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Borneo Studies: Perspectives from a Jobbing Social Scientist

Kajian Borneo: Perspektif Seorang *Jobbing Social Scientist*

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ABSTRAK

Makalah ini merupakan satu pengembaraan intelektual merentasi Borneo. Namun, daripada hanya merumuskan hasil penyelidikan sendiri dan juga penyelidikan orang lain mengenai masyarakat, budaya dan sejarah Borneo, dan menunjukkan sumbangan para penyelidik itu kepada khazanah ilmu pengetahuan dalam bidang kesarjanaan dan tradisi teoretis tertentu, penulis turut memperkatakan tentang suatu gaya penyelidikan khusus yang beliau namakan sebagai jobbing. *Reaksi popular ekoran penggunaan konsep sedemikian lazimnya memberikan satu gambaran seolah-olah ia suatu pendekatan yang tidak profesional tanpa mempunyai nilai kesarjanaan terhadap suatu kegiatan akademik yang serius. Walau bagaimanapun, penulis menghujahkan bahawa kebanyakan daripada penyelidikannya sendiri boleh disifatkan sebagai* jobbing*, iaitu ia terletak di tengah-tengah dalam satu kontinum daripada teori membawa kepada praktis, menggunakan pelbagai konsep secara eklektik dan pragmatik untuk menganalisis dan membentangkan bahan-bahan yang diperolehi daripada sumber-sumber yang amat pelbagai dan menuangkannya ke dalam suatu huraian naratif secara logik dan bermakna. Dengan cara itu, penulis menghujahkan bahawa banyak daripada penyelidikannya di Borneo dalam tempoh setengah abad ini boleh dikategorikan dalam gaya yang sama. Makalah ini menghuraikan konsep* jobbing*, hubungan antara kajian kawasan dengan gaya hidup* jobbing*, perantisan seseorang penyelidik yang* jobbing*, cara bagaimana penyelidikan mengenai 'Maloh' di kawasan pedalaman Kalimantan dan mengenai Borneo secara lebih umum boleh difahami dengan lebih baik sekiranya dilihat daripada perspektif ini. Begitu juga perspektif ini membantu memahami dengan lebih baik masalah yang ditimbulkan oleh pendekatan globalisasi bagi mereka yang penyelidikannya terpahat dalam pemahaman struktur dan proses* on-the-ground.

Kata kunci: Borneo, jobbing*, autobiografi, metodologi, globalisasi*

ABSTRACT

The paper comprises an intellectual journey through Borneo. But rather than summarising the results of his and others research on Borneo's societies, cultures and histories and demonstrating their contribution to knowledge within certain fields of scholarship and theoretical tradition the author dwells on a particular style of research which he refers to as 'jobbing'. Popular reactions to the use of such a concept usually turn on the images which it conjures of an unprofessional and unscholarly approach to what are serious matters of academic endeavour. However, in arguing that much of his own research can be characterised as 'jobbing', that it falls somewhere in the middle of a continuum from theory to practice drawing on concepts in an eclectic and pragmatic way in order to analyse and present materials gathered from a diverse range of sources in a logical and meaningful explanatory narrative, the author proposes that much of the research undertaken in Borneo over the last half century can also be categorised in the same fashion. The paper ranges over 'jobbing concepts', the relations between area studies and a jobbing lifestyle, the apprenticeship of a jobbing researcher, the ways in which research both on the 'Maloh' of interior Kalimantan and on Borneo more generally can be appreciated from this perspective, and the problems posed by globalisation approaches for those whose work is rooted in the understanding of 'on-the-ground' structures and processes.

Keywords: Borneo, jobbing, autobiography, methodology, globalisation

INTRODUCTION

Having spent nearly four decades in undertaking research and writing on the societies and cultures of Borneo, and indeed more widely in Southeast Asia, I thought that, on the occasion of the Malaysian Social Science Association's (Persatuan Sains Sosial Malaysia, PSSM) 6th International Malaysian Studies Conference in Kuching, it would be profitable to re-examine some of this work and consider other research in relation to it. In addressing this theme I recall James Chin's comment on the occasion of a gathering of Malaysian social scientists in Kuching in February 2006 to discuss 'New Research in Malaysian Studies', reported on the Association's website in *Bulletin PSSM*, that social scientists in Sarawak tend to feel 'a little isolated' from their Malaysian colleagues elsewhere and that Borneo remains under-studied in comparison with the Peninsula (http://pssmalaysia.tripod.com/). This apparent marginality and the lack of attention to Borneo need further scrutiny and in this connection I consulted the website of the Borneo Research Council (BRC; http://www.borneoresearchcouncil.org/) to see what had been achieved, particularly during the past decade when I have not been involved in any first-hand research in Borneo. My last period of fieldwork there

goes back to the mid-1990s and I cannot claim any special authority to comment on what has been done most recently (King 1999a, 1999b), although I note that the BRC has recently commissioned its own series of reviews of different disciplinary and subject fields.

