, and my perceptions were altered. Having my own child involved in these beliefs and practices made me more aware of their significance and led me to explore their nature.

Return to Pa' Dalih in 2006 and 2009

After 1993, there was a gap of 12 years before I returned to the Kelabit Highlands, as I was working on research projects in other parts of the world. I visited again in 2005 and between 2007 and 2011 the highlands again became my main focus of research, when I worked with a large group of archaeologists, anthropologists and environmental scientists led by Prof. Graeme Barker, on a research project which he and I co-conceived, which we called *The Cultured Rainforest*. Since 2005 I have visited the Kelabit Highlands eleven times. Molly and Kaz have accompanied me twice, in 2006 and 2009.

Monica, Molly, Balang Muned and Sabet, August 2006. Photo: Kaz Janowski.

Molly remembered her time in Pa' Dalih in 1992-93 very clearly, and possibly had some memories from her time there in 1986-88 as a toddler (it was difficult to disentangle the later memories from the earlier ones). She turned 21 while we were in Pa' Dalih in 2006, and we held a birthday party for her there.

Molly had forgotten how to speak Kelabit. However, she seemed to sense the meaning of things that were said. At a conscious level, she was English – she was no longer the little Kelabit child she had been. When we returned to the UK in 1988 and went to live with her Polish grandmother, Molly stated that she would not learn Polish as 'she was English now, not Kelabit and not Polish'. But at a deep level she was returning to somewhere which felt very comfortable and familiar.

Key aspects of Molly's character were, I believe, formed during her time in Pa' Dalih. The Kelabit encouraged a combination of strength of character with a strong sense of consideration for others in the growing child, a combination which seems to be present in Molly as an adult.

Molly also has a strong attraction to the forest and to natural objects. When we returned to the UK in 1988 she had no interest in playing with toys for more than a year, instead going into the garden and gathering natural objects to play with. We took her to Epping Forest regularly, where she played with mud, sticks and stones. She placed a number of

found objects up in our pear tree and created a kind of shrine there, where she spent a lot of time. When she returned to Pa' Dalih in 1992 she was keen to go into the forest with her father and to collect natural objects to take back to show her best friend Rachel and other friends at school. She had no squeamishness about the killing of animals. When we returned to Pa' Dalin in 2006 one of her goals was to see an animal hunted, a goal she achieved during the four-day visit we made to the waterfall high on the Diit river with Henry Lagang and Balang Pelewan. She later studied medicine and very much enjoyed dissection!

Molly herself gave birth to her first child, Arlo, on 10 June 2016. I find myself giving her advice deriving not only from instruction from my own mother, but also from my experiences in the Kelabit Highlands. Molly seems to share the assumption that many of the customs which were usual in the Kelabit Highlands when we lived there should be adopted for Arlo. She has, for example, installed a sarong-on-a-spring, like the one she slept in in Pa' Dalih, for Arlo to nap in. It will be interesting to see to what extent she will put into practice the behavioural norms she learnt as a child in Pa' Dalih in the way she brings up her own children.

A few concluding thoughts: personhood and the anthropological endeavour

To contextualise my Ph.D. supervisor Maurice Bloch's reaction to my pregnancy, in 1984, and its implications in relation to my doctoral fieldwork, we need to take a look at the nature of social anthropology. As a discipline, social anthropology has a self-image as a science. This meant that the researcher tried as far as possible to be a disinterested and impartial observer of the 'field'. While it is now recognised as important to be aware of the ways in which the researcher as a person affected the nature and quality of the research, the ways in which this affected the research findings were regarded (implicitly if not explicitly) as ideally minimised. Having a husband and baby along clearly generated a complex 'self' whose impact on the research was going to be considerable. Whilst having a child along meant that a researcher may be more easily accepted into the community and may gain access to some

kinds of information more easily, it also meant (in the context of that aim of being a disinterested and impartial observer) that the researcher would need to fight her way through a mass of complex personal factors which arguably blocked her ability to see impartially. Hence, Maurice's reaction as mentioned earlier in this chapter.

I am not at all convinced that social anthropology should attempt in this way to be a science. A definition of science can range from, simply, 'knowledge', to the UK Science Council's definition: 'Science is the pursuit and application of knowledge and understanding of the natural and social world following a systematic methodology based on evidence.' Clearly any area of research involves the pursuit of knowledge, and in that sense social anthropology is the pursuit of science. However, if we turn to the method used in the pursuit of knowledge which is included in the Science Council's definition of science – the 'scientific method' involves isolating a controlled context and testing hypotheses through experimentation. This is clearly very difficult in the context of the social world. Some branches of what are called the 'social sciences' make very concerted attempts to create a controlled context, and focus on using methods such as questionnaires and surveys.

Social anthropology, however, has mostly been defined by not using these as its core methods, although they are used as adjunct methods. Most social anthropologists have used what can be called discernment as a key method in reaching conclusions. While I was preparing to go to the field as a Ph.D. student, I was taught to go without preconceptions, as far as possible, and to seek out the core values and concerns of the society I would be studying. I was then to pursue a better understanding of those underlying dynamics driving the society I studied. This is surely discernment, defined by Merriam-Webster as 'the quality of being able to grasp and comprehend what is obscure'. The process of understanding through discernment is hard to pin down, certainly, but we all know, as humans, that this process is absolutely central to human relationships and understanding. It should also, in my view, be regarded as central to social anthropology.

If we accept that it is discernment which we are using as our core method in social anthropology, then our personal qualities as researchers are key to enabling us to practise the method. Life experiences feed into

our ability to discern. Being a mother, in this context, was not an obstacle to being an 'impartial observer'; rather, it made the researcher more sensitive to the dynamics of a society, more able to practise discernment. This is especially true given that the parent-child relationship is arguably the central relationship within society, even though the importance of parenthood has receded greatly in modern urban societies.

The fact that it is not really possible to exclude oneself as a person from the research one does as a social anthropologist is now much more clearly accepted than it was at the time that I was doing my Ph.D. research. However, this is generally seen in terms of whether it restricts or improves access to information, in line with the categorisation of anthropology as a science rather than a philosophical endeavour. I would suggest that the personhood of the researcher should be regarded as much more significant. Discernment on the part of the researcher should, I suggest, be valued as part of a Jungian interaction between two subjects, leading to a 'noumenal reality which embraces the whole situation' (Watson, 1992: 39) – a result which is more than a mechanical sum of its parts.

Having Molly and Kaz along during my fieldwork helped me enormously in my research. The key areas on which I have focused in my writings on the Kelabit have been grounded in what I understood through my role as the mother of Molly and the wife of Kaz. These have included the significance of the hearth as the central focus of Kelabit society, where both food and kinship were generated; the importance of the married couple and their relationship with their children and grandchildren as the kingpin of society both in terms of kinship and in terms of hierarchy and cosmology; and the centrality and nature of Kelabit spiritual beliefs. If I had not been a wife and above all a mother, I am convinced that I would not have understood – have discerned, through my own experiences and feelings – the importance of these central aspects of Kelabit society.

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