

7 Frequently it appears that human beings 'face' space, i.e. are standing up against it, according to Heidegger. But space is neither an external object, nor an experience. Human beings live with things or places, being-in-the-world, as Heidegger would have expressed it.

WHO'S IN CHARGE AROUND HERE?

Struggle for leadership in a changing world
among the Kelabit of Sarawak

Monica Janowski

When, in 1945, Tom Harrison – later to become Curator of the Sarawak Museum – was parachuted into the Kelabit Highlands in the interior of Sarawak by the British to organize resistance against the Japanese 'from the inside out' (see Harrison 1959 for an interesting description of this episode), he and his fellow officers needed urgently to get assistance and information about the interior, and if possible to get an assurance of co-operation from the Kelabit. In order to do this, he had to find and negotiate with whoever was in charge. What happened when he set about trying to do this illustrates two things: that the Kelabit, hierarchical in their social organization to some degree, tend towards competition and contestation of authority; and that successful assertion of claims to status are associated with feeding rice meals to others. These are both just as applicable nowadays; but the level of competition for status has heightened.

The Kelabit are a tribal group numbering about 5,000 (Ko Tee Hock 1987) who live at the headwaters of the Baram river in Sarawak, East Malaysia. They are agriculturists, cultivating rice as their symbolically central crop as well as a number of other crops, and hunting and gathering in the primary and secondary forest which surrounds their settlements. They live in longhouses (*ruma' kadang*) of about 100 people each, which are usually grouped. I carried out fieldwork in 1986–88, and again in 1992–93, in a community called Pa' Dalih in the southern part of the Kelabit Highlands,¹ which consisted at that time of two long-houses; there are now three longhouses in the community.

In 1945, Tom Harrisson found that although it was clear that there were differences in status, there was no universally recognized hierarchy in the Kelabit Highlands which made it clear which longhouse head was supreme. He would need to deal with a number of different leaders of different longhouses. Getting a leader's co-operation seemed to necessitate staying in the longhouse headed by himself and his wife, and it was immediately apparent to Harrisson that this was because accepting accommodation and rice meals on his part implied complying with the claims of that longhouse, and its leading couple, to supremacy. Tom Harrisson recounts:

Apart from the ordinary moods inspiring Penghulu Miri [the leader of the group of longhouses in the southern part of the Kelabit Highlands], he could see at once that a lot of prestige was coming to his class rival, Lawai Bisarai, if we remained at Bario... Beside these considerations, the Japanese risks paled into the insignificance of an imitation dragon bead or modern bead.

Harrisson and his men eventually resolved the situation by moving out of longhouse life and establishing a camp in the forest.

I want in this chapter to explore the – inherently contested – nature of hierarchy within the house at its different levels among the Kelabit. The Kelabit word *ruma'* is a reasonably good approximation of the English word 'house', although the baggage which the words carry in the two languages is different in a number of ways. *Ruma'* may be used to refer to the basic residential, production and consumption unit below the level of the longhouse, though the unit is more commonly referred to as *tetal*, literally 'hearth', and which I translate as 'hearth-group' (Janowski 1991, 1995). *Ruma'* is also used to refer to the longhouse itself, literally described as a 'long house' (*ruma' kadang*). I have argued elsewhere (Janowski 1995) that the Kelabit house is associated with two core symbols: the hearth and the conjugal couple. I have suggested that the house, among the Kelabit, has the function of resolving, and utilizing, the 'dynamic tension' between the man and woman who form part of the conjugal couple. This is achieved through the rice meal, which is provided for dependants by the conjugal couple; I have argued that the rice and foods from the wild – especially meat – which make up the meal symbolize male and female. The rice meal, provided by the couple for their dependants, makes hierarchical differentiation possible. Hierarchy is fundamental to the construction of the house at all its levels, because different couples succeed to different degrees in achieving this resolution between male and female through the rice meal, which generates prestige. In this chapter, I want to build on my earlier analysis, taking a closer look at hierarchy, introducing the notion of 'rice-based kinship' and looking at what has happened to Kelabit

hierarchy in the light of an increasing involvement with a town-focused, multi-ethnic and more economically complex world since World War II.

HOUSES AT DIFFERENT LEVELS AND THE CONCEPT OF 'BIG PEOPLE'

Communities in the Kelabit Highlands are made up of one or more longhouses (*ruma' kadang*), which in turn are made up of hearth-groups (*tetal*) (Janowski 1991, 1995). These cultivate rice land and consume rice meals separately except at feasts, at ceremonial meals or when visitors are present. On these occasions, the longhouse or group of longhouses presents itself in unity to the outside world, providing a joint rice meal for outsiders. In a number of other ways the longhouse presents itself to itself in unity, too. However, the level of the hearth-group and the importance of leading a hearth-group cannot be exaggerated; this is the basis of status at all levels for the 'big people' who lead a hearth-group.