In contrast to Chin's observations above a cursory survey of the theses listed on the BRC's website compiled by Robert Winzeler (2004) suggests that there is an abundance of studies on Borneo and there have been significant contributions to the general social science literature. The current thesis list comprises some 540 titles with abstracts (http://www2.library.unr.edu/dataworks/Borneo/). This is by no means an exhaustive record, nor does it include many of the dissertations and academic exercises that students in Malaysian (or indeed in Indonesian and Bruneian) universities have undertaken. Tan Chee Beng (1996), for example, provided such a list for the Department of Anthropology and Sociology at the University of Malaya from 1972 to 1996, which then amounted to 50 pieces of work. To provide a comprehensive overview of this scholarship is impossible in my current reflections on Borneo research. Even a review of social science contributions to the *Borneo Research Bulletin* during its almost 40 years of publication from March 1969, as well as the Council's publications series and the enormous number of papers presented at its successful biennial conferences in Borneo since 1990 are way beyond the scope of what I can cover here. If we also take into account the research and publications including specialist journals on Borneo which have emerged from the universities, museums and specialist research and government institutions in Sarawak, Sabah, Brunei and Kalimantan, and elsewhere in Malaysia and Indonesia, my task becomes impossible.

It was for this reason that rather than attempt a survey of the field I decided that it would be profitable for me to undertake a personal journey and look back over my engagement with Southeast Asia and particularly Borneo since the early 1970s. In this exercise I intend to examine, however briefly, what I think I have been trying to do, how I came to do it in that way, and then consider selectively some other research which appears to connect with it. I hope those who read this piece will permit me to indulge in this personal reminiscence. It may, in part at least, resonate with some of their experiences. However, I should emphasise that I am not making any grand claim for my own approach, only that in the Borneo context it seems most appropriate. Nor in constructing this academic biography am I suggesting that this is the way in which I conceived clearly what I was doing and that I rationalised it in these terms at the time. My current exercise is something of a *post hoc* rationalisation, although it became clear to me by the early 1990s that I could begin to explain my work in terms of the concept of 'jobbing'.

A JOBBING LIFESTYLE

So what do I mean by the term 'jobbing social scientist'? I see it as a kind of lifestyle and vocation. I first used the term in a paper published in *The Sarawak Gazette* in 1994 when at that time I was reflecting on the changes which had taken place in Sarawak during my two decades of interaction with the state from the early 1970s. I believe the term 'jobbing' captures my kind of work, though various meanings, some popular and some technical, have been attached to that term (see, for example, http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary). I conceive of it in a positive sense and not an approach to academic endeavour which is in any way self-deprecating, belittling and lacking in professionalism. Indeed it is a style of work and a perspective which is fully professional and rooted in scholarship. With regard to academic activity it has taken on a quite specific meaning. Tony Barnett and Piers Blaikie (1994) in their research from the late 1980s in rural Uganda on the social and economic impact of the AIDS epidemic characterised what they were doing as 'jobbing'. It corresponded very much with the way I was thinking about the kind of social science in which I was engaged at the time (King 1999a, 1999b, 1999c).

What did they mean by this term (which also captures precisely how I view my approach)? They traced the route by which a research project comprising a series of specific research questions and which required the piecing together of a range of materials gathered from field observations, interviews, surveys, casual conversations and encounters, and a mix of published and unpublished data, and drawing eclectically on certain concepts and frameworks, was eventually translated into 'a "coherent" [empirical] account which in some way relates to the "problem" from which the journey originated' (Barnett & Blaikie 1994: 226). It is a logical narrative which should as its main objective make sense in relation to the questions asked. Barnett's and Blaikie's research also had to feed into policy and be accessible to policy-makers and practitioners, and though it made recourse to theories, it was not involved in formulating theory. Barnett and Blaikie argued that what they did fell somewhere in the middle of a continuum from theory to practice (ibid: 227). At its grandest it might, in Robert Merton's terms, approach 'middle range theory' (1957), but perhaps more correctly, the concepts which Barnett and Blaikie (and which I) use are at a relatively low level of abstraction and do not form a unified or coherent body of theory as such. This approach draws on concepts in an eclectic and pragmatic way; utilising them where it is thought necessary (Barnett & Blaikie 1994: 247-248).

JOBBING CONCEPT

What are some of these low level concepts which I have in mind? In my early years of research in the 1970s and 1980s I, like many other anthropologists of the

time, employed such notions as the personal kindred and ego- and conjugal pair-focused networks in describing and analysing cognatic or bilateral social systems in Borneo and elsewhere, along with such other concepts as household, family and domestic group. In research on the stratified societies of Borneo notions of social rank and status were indispensable (King 1991). These for me are all low level concepts which help us order data in convenient ways.

I also found another concept particularly useful, that of dual symbolic classification, a concern that preoccupied me in the 1980s when I was attempting to analyse symbolism in religion and material culture. It could be interpreted as part of Lévi-Straussian high theory, but in my view it is not, or at least it can be detached from it and used in the analysis of cognatic systems. For me it helped illuminate some aspects of Bornean symbolism found in the work of Erik Jensen, Peter Metcalf and Hans Schärer among others (King 1980).

However, more importantly, from the mid-1980s up to the end of the 1990s I moved into other more development- and sociologically-oriented fields and have been deploying such concepts as ecosystem, informal sector, centre-periphery relations, ethnicity, gender, social class and strategic group in helping explain various aspects of social change in Southeast Asia, as well as employing relatively straightforward analytical schemes to address such issues as resettlement and agricultural development. I must emphasise that none of these relate to a coherent or distinctive body of theory (King 1999c, 2008). I have selected ideas from here and there because they seemed appropriate at the time and helped me develop what I hoped was a coherent empirical account of this or that problem which, in certain cases and particularly in the field of development studies, might also serve practical purposes.

In all of these exercises I have steadfastly tried to proceed on a case-by-case basis recognising that there are significant variations at the local level between the circumstances of different communities. We have to recognise that even a low level conceptual framework might not capture the diversity of lived experiences though it is still preferable to higher level theory. In any case I have always been troubled by grand theories and purported universalisms, however seductive they often seem in their desire to explain all before them (King 2008; King & Wilder 2006, 2003). A more recent example of these universalisms is that of globalisation theory on which I shall comment in a moment.

Like Barnett & Blaikie in Uganda, in some of my later work in Borneo and elsewhere I too was involved in some of the more immediate issues of policy and practice, particularly in such matters as rural development, land schemes, resettlement, environmental change and cultural and ethnic tourism (King 1986a, 1986b, 1988, 1990a, 1990b, 1993a, 1999a, 1999c). This required the use of certain concepts in addressing on-the-ground data in order to say something which might be practically useful to government and other agencies. So it is in this area of work where concepts interact with practice in most immediate ways where jobbing seems to be most appropriate. I also tried to make sense of this in a

region-wide comparative book which examined the relationships between anthropology and development in Southeast Asia and specifically those between doing theory and engaging in practice, arguing against the position that they were separate domains of activity and attempting to explore which concepts might help us in our understanding of policy and development interventions (King 1999b: 10; 1999c: 4-7; also King 1996, 1998).

As I was engaged in writing this paper I happened to be reading Rob Cramb's recent book *Land and Longhouse* (2007) in which he evaluates the roles of community, market and state in the transformation of Saribas Iban livelihoods. In his cross-disciplinary exercise as an agricultural economist Cramb sets out the kind of approach which I have in mind in my term 'jobbing', though he does not use this term himself. He says 'I emphasise the humble and pedestrian nature of my profession to forestall some of the inevitable criticism I will encounter for having strayed inexpertly into the fields of anthropologists, sociologists, historians, legal experts, and political scientists…..(ibid: xviii). In my view he should not be so apologetic. This is precisely what we should be doing. Let me now extend the discussion into area studies and the influence that this kind of academic environment has on research styles and approaches.