The concept of 'big people' (*lun merar*) (*ibid.*) is a key one in understanding Kelabit kinship and social structure. 'Big people' are married couples² (*diweh ruma'* – 'they two of the house'). They may simply head a hearth-group, or they may head a whole longhouse or group of longhouses, which are higher-level symbolic hearth-groups.³

The status of 'big people' is gained by degrees, and the difference between the couple heading a hearth-group and that heading the longhouse is one of degree, not of kind. The prerequisites for being 'big people' at the hearth-group level are (a) having children and, to be fully *lun merar*, co-resident grandchildren; and (b) being able to provide the rice meal for these descendants/dependants.

The status of *lun merar* heading a basic hearth-group within a longhouse is something to be proven, through successful rice-growing and provision for dependants within the hearth-group through rice meals. The status of *lun merar* heading a longhouse or group of longhouses is a matter for competition between the *lun merar* of the longhouse or a group of longhouses' constituent hearth-groups. One context in which this competition is visible is when a stranger arrives in a longhouse. To which hearth will he or she be ushered? Will it be the hearth of the government-appointed *hetua ruma'*, or longhouse leader? There are also likely to be other *lun merar* couples within the longhouse who are attempting to build their status by hosting guests, and their supporters may lead a stranger to their hearth. If this occurs, it will lead to some tension – although this will be hidden as far as possible from the visitor. At an even higher level, as was apparent in Tom Harrisson's experience in 1945, there is competition between the *lun merar* heading groups of longhouses in different parts of the highlands as to which couple is paramount. Whether Harrisson was accommodated in Bario, by Lawai

Bisara, or in Pa' Dalih, by Penghulu Miri, would be ammunition in the ongoing rivalry between them for supremacy.

There should (according to both Kelabit and government theory) be just one conjugal couple who are the *lun merar* of the longhouse. Not only do they lead a hearth-group which belongs to the longhouse: they lead the longhouse *qua* hearth-group. The male and female members of this couple should be those who make decisions on behalf of other members, who are the leaders in rice agriculture, hunting, religion (now Christianity) and dispute settlement. They should be the representatives of the longhouse *vis-à-vis* the outside world. The *lun merar* of the entire longhouse are in a sense the providers of rice for the longhouse: their effective leadership in rice cultivation means that enough rice is grown. At important points in the rice calendar and at important religious festivals, and when visitors are present, rice meals are shared by the whole of the longhouse. These meals centre on one hearth, and this should be that of the central *lun merar* of the longhouse, arguably presenting them as the providers of the rice meal for all present, who are their 'children' and 'grandchildren'

The fact that 'big people' exist at higher levels than the longhouse too, with a group of longhouses forming a community, a grouping of communities, and the entire Kelabit social universe having their 'big people', and consuming rice meals together in certain ceremonial contexts, implies that there are houses – *ruma*' – at a number of levels in Kelabit society and that in some sense the entire Kelabit social universe is one 'house'. Such a house, at any level, plays out, for the benefit of the outside world, a fiction of being an undivided and uncontentious unity. However, this hides the fact that it is nowadays, and has probably always been, riven with tensions, jockeying for position and complex politicking. The existence of the overarching house is accepted by all; but the locus of its centre is not.

KELABIT RICE-BASED KINSHIP

The Kelabit house, *ruma*', is made up of people conceived of as *lun myong*, literally 'people together'. This is the only Kelabit word which can be translated as 'kin' in English. It is not only the hearth-group – an entity which usually consists of grandparents, parents and children who are demonstrably biological kin – which is conceived of in this way. Higher levels of the 'house' are too, in which biological kinship is not always demonstrable. I refer to the state of being 'people together' as 'rice-based kinship' (see Janowski forthcoming). It is founded on the relationship between people who are 'together' within the hearth-group. There are two ways in which people relate to each other as 'people together' within the hearth-group. One is between members of

ascending and descending generations, that is between 'big people' and their descendants/dependants (*anak*, 'children'). The second is between individuals of the same generation, who are termed *kenanak* ('children together').

Within the 'house' at higher levels, too, these relationships are the basis of social interaction. The relationship between the leading couple(s) of a longhouse, described as its 'big people', and other couples is considered to be one between kin of ascending and descending generations and appropriate kin terms are used in address and reference,⁴ this is very likely to involve selective kin reckoning in order to establish a generational difference through distant links between people who could also trace a link establishing that they are of the same generation. All related people who are conceived of as belonging to the same generation can be – and should be, for politeness – described as *kenanak*.

The essence of the relationship between generations is that the ascending generation provides the rice meal for the descending generation; the essence of the relationship between *kenanak* is that they share the same source of the rice meal, that they depend for rice upon the same 'big people' (*lun merar*). Since the rice meal takes place at different levels, people are rice-based kin at different levels. Actual perceptions of the closeness of rice-based kinship are contextual and depend on the sharing of the same 'house' (*ruma*') at some level – hearth-group, longhouse, group of longhouses – which implies, indeed is founded on, the sharing of the rice meal. This is why I use the term 'rice-based kinship'.

KELABIT HIERARCHY

The Kelabit cannot be said to have clearly defined, named social strata as do groups like the Kayan and Kenyah, although Rousseau (1990) includes them in the group of Central Bornean 'stratified' societies together with groups like the Kayan and Kenyah, who have named social strata. Although Bulan, Lian-Saging and Talla, all Kelabit writing about their own people, speak of the existence before the Second World War of four 'classes' in Kelabit society, they disagree quite radically as to the labels attached to these classes, their relative size and who belongs to them.⁵

I did not find, during my own fieldwork, that a differentiation into distinct strata or classes was meaningful to the Kelabit either with reference to the present or to the past, and I would suggest that any attempt to find 'classes' may have been influenced by the fact that these have been described for other Bornean societies. However, there is certainly hierarchical differentiation among the Kelabit, and this is conceived of as being inherited. The Kelabit are preoccupied with

differentiation between people in terms of how *doo* they are, and it is this word which is used to describe relative status. *Doo* is translated into English as 'good' but it carries rather different connotations than the English word in a context where there is not the dichotomous belief in good and evil as in Europe and the Middle East. There have been attempts by Christian missionaries, notably in the 1970s, to reduce the emphasis on hierarchy among the Kelabit, but this was resurfacing in the 1980s. Indeed, it would seem that the Kelabit do not see the problem with hierarchy. In Kelabit life, this is not accompanied by differences in standard of living or even style of life. Being of higher status, being more *doo*, simply means taking more responsibility for others and therefore being more respected, and inherited differentiation means that some people are born with a greater ability to take decisions and take care of others.



Photo 7.1: Inside of a Kelabit long house showing a row of hearths down one side (Monica Janowski)

Differentiation in terms of levels of *doo*-ness is what I am describing as hierarchical differentiation. This is not characterized by divisions between groups, but by a gradual gradient of how *doo* a person is said to be.⁶ Very high status couples, recognized leaders within longhouses and groups of longhouses (the male member of whom may or may not be the

government-appointed headman, *ketua ruma*), are described as *lun doo to'oh* – 'really good people'. Although the terms *maren* (the term used by Kayan for the top stratum), *paran* (the term used by some Kenyah groups for the top stratum) and *aren* (which appears to be a cognate word but it is not clear of what origin) are used as name elements in parental and grandparental names as part of contemporary bids for higher status (Paran To'oh [True Paran], Aren Raja, Maren Doo [Good Maren] are examples of names from Pa' Dalih); however these terms are not used in any other context and it would appear that their use is part of a cross-ethnic perception of the nature of status (which is explicit in marriage negotiations between the Kelabit and stratified tribal groups; see below).

The Kelabit say that the level of *doo*-ness is inherited. However, although it is believed to be possible to predict it from parentage, this cannot be guaranteed. The rationale for this is based on the fluid kinship reckoning, through which individuals are able to emphasize distant links (their own or those of other people) or de-emphasize closer ones (both with kin of the same generation and with those of preceding generations) according to the desirability of the link. The actual level of *doo*-ness which the two members of a couple is believed to have inherited, and which is demonstrated through their achievements in terms of leadership and rice-growing, is displayed in the marriages which they manage to make for their children.

Unlike among stratified peoples like the Kayan or Kenyah, among the Kelabit it is never possible to say definitely where a person lies in terms of relative hierarchical status, since there is no named stratum to which to ascribe him or her. The fluidity of the way in which the system is conceptualized encourages mobility and competition for hierarchical position.

HIERARCHY, HOUSES AND RICE-BASED KINSHIP

Hierarchy is founded, for the Kelabit, in rice-based kinship. Those described as *lun doo*, 'good people', in the most basic sense of the term, are couples who are accepted as having attained the status of *lun merar*, effective joint heads of hearth-groups – the smallest entity which could be described as a house. *Lun doo to'oh*, 'really good people', are those who are said (at least by their supporters) to be the *lun merar* of longhouses and heads of longhouses. There are some differences in the situations in which a couple will be described as *doo* and *merar*: the first tends to be used in discussing achievements and the latter in discussing relations with those dependent on them, within the family or longhouse. However, the two statuses are coincident.

The fact that hierarchical position is founded in position within the rice-based kinship system is clearly seen in the way in which a couple

displays their *doo*-ness. The achievements associated with exhibiting *doo*-ness relate to effective leadership of the appropriate level of 'house' – hearth-group, longhouse or group of longhouses, which are, I have argued, rice-based kin groups. To be *lun doo*, a couple must be effective *lun merar*, able to maintain and lead the group, and above all able to produce rice to feed the rice meal to their dependants within the hearth-group. To be *lun doo to'oh*, 'really good people', a couple must be able to ensure that the longhouse or group of longhouses for which it is responsible as *lun merar* grows enough rice to feed itself, by effectively leading the community in rice cultivation, in which they are supposed to be the hardest and most skilled workers, and taking in those people who are unable to grow enough, if necessary, as dependent 'children' (slaves, *demulun*, in fact) within their own hearth-group.

While other writers have suggested that kinship and hierarchy – or 'rank'⁷ – in Borneo are alternative modes of social organization (Rousseau 1990, King 1991), I would, then, suggest that for the Kelabit, at least, the two are inseparable; hierarchy is founded in (rice-based) kinship.