AREA STUDIES AND JOBBING

I do not wish here to become embroiled in debates about the definition of region and specifically Southeast Asia and the place of Borneo within it. I have spent the last few years in dialogue with several researchers, particularly American scholars, and like Heather Sunderland and Ruth McVey have argued that Southeast Asia is for research purposes a 'contingent device' and depending on the topic or subject addressed can vary in its definition and scope so that we might conceive of several Southeast Asias or indeed several Borneos (King 2006). In any case debates on the nature and definition of region and knowledge about it are open-ended, intense, frequent and ongoing. They certainly show no signs of diminishing (Sears 2007).

However, the important point to make is that working in area studies programmes strengthens the inclination to adopt a 'jobbing' approach. In other words, researchers usually work in a multi- and sometimes inter-disciplinary mode and draw eclectically on concepts and frameworks from more than one discipline. In collaborative work and in the supervision of research one tends to get involved in several different topics of interest, often simultaneously, which may not have very direct or demonstrable connections with each other. At one time or another I have been involved in work on kinship, household and residence relationships; on symbolism and classification; material culture, including work on textiles; photographic and ethnographic collections; ecology and environmental change; rural development and resettlement; colonial, economic

and political history; religious conversion and social change; oral tradition; cultural tourism and heritage; social class and youth cultures; gender and work; urban redevelopment; local level politics; and ethnicity and identities. Even though several of the projects have been concerned with Borneo, overall they have ranged over Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, Brunei, Myanmar and north-east India, Thailand, Laos, the Philippines and Vietnam. I have also worked in or supervised research on hunter-gatherers, shifting cultivators, irrigated rice farmers, commercial estate workers, industrial and mining communities and urban populations. I dip in and out of projects, moving from one discipline or subject to another in haphazard fashion and generally hunting, gathering, cultivating and grazing over broad expanses of academic territory, usually occupied by others. One thing which is constant in this lifestyle is the desire to understand the on-the-ground 'realities' of the region.

I was struck by how different my experience has been from those who work in strongly focused disciplinary departments or programmes of study focused on particular approaches or paradigms. Recently I read with great interest Kirk Endicott's affectionate reminiscence of Rodney Needham in the 2007 edition of the *Borneo Research Bulletin*. As one of Needham's postgraduate students at Oxford in the mid-1960s, Endicott (2007: 10-11) observed that:

> … "the Diploma year was an intensive indoctrination into the Oxford approach to social anthropology, the approach that has been called 'British structuralism'….The faculty, despite their differing regional and topical interests, all (with the partial exception of Edwin Ardener, who had studied at the L.S.E.) subscribed to this basic paradigm…We students were expected to learn to think and view the world in this way, which most of us willingly did. Other approaches were presented mainly to show why they were wrong…"

What a radical difference from my background and training! I never experienced that unity of purpose and coherence of perspective which Kirk Endicott and other doctoral students at Oxford enjoyed. So where did my rather different jobbing lifestyle begin?

AN APPRENTICE JOBBER

I have pondered why I took the jobbing route. More than this, despite the apparent unfocused approach is there nevertheless certain guiding principles? Three things come to mind immediately, which characterised what I began to do during my own research: first, the need to travel across borders and boundaries (political, ethnic, geographical, disciplinary) (King 1993b); second, the acknowledgement that whatever one does a historical perspective will help you do it better; and finally, the recognition that the case you want to concentrate on is part of a much wider set of relationships (but you have to determine how far you want to pursue those relationships and undertake comparison). And how did I arrive at these simple precepts? It was along routes with which many

academics will be familiar: in relationships with immediate mentors (I had many but those I discuss in a moment were of particular importance), in various kinds of departmental and institutional interaction (mine was primarily within multidisciplinary regional studies, but also at various times within sociology, anthropology and geography) and in exchange with significant others (especially those whom one asks for help, guidance and advice, even though they have no specific obligation to assist you. In my case those who immediately spring to mind in no particular order of precedence are Rodney Needham, Edmund Leach, Derek Freeman, George Appell, Alf and Judith Hudson, Herb and Pat Whittier, Jan Avé, Anthony Richards, Benedict Sandin, Harry Benda, The Siauw Giap, Donatus Dunselman, Stephen Morris, Barbara Ward, George Elliston and Charles Fisher.