HIERARCHY AND THE HOUSE

In the Kelabit Highlands, the physical house, both the hearth-group apartment and the longhouse (both of which are described as *ruma*) is an expression of relative hierarchical position. This is true both in the physical composition of the longhouse and in the configuration of hearth-group apartments within the longhouse. In terms of physical composition, relative permanency is a mark of high status. Houses are made largely of transient materials that rot away; this is almost as true nowadays as in the past. The most important new material used, corrugated metal for roofs, develops holes and is eventually discarded. More wood is used now because of the availability of chainsaws and this rots more quickly than the bamboo that was often used for flooring and walls in the past. However, only posts and some flooring planks tend to be made of good hardwood that lasts for several generations. These are passed down the generations, and the possession of them is prestigious, and a mark of 'good' ancestry. Such planks and posts, which in the past were very labour intensive to make, are proof of the hard work of one's ancestors. In a general sense, the creation of permanency or semi-permanency, including the making of marks on the landscape through the erection of megaliths until the 1950s and, arguably, the making of wet rice fields now, is seen as prestigious.

The configuration of hearth-group apartments in the longhouse is the concrete expression of the relative rice-based kin and hierarchical status of their leading couples, their 'big people'. Ideologically, and

ideally, the central hearth is that of the undisputed 'big people' of the longhouse, with close biological kin on either side. Status falls as one approaches the ends of the longhouses, whose residents were until recently described as *anak katu*, literally 'children at the end', emphasizing their 'child', dependent status in the centre.⁸ Symbolically, the leading couple is the 'centre' of the longhouse. Physically, their hearth should be at the centre of the longhouse; Kelabit longhouses are regularly rebuilt and when this happens the hearth of the current leading couple is always at the centre.

When a visitor approaches a longhouse, unless he/she has close relatives in it he/she will enter by the door leading into the hearth area of the couple which he/she knows to be or chooses to see as leaders. The areas by the hearths of high status couples are the locus of meetings and informal gatherings; their leading couples have the means to provide snacks, drinks and strong lights for meetings. When a longhouse eats a rice meal together, this is always focused, physically, on the hearth of a prominent couple, implying their status as 'big people' of the longhouse.

COMPETITION FOR STATUS IN THE HIGHLANDS

For as long as Kelabit memory goes back, it would seem that leadership and hierarchical position has been contested. The Kelabit of Pa' Dalih say that near the present site of Batu Patong near Pa' Dalih there was, at an undetermined time in the past, a very large settlement said to consist of hundreds of longhouses. This was built up on the basis of the leadership of one couple and their successor couples. However, it eventually disintegrated, with the inhabitants dispersing to form independent communities. It would appear that the descendants of the founding leading couple were not able to maintain their position in the face of competition from subordinate leading couples of the constituent longhouses, who exerted a centrifugal force. Nowadays, the group of eight longhouses at Bario can be seen in some senses as part of the same kind of cycle of growth (and eventual decline) of powerful centres, although the presence of government services and a secondary school, as well as an airstrip, exerted some at least of the initial centripetal influence and continue to hold the settlement together in the face of considerable rivalries between the leaders of longhouses deriving from different parts of the Kelabit Highlands but all currently within the Bario area. Thus the Bario concentration has a number of characteristics, including a high level of competition for status, which are different from those of previous concentrations of longhouses.

Within a longhouse or a multi-longhouse community, there is often rivalry, sometimes fierce rivalry, over which couple is the 'biggest' and

'best' and which should, therefore, lead the community and represent it *vis-à-vis* the outside world. A configuration where there is one central and undisputed hearth-group whose leading couple is the undisputed 'big people' of the longhouse is unusual. The usual pattern is that there are various contenders for leadership. In Pa' Dalih in 1986-1988, for example, the 'big people' of three different hearth-groups were in rivalry for leadership of the community.

The relative hierarchical position of couples leading the hearth-groups making up a longhouse at one point in time is made explicit at the rebuilding of the longhouse. At rebuilding, the house does not only need to be rebuilt in a physical sense, in that it has deteriorated physically, but it almost certainly needs to be rebuilt in a social sense. Changes in the relative hierarchical position of different couples lead to a lack of fit between the configuration of the longhouse and the real relative position of couples leading hearth-groups. Hearth-groups split and amalgamate, cease to exist altogether and change heads, while the longhouse might well be headed *de facto* by the couple at the focus of a different hearth-group than before. Where more than one serious contender for headship exists, a longhouse may split into two or more longhouses. The membership of a longhouse can change, with hearth-groups leaving or joining the longhouse. All of these changes are related to the constant struggle for 'big people' status and relative *doo*-ness within the hearth-group and within the longhouse. The physical house is, at rebuilding, a barometer of the outcomes of these struggles. However, rebuilding, which used to occur every couple of years, now occurs more rarely than before because more permanent materials are used, and it is therefore more likely that a lack of fit will develop between actual leadership patterns and the configuration of the longhouses. This can be seen in empty hearth-group apartments and the lack of physical centrality of what are clearly leading couples, both of which are apparent in Pa' Dalih. The desire to be closer to government services also means that, as in Pa' Dalih, longhouses which do not have clear heads and which should split do not do so; Pa' Dalih is the site of the primary school and health clinic for the southern part of the Highlands.

Even within the hearth-group there is competition for dominance and 'big person' status. This occurs between members of the same generation, siblings, especially within hearth-groups whose 'big people' are of high status and where potentially the leadership of a longhouse is at stake. Among the Kelabit, as is common in Borneo, only one child plus spouse remains in the hearth-group (and should inherit the leading role of the previous couple if this is applicable) once they have children themselves, and so there is potential tension over which sibling plus spouse should take on leadership of high-status hearth-groups, which

carries with it leadership of the longhouse itself. Tension most often occurs between ascending and descending generation couples; the older couple must at some point relinquish control over rice growing and their status as *the* 'big people' leading the hearth-group, and they are not always willing to do this as soon as the junior couple would like.

The rivalries which exist for leadership and status within hearth-groups, longhouses, groups of longhouses and the entire Kelabit community are, however, not something which are aired outside those levels; the group should, to the outside, try to present a united front. The visitor to a longhouse is acutely aware of both the desire to appear united and the existence of rivalries. Visitors should be accommodated and fed rice meals by the 'big people' heading the longhouse, at their hearth; but there is often no agreement as to which couple this is. In Pa' Dalih this was clearly expressed on a regular basis, through tensions over where visitors to the longhouse should be hosted. Wherever the visitor ends up being accommodated, though, most other hearth-groups will send rice and side dishes so that the visitor is, in one sense, being fed by the entire community, which has accepted the hearth where the visitor is being accommodated, at least temporarily *vis-à-vis* the visitor, as its centre.

THE KELABIT SINCE THE SECOND WORLD WAR

After the Second World War, the Kelabit Highlands began to be regularly visited by missionaries of the Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM), for whom small airstrips were built by local people at a number of longhouses, and in 1961 a commercial airstrip was opened at Bario. The first primary school was opened in 1946 and there are now two primary schools and one secondary school in the Highlands. Kelabit have been successful in education and there are a number with university degrees and professional jobs. Migration to town, mainly Miri, for the purposes of employment began in the 1960s and gathered speed in the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s. Much of this has been temporary, but it involves a very large proportion of the total Kelabit population; probably around half are at any one time resident in town.

Kelabit living in the Highlands now visit relatives in town very regularly. While there was some cash in the Highlands before the Second World War, this was very limited. A cash economy has developed since then which is based very largely on the export of a variety of rice grown in wet fields in the Highlands (*pade adan*, known as 'Bario rice' in town), although this benefits predominantly communities within a few hours' walk of the airstrip in Bario.

Bario is the area with most contact with the coast, and the majority of Kelabit resident in the Highlands have now migrated to this area. Almost all Kelabit in Bario, who total around 1,500-2,000, still live in longhouses

and grow rice. The sale of rice and the purchase of goods from town has provided the opportunity for a small number of entrepreneurs based in Bario, all (at least up to 1993) Kelabit.

Entrepreneurs, despite being rather well off, usually live in the longhouse from which they derive, or attempt to generate a new longhouse which they head. Thus they continue to be part of the Kelabit system of 'houses' at different levels, and are attempting to establish their status through 'traditional' means – being *lun merar* of 'houses'. Although government employees, mostly teachers and those who work at the two health clinics, often do not live in the longhouses from which they derive because they are given separate houses built by the government, they seem in many ways to operate as though they did belong to a longhouse, even though this may not be their natal longhouse. In Pa' Dalih teachers and the 'dresser' at the health clinic participate in longhouse life there as though they formed part of it, although in some respects they appear to belong to the longhouses from which they derive. The hearth-groups to which all of these individuals belong cultivate rice, and they participate in communal meals at certain levels and in hosting *irau* feasts.

KELABIT IN TOWN

Kelabit living in town have to construct their identities, at least in some senses, in new ways. They cannot usually grow rice and do not live in longhouses. However, they appear in many ways to be attempting to recreate the social and residence systems of the Highlands, and some are even growing rice on the outskirts of Miri. They place considerable emphasis on their continuing rights to residence in the Highlands and most talk of returning there eventually. Many maintain a longhouse apartment or a separate house attached to a longhouse community in Bario. In town, their identity revolves around continuing to be Kelabit, and the majority of them have social lives which appear to be almost entirely with other Kelabit in town, particularly those from the same longhouse or the same part of the Highlands. Some do marry outside the Kelabit community, but this is regarded with disapproval by most Kelabit. Ties with non-Kelabit appear, at least at the moment, to be peripheral to their identity.

The regularity of movement of people and news between Miri and the Highlands is such that Kelabit in Miri (at least those deriving from longhouses in Bario) and in Bario may be seen as forming two sub-groups of a single community. Kelabit living in town who are from communities like Pa' Dalih outside Bario cannot visit their homes so often, but manage to do so fairly regularly. Values and views held by Kelabit in Miri and in the Highlands seem to be very close. Indeed, the town of Miri

is so new in its present size, and so many of its inhabitants are recent immigrants that it is probably true to say that there is as yet no distinct 'town' culture. There is rather a collection of sub-groups of immigrants, each constructing their identities very largely with reference to the place they came from and around others from that place. Despite the extreme isolation of the Kelabit Highlands, the direct air link enables Kelabit in town to do this quite effectively.