I am sure that many young and emerging scholars decided on an academic career or were influenced in that direction by a committed, inspiring, supportive teacher or supervisor. I had the great good fortune to have three principle mentors during my undergraduate and postgraduate days. The most important was James Jackson who read for his doctorate at the University of Malaya and published his thesis, *Planters and Speculators* (1968a), with University of Malay Press. The thesis comprised a historical-geographical examination of Western and Chinese commercial agriculture in colonial Malaya. I was privileged to attend his lectures in cultural and historical geography. Jackson was the consummate academic, combining his current research interests with his teaching and introducing his students to a fascinating world of cultural landscapes and how they had developed. In his lectures, among other things, he presented material on his recently published work, including drawing from his *Sarawak: A Geographical Survey of a Developing State* (1968b). My first academic contact with Borneo had been made. He brought his students to the cross-disciplinary concept of development and the different dimensions of what the newly independent territories and peoples of the developing world had to address in their uncertain futures. Yet he went beyond geography into history, society and culture, and he did not confine himself to Sarawak and Malaya because at that time he was also developing a research interest in Chinese enterprise in the former Netherlands East Indies.

Up to the 1980s at least if you undertook research in the northern, former British territories of Borneo, you did not usually move into Kalimantan (King 1978; 1993b). Instead, after engaging with Sarawak Jackson shifted his sights to western Indonesian Borneo in his study of Chinese gold-mining (1970). He argued for the importance of examining communities from a historical perspective, the crucial significance of detailed comparative case material whether or not it was contained within particular political or geographical borders, and the effects that different cultures have on landscapes and environment. It was this study which really captured my interest in Indonesian Borneo. This rootedness in space and place and the firm location in particular human-shaped landscapes to

which the study of geography introduced me also made me somewhat sceptical of higher level theory and speculation.

Jackson's influence was reinforced by Mervyn Jaspan, the then Professor of Southeast Asian Sociology at the University of Hull, an Indonesian specialist familiar with Dutch scholarship on Indonesia. A one-time Professor of Sociology in Java, he subsequently undertook research in Sumatra, Cambodia and the Philippines among other places. He combined both sociology and anthropology in his teaching and research and reinforced my interests in working across disciplines. Importantly in an Indonesian context it was not only the Dutch historical-sociological and comparative tradition on Indonesia developed by Wim Wertheim and Otto van der Muizenberg in Amsterdam, whose influence on my sociological perspectives was considerable, but also the Leiden structuralist approach established primarily by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong and W.H. Rassers and the early Dutch scholarship on Borneo. Jaspan also eschewed theory in favour of ethnography and a committed empiricism. With his range of scholarly interests and his view that we must understand the multidimensional, constantly evolving and interacting character of the communities under study he insisted that his students must go to the field with no preconceptions; he wanted the thesis to emerge from the data collected rather than it being determined by a preconceived set of theoretical propositions (Martinez 2002: 20-21). It was also Jaspan who introduced me to Edmund Leach, George Appell, Stephen Morris, Barbara Ward, Jan Avé, Donatus Dunselman and Anthony Richards who were all to have a significant influence on how I eventually decided to address and understand Borneo.

Mervyn Jaspan, as an Indonesianist, was also insistent that my main research should focus on the Indonesian side of the border, whether among the Kalimantan Iban or a neighbouring group. At that time it was touch and go whether or not I should go to study the Punan Bah in Sarawak, which had been suggested as a possible field site by Stephen Morris. Interestingly at that time Jaspan was also engaged in a comparative project with Tom Harrisson and Benedict Sandin on oral traditions and the indigenous scripts of the Rejang of Sumatra and what Harrisson rather misleadingly referred to at that time as Iban 'writing boards'. Jaspan suggested that I contact Harrisson and in rather abrupt and terse correspondence with Harrisson I became increasingly attracted to the idea of studying the famous silversmiths of Borneo, usually referred to in the literature, and by Harrisson (1995), as 'Maloh', though much of the material which Harrisson used for his work on the Maloh had been gathered by Benedict Sandin and George Jamuh at the Sarawak Museum. The Maloh (also referred to in the literature as Embaloh, Memaloh, Taman and Kalis) had especially close relations with the Iban and some other Iban-related groups like the Kantu'; they spoke Iban, intermarried with them and Iban were the main customers for Maloh-manufactured silver adornments.