While some Kelabit in town are professionals, entrepreneurs or are employed by companies on a long-term basis, many are unskilled and semi-skilled. There appear to be about equal numbers of men and women in the two categories. Those working as unskilled or semi-skilled labour are likely to remain unmarried while living in town, and to return eventually to their longhouse to marry and settle down as rice cultivators. Professionals are much more likely to marry and settle in the town. However, although Kelabit professionals have greater possibilities of constructing a new identity for themselves in the multi-ethnic world of the town, they tend to rely heavily on their position within the Kelabit social universe as a means of constructing their identity. Their social lives are largely with other Kelabit.

BEING *LUN MERAR/LUN DOO* IN TOWN

While unmarried Kelabit in town are not yet, because they have no children, in a position where they need to show that they are *lun doo* or *lun merar*, married professionals do face the question of demonstrating this, in a context where they rely for their identity very largely on a Kelabit social universe. One of the fundamental points about achieving the status of *lun doo/lun merar* in the Highlands is the successful cultivation of rice and its provision for dependants. However, town dwellers are rarely able to grow rice – although recently some have begun to do so on the outskirts of Miri, not because they need to supplement their livelihoods but in order to eat rice they have grown themselves. Usually, though, Kelabit in town eat rice sent down by their parents or grandparents in the Highlands. This implies that they are still 'children' within the traditional rice-based kinship system. It is interesting that the option of buying rice is not taken up unless absolutely necessary – it is better to be linked to the Kelabit 'house' system as a dependant than not to be linked to it at all, which would be implied by eating purchased rice.

The fact that married Kelabit professionals in town are not usually able to grow rice is explicitly seen as an issue, and this relates to their status as *lun merar*. An attempt to grapple with the issue is expressed in the view, which I heard expressed a number of times by close relatives of a certain professional, that *kerja late' iah*, 'his/her work is his/her rice field'. This is said in a tone that makes clear that the fact that the person

concerned does not have a rice field is something which is potentially problematic and demeaning.

This statement appears to be an attempt to construct a new source of *lun doo/lun merar*-hood – salaried, high-status work. There is no doubt that people with good government jobs and successful entrepreneurs are granted status by the outside world, and other Kelabit are affected by this. However, in order for them to be accepted as leaders of the Kelabit community in town this has to be rationalized within the system of values imported from the Highlands. This is clearly expressed through the fact that the prosperity deriving from employment or entrepreneurship, both in Bario and in Miri, is, like that deriving from rice agriculture, directed very largely into accommodating and feeding others. Money is used to make this possible, and perhaps one might see the suggestion that 'his/work is his/her rice field' as a postulation that money is 'produced' as rice is produced.

Both entrepreneurial couples in the Highlands and town couples who are well established and have children ensure that they have a house that is big enough to accommodate guests. Such guests are usually young unmarried relatives of junior generations, some of whom stay more or less indefinitely, studying or working in town. These in effect become extra 'children' or even 'grandchildren' of the couple who own the house, thus enlarging the group for which the couple that owns the house is responsible. They address and refer to the couple who own the house as 'mother' (*sinah*), 'father' (*tama*) or 'grandparent' (*lepo*), and are referred to as 'children' or 'descendants' (*anak*) by that couple. To have a houseful of such 'descendants' appears to be a prerequisite of leadership in town.

The physical house continues to be a very important place for exhibiting *lun merar*-hood and *lun doo*-hood. In the Highlands, entrepreneurs and also some town dwellers are investing large amounts of money in building ostentatious hearth-group apartments or separate houses attached to longhouses, sometimes central apartments at the focus of rebuilt or new longhouses. These are much grander than the apartments traditionally built by Kelabit leaders, which were not very different from other apartments, and there seems to be some borrowing from Kenyah and Kayan groups in this. Such houses, and houses in town, are decorated with what are described as *bunga ruma* ('flowers' – decorations of the house), items made in the Highlands (such as sun hats and carrying baskets) which are representative of Kelabit identity and which may incorporate high-value heirloom items.

It is arguable that the Kelabit house in town should be seen as equivalent to a hearth-group in the Kelabit Highlands. Should it contain dependant couples with children, it can even be seen as equivalent to a nascent longhouse. Kelabit in town make efforts to buy houses close to

each other; there is even one housing estate which is called Spring Bario and appears to contain a majority of Kelabit. Houses in such housing estates are usually built in terraces or rows and their configuration is not dissimilar to that of a longhouse.

The parallel between a Highlands hearth-group and a town house headed by a couple is strengthened by the role of gender within these two entities. In the Highlands, both the male and the female member of a *lun merar* couple are essential elements in the production of rice and in the generation of *lun merar*-hood and *lun doo*-hood. In town, too, the status of the couple is generated through both male and female member engaging in prestigious salaried work. It is very rare indeed for a married woman in town to stay at home and look after her children. This is rather seen as the task of a young, unmarried female relative who is brought down from the Highlands for this purpose. In the Highlands, however, the wives of professional men concentrate on rice-growing, and in this way it is possible, arguably, for both the production of rice and that of money to be used as sources of *doo*-ness.