The third influence was Lewis Hill who had undertaken library-based anthropological research at Oxford on upland communities of the Burma-north-

eastern Indian borderlands under the supervision of Rodney Needham, prior to pursuing field studies in a completely different location, the western Sudan. It was Lewis Hill who introduced me to Oxford structuralism (as well as to American cultural anthropology), to the fascination of particular kinds of marriage and symbolic classification systems in northern upland Southeast Asia, Sumatra and eastern Indonesia, and to Rodney Needham. Whilst Needham was enormously generous with his time and advice he stated firmly in our exchanges that although he was not interested in much of the work that I had undertaken on Borneo and other parts of Southeast Asia (because it was not remotely connected to the Oxford tradition), he did appreciate my irregular (perhaps even erratic) excursions into symbolic classification. In any case for me Oxford structuralism was something of a sideline, though it required me to read a large body of work on Southeast Asia that not only came out of Oxford but also Paris, Leiden and Cambridge.

My mature contemplation on this early encounter with Southeast Asia, and Borneo in particular, suggests to me that what I came into contact with at a formative stage in my career was an extraordinary mix of disciplinary influences, styles and subject interests which pushed me in the direction of jobbing (a concept with which I was unfamiliar at the time). However my field situation in the Upper Kapuas area of West Kalimantan also seemed conducive to this eclectic and multidisciplinary approach.

JOBBING IN MALOH LAND

Even in what was a relatively remote part of the island in the early 1970s, the casual visitor to interior West Kalimantan would have been immediately aware of change (King 1985). What I was aware of was a complex mix of differently named ethnic groupings; significant levels of cultural exchange, intermarriage, trade, and migration; expanding markets; the effects of colonial intervention; and relatively rapid socio-economic transformations during the stormy late-Sukarno period and the modernisation, ideological indoctrination and administrative incorporation of rural communities in the early Suharto years. In the case of the Maloh there was considerable internal cultural variation, shifting identities and fuzzy boundaries. It is interesting that, although there has been much debate about such terms as 'Iban', 'Bidayuh', 'Penan', 'Punan' and so on in Sarawak, at least these terms now seem to enjoy a measure of agreement; not so the exonym 'Maloh'. It is still surrounded by dispute among the people themselves and outside observers. I attempted to address the reasons for this in two interrelated papers in which I compared the plural society of the Brunei sultanate and the small Malay states of the Upper Kapuas region in which the Maloh had participated (King 2001a, 2001b). I also argued that one could not begin to comprehend these dynamic socio-cultural systems using 'traditional modes of anthropological enquiry' (King 2001a: 113). Returning to my present

theme, I maintain that you need to take a jobbing approach, move across disciplines and borders (in this case between Sarawak and West Kalimantan), do not languish in one place, travel and try to capture variations, explore local history insofar as you can, and then look to the wider relations within which the communities under study are embedded. Above all do not assume that this or that theory will embrace all or even a major part of what you hope to understand and describe in a logical form. I have great sympathy with Martinez's view (2002: 20), in her reflections on theory in Malaysian Studies, that "… no theory is, nor can be transplanted or appropriated in its entirety… [instead] …one allows field work and research material to shape findings, instead of setting out to prove a conclusion already held".

However, in attempting to understand the socio-cultural complexities of the Upper Kapuas region we also have to find what I call 'nodal points' (another low level concept) in overarching, trans-ethnic social systems; specifically in the recorded history of Borneo these are Malay-Muslim politico-economic centres, though some were appropriated by the colonial powers and were changed in their character and significance whilst others were superseded and marginalised by European-dominated centres located elsewhere (King 2001b). To my mind there has to be a focal point which arranges modes of discourse, organisation and categorisation in mobile, fluid, interpenetrating and cyclically expanding and contracting situations. These shifting relations and ideas have to be anchored in space and time articulated by such organisational principles as rank, status, residence and ethnicity. This is where one moves beyond particular communities or ethnic groupings, placing them in a wider context, and this is where it becomes potentially fruitful to compare what might seem to be disparate cases, for example, Brunei and the Upper Kapuas. We return to border crossing, historical analysis, wider relationships, variation between local communities and low level concepts which help organise comparative cases without assuming that there is something essential and characteristic about a particular case or community. If we adopt this approach then I think we can also resolve the sometimes rather intense and personal debates on whether or not the essential nature of Iban or indeed Maloh social organisation, for example, is either egalitarian or hierarchical.