CONTEMPORARY COMPETITION FOR HIERARCHICAL POSITIONS

With the concentration of population in Bario, the level of competition for rank, and by implication 'house' leadership, has become very intense. This is apparent in the ever-increasing size and lavishness of *irau* naming feasts, the excessively boastful parental and grandparental names which are taken at *irau* and the widespread desire to buy and display prestige possessions, including what have traditionally been heirloom items, particularly old beads; these are now purchased from related people from across the Indonesian border. *Iraus* are essentially huge rice meals, and may be seen as bids on the part of the host for *lun merar* status *vis-à-vis* the entire Kelabit population – who are all invited – at least temporarily. This implies being at the head of the highest-level symbolic 'house' within the Kelabit system of 'houses' at different levels. Lavish *irau* and the purchase of beads and other prestige possessions are made possible because of the increased availability of cash in the Highlands. It is widely agreed by Kelabit that in the past only a very small number of 'really good people' held such feasts. This implied a lower level of competition for leadership of the 'house' to which all Kelabit belong. Now, however, all couples hold *irau* after the birth of their first co-resident grandchild. However, some *irau* are much better attended than others; a well-attended *irau* generates higher rank because it projects and generates, temporarily, a bigger 'hearth-group' or 'house'.

Success in rice growing and success in education and in 'producing' money as two different sources of status are in uneasy and dynamic relation with each other. It is difficult to succeed in both spheres, and yet

both are very relevant to the generation of *doo-ness*. In addition, there is tension surrounding the fact that income is derived unequally by different people from the sale of 'Bario rice'; it appears to be fundamental to the Kelabit concept of *doo-ness* that all should have equal access to the possibilities of demonstrating it, and this is being breached.

The struggle to establish ever-higher levels of *doo-ness* – a higher hierarchical position, in other words, and leadership of a higher level of 'house' – and the way in which success in rice growing and in education and employment are related to this is illustrated and played out in marriage negotiations. The basis of establishing a level of *doo-ness* or rank in this context is coming to be achievement in education and in obtaining a good job. Achievement on the part of parents, grandparents and ancestors, however, is assessed in terms of rice growing, and this is used as a predictor of achievement; but insofar as there has been participation in the educational system on the part of the spouse himself or herself, his or her achievement is assessed in terms of success in this sphere, together with eventual success in the 'production' of money which derives from it. Even in the Highlands, those who only succeed in growing rice and do not succeed in education are not seen, nowadays, as good potential spouses. This relates back to the discussion above of the comment by a relative that, in reference to a successful town dweller, 'his work is his rice field'.

In town, matches with the closely related Lun Bawang and Lun Dayeh groups in the Fifth Division are sometimes arranged, and marriages with other tribal groups are seen as acceptable, though they are not arranged. In this context equivalence is generated between the different hierarchical systems, but negotiations hinge around detailed discussion of the achievements, as well as the 'rank' status for stratified groups, of ancestors and potential spouse – the latter in education and employment.

The competition between couples heading different hearth-groups within a longhouse to host visitors has its equivalent in Miri in the competition between couples owning houses to accommodate visitors in their houses. Visitors, particularly high-status visitors, will receive invitations from many different Kelabit in Miri to stay with them, and may even be practically forcibly removed from one house and taken to another to stay; this happened to myself, my husband and daughter. Visitors will certainly have to go around to a number of houses to eat a rice meal in each.

THE RICE MEAL IN TOWN

Providing the rice meal for others, both visitors and dependants, remains the focal activity which defines the membership of a house or a

hearth-group and which demonstrates *doo-ness*, in town as in the Kelabit Highlands. Within the town house, which I have suggested is equivalent to a hearth-group, and perhaps to a nascent longhouse, the rice meal is regularly provided not only for biological children but also for the group of young relatives usually also resident in the house. Within the wider Kelabit town community, which might be seen as a higher-level 'house', the rice meal is provided on certain occasions communally, for guests from the Highlands who are heads of hearth-groups there and, at special occasion meals, for couples heading other town houses. As in the highlands, this takes place at the 'hearth' (town house) of one couple, but food is provided by other couples living in other 'hearths' (town houses). Through this means (feeding other 'big people', heads of other hearth-groups), *doo-ness* is generated at a higher level than that of the hearth-group (town-house) which one actually heads and a bid is arguably made to head a higher-level 'house' (a group of town houses, physically adjacent or not).

CONCLUSION

Hierarchical differentiation among the Kelabit, which is normally talked of in terms of levels of 'goodness' (*doo-ness*), is based on how successful a couple is in being *lun merar* – 'big people' – within what I have called the rice-based kinship system (Janowski forthcoming). This means being successful in leading the basic residential and kin unit, the hearth-group, and above all in providing the rice meal regularly for their children and grandchildren within the hearth-group which they head. The hearth-group is the longhouse in miniature; longhouses and groups of longhouses also have their 'big people' couples, who are the leaders of the longhouse; the larger the 'house' of which a couple is 'big people', the greater their *doo-ness* and the higher their hierarchical position.