BORNEO STUDIES AND JOBBING

I have noted the particular circumstances of my own fieldwork, but I want to turn now to a brief consideration of other literature, specifically on Sarawak, though I think that we can say the same for Sabah and Kalimantan, and examine its major characteristics in relation to my preoccupations. I maintain that the emphasis of much of this work relates again to my jobbing theme. What strikes me about the roughly 60 years of post-war social science research in Sarawak is that much of it is concerned with development, change and modernisation. If I was to attempt

to identify one of the major contributions of social science research, particularly in Sarawak but also Sabah and Kalimantan (though not Brunei) then it is in this field where an impact has been made on Malaysian and more generally Southeast Asian Studies. Rather than theoretical formulation, it has been concerned, if not directly with policy, at least with many of the down-to-earth matters of socio-economic change, agricultural transformation, educational provision, rural-urban migration and planned development. This is so both for work undertaken by expatriate and local scholars. Of course I acknowledge the excellent research that has been done on oral traditions and ethno-history, ethnic identities, religions, cognatic social organisation, politics, customary law and material culture, and there have been some outstanding historical studies. Yet, the weight of the work in my view, lies elsewhere in spite of the towering presence in studies of oral history of scholars such as Benedict Sandin, and the very important research sponsored in Kuching by the Tun Jugah Foundation, the Sarawak Museum and the Majlis Adat-Istiadat.

In a survey which I undertook in the mid-1980s reviewing the relationships between anthropology and development in Sarawak it was striking just how much attention had been devoted not only to the gathering of basic ethnographic data, but also to such issues as socio-economic development and change (King 1986b). George Appell (1977: 32), writing in the late 1970s, stated, with specific reference to Sarawak that anthropological research was initiated early on 'for the purposes of learning what significance its findings might have for the formation of policy and for the future of the country'. The early studies of Derek Freeman, William Geddes, Stephen Morris and T'ien Ju-K'ang, and even the general survey by Edmund Leach, under the auspices of the Colonial Social Science Research Council, can be read in various ways: colonial knowledge, ethnographic infill, socio-economic studies, structural-functionalist analyses, or applied anthropology (and see Shamsul 2006). However, the context of the studies was the imperative of post-war development and the practical aims of government. They are still models of ethnography which continue to serve as points of reference for subsequent research, even though there have been recent criticisms drawing attention to certain colonial and other preoccupations in their work (see the evaluation of Harrisson's and Geddes's work in Zawawi 2008).

Interestingly many social scientists who followed the early colonial anthropologists made significant academic contributions to social science research in Sarawak, and were involved, at one time or another, in research on socio-economic development (Cramb & Reece 1988). Erik Jensen, for example, did his doctoral study on Iban religion, but also worked in the development field in the 1960s. Much of Peter Kedit's research has focused on issues of modernisation and development primarily among the Iban (for example, 1980), and it was probably Kedit's well known statement, as the then Government Ethnologist, in the *Sarawak Museum Journal* which set the tone of much of the subsequent research when he said specifically of anthropology that it

> … should offer more studies of a practical nature..[and also broaden]…its empirical scope to understand and analyse, and to offer 'solutions' to the socio-cultural problems and processes that are taking place among the very subjects that anthropologists seek to study… (Kedit 1975: 32).

This call to action proved to be very influential in shaping subsequent research agendas.

Through the 1970s and 1980s and into the 1990s we find numerous expatriate social scientists undertaking development-oriented and socio-economic studies (even if they had been engaged in other kinds of research as well) with their findings relating in some way to social, economic and cultural transformations and local responses to these. I shall not make detailed reference to their work (some of it is considered in King 1986b), but merely list some of those who immediately spring to mind: Robert Austin; Don Cobb, Rob Cramb, BG Grijpstra; Michael Heppell; Margit Komanyi; Christine Padoch; Jérôme Rousseau; Clifford Sather; Richard Schwenk; James Seymour; Simon Strickland; and Vinson Sutlive.