Now that many Kelabit participate in the educational system and work temporarily or permanently in town, while remaining closely tied to the Kelabit community in town and also in the Highlands, an additional source of status, generating 'big person'-hood, *doo-ness*, and leadership, has been added: success in education and in employment. However the provision of rice meals for others continues to be the central way in which Kelabit in town as well as in the Highlands express and bring into being rice-based kin status and *doo-ness*, in other words hierarchical position. This continues to be focused on the house, and it would seem arguable that Kelabit houses in town may be seen as equivalent to hearth-groups in the Highlands, and that Kelabit in town are beginning to regenerate the longhouse system utilizing individual town houses. However, this would require detailed attention.

Mobility is built into the system because inherited potential has to be exhibited in achievement. Competition is inherent to the Kelabit system of hierarchical differentiation and leadership; the Kelabit system, which does not divide people into clear-cut strata but necessitates constant negotiation of relative hierarchical position – expressed most clearly at *irau* feasts and arranged marriages – is driven by intense struggle for higher position in the continuous hierarchy of *doo*-ness. This is as true in a town context as it is in the Highlands. Competition for *lun merar*-ship (parenthood and grandparenthood in the rice-based kin system), which implies appropriate levels of *doo*-ness (hierarchical position), occurs, both in the Highlands and in town, at all levels of the 'house' (*ruma*): hearth-group (individual house in town), longhouse (group of houses in town; and perhaps individual houses) and group of longhouses.

NOTES

1 I carried out Ph.D fieldwork, funded by an ESRC (UK Government's Economic and Social Research Council) award, from July 1986 to May 1988 and returned to Pa' Dalih for a further four months' fieldwork in 1992–93, when I was supported by a British Academy grant and by an Evans Fellowship at the University of Cambridge. I am grateful to all of these sources of funding.

2 Both the division of the couple into male and female components and its unity are of significance, and both are visible in different contexts (Janowski 1991, 1995).

3 The fact that both the hearth-groups and the longhouse are described as *ruma* points to an equivalence between hearth-group and longhouse. A number of scholars have noted the fact that in SE Asia, there is frequently an equation between different levels of 'house' – often described using terms deriving from proto-Austronesian **Rumaq* (Blust 1980:211) – where the higher levels are inclusive of the lower (see chapters in Macdonald 1987 and in Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995).

4 This is not something confined to the Kelabit; it exists among other Bornean hierarchical peoples. Among the Kayan, all adult *maren* (together with a few other men of high status and certain priests) are conceived of as being of an ascending generation vis-à-vis those of lower status, being described as *kelunan aya*, literally 'people who are already big', the same term used for adults, vis-à-vis other members of the community (Rousseau 1974: 343–344, 403–404). Among the Kenyah group studied by Whittier glosses this term as 'children/followers' of the *paran*, which Whittier (1973: 70) translates as 'aristocrats'. Among the Maloh, aristocrats were likened to cognatic kinsmen of the senior genealogical levels and addressed by terms which King (1991: 28) translates as 'grandfather/grandmother' and 'father/mother'; aristocrats frequently talked of other villagers as 'our children' (*anakka banua*) or 'grandchildren' (*ampuka*).

5 Lian-Saging and Bulan give the classes as (1) *paran*, also known as *tutul lun merar* (*marar* for Bulan), 'descendants of leaders', literally 'big people' and as *tutul lun do* ('descendants' of 'good people', 15 per cent of the population; (2) *upa-upa* ('half-half'), 55 per cent of the population; (3) *anak hatu*, ('followers', literally 'children at the end' [of the longhouse]), 28 per cent of the population; and (4) *demulun*, ('slaves'), 2 per cent of the population. Talla disagrees with this analysis and gives the classes as (1) *anak lun merar*, equivalent to Lian-Saging's and Bulan's *paran* in size but divided into two parts, *lun lun merar* and *lun dhoor* are not interchangeable; (2) *pupa* [= *upa-upa*], an undetermined proportion of the population; (3) *lun daat*, ('bad people'), also known as *lun naam lunnuwan* (Talla's translation of which is 'man of no family genealogy'; but this can also be translated literally as 'person with no-one belonging to him/her', i.e. with no known family). Talla disagrees with Lian-Saging's labelling the third class *anak lun merar* should be term *anak hatu*. (Talla 1979: 76–90; Lian-Saging 1976/77: 115–125; Bulan n.d.)

6 People can also, at least in theory, be described as *daat*, translated into English as 'bad' or 'evil' but implying rather an inability to look after and provide for oneself.

7 Because of the lack of definite named strata I do not use the term 'rank' for Kelabit hierarchy.

8 While Lian-Saging (1976/77) states that it is only those at the ends of the longhouse who are described as *anak hatu*, Talla (1979) argues that everyone except members of the leading hearth-group should be described as *anak hatu*, emphasizing the dependency of the whole longhouse as children on the leading couple of that hearth-group.

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