If we examine the contributions of social science research to our understanding of the transformations generated by large-scale forest clearance and the exploitation of other natural resources since the late 1970s and into the 1980s and beyond then the amount of data accumulated is truly substantial. This is in addition to a continuing interest in rural change and the effects of the incorporation or resettlement of small farmers into large-scale plantation agriculture. A considerable amount of work has been done on Sarawak and Sabah in this field, but, in my view, some of the most interesting studies and wide-ranging multidisciplinary work have been undertaken in Kalimantan by, among others, Lucia Cargill, Carol Pierce Colfer, Simon Devung, Michael Dove, Cristina Eghenter, Mary Beth Fulcher, Timothy Jessup, Danna Leamann, Nancy Peluso, Bernard Sellato and Reed Wadley (see for example, Eghenter, Sellato & Devung 2003).

This emphasis continues. If we examine the work of most of the local scholars who have undertaken social science research in Sarawak during the last twenty years, the focus on socio-economic change and development issues is overwhelming, even if, like some of the expatriate researchers, their initial research was not specifically development-oriented: Madeline Berma, Henry Chan, Wilson Dandot, Spencer Empading, Hew Cheng Sim, Evelyne Hong, Jayum Jawan, Jayl Langub, Francis Jana Lian, James Masing, Dimbab Ngidang, Jegak Uli, Abdul Rashid Abdullah, Peter Songan, Shanthi Thambiah, Hatta Solhee, Abdul Majid Mat Salleh, Mohd Yusof Kasim and many more. By and large this research has been primarily and soundly ethnographic, using low level concepts where necessary and focusing to a greater or lesser extent on practical issues. Whether or not specific pieces of research have made a difference to government policies, programmes and projects is often difficult to establish. In some cases clearly they have, but it would take detailed interrogation to determine the precise lines of influence and the main contours of debate (see, for example, Abdul Majid Mat

Salleh et al 1988; Songan 1992; Dandot 1987, 1991). My view is that much of this research has demonstrated the crucial need to address the human dimensions of development, the complexity of development interventions and the need to listen to the voices of ordinary people who are the targets of centrally planned policies. It is something which Zawawi Ibrahim, among others, has been championing in Malaysia (Zawawi Ibrahim 1998, 2001).

UNIVERSALISMS AND JOBBING

You now know where I stand on the importance of detailed ethnographic work and on relating concepts to policy and practice so you will not be surprised at what I am going to say about globalisation theory. Despite an undoubted increase in interest in the processes and consequences of globalisation in Southeast Asia I wonder whether we shall discover an abundance of hidden treasures in Sarawak and elsewhere in Borneo by using globalisation analyses, although I am happy to be convinced that we might. What seems to have happened is that the term has increasingly cropped up in social science discourse on Borneo, but, in most cases, it has either not added anything significantly new to the analysis, or analyses have been conducted quite satisfactorily using familiar, often low level concepts within local and national contexts. I am prepared to accept that in certain cases a carefully framed concept of globalisation which deconstructs both the 'global' and the 'local' can be useful, but we need to be much more specific about what we mean and what we do (see Khondker 1994). I have long held serious doubts about the utility of globalisation analysis when applied to specific locales. Following Clive Kessler's observations (2000, 2003), I concur that we seem to have been involved in a rather time-consuming 'new-fangled discourse' which obfuscates rather than clarifies. In this connection Kessler (2000: 931) asks the very pertinent question whether or not globalisation … "represents just another – and merely the most recent – of the false or compromised universalisms which have emerged within human history"… (also see Emmerson 2004: 24).

A brief pause to consider what we mean by the term is necessary. Evers (2006: 5). has indicated that globalisation comprises … "a particular way of constructing reality"… In a world in which 'all aspects of life, social organisation, economic activities, spatial arrangements, etc.' are increasingly interconnected he argues for 'the necessity' of viewing and understanding these aspects … "from a worldwide perspective"… (ibid), though I would tend to qualify the proposal that it is necessary in all such cases to adopt a globalised perspective. Global political economy, technological innovation, especially in the arena of communications, and identities, lifestyles, and consumerism are the major areas of interest, as is 'knowledge and the power of knowledge' (Zainal Kling 1999: 4; Evers 2003). In my view an appropriate way in which this increasing

multidimensional interconnectedness can be captured is by continuing to use Giddens's concept of time-space compression (1990, 1991, 2002; Hutton & Giddens, 2000) in which "… events in one place directly and immediately affect those in another" (Mittelman 2001: 213).

It has also been argued that globalisation is a differentiated and differentiating process which moves unevenly and irregularly (Mittelman 2000: 923). This differentiation operates in hierarchical mode in that some people are rendered less able to control events and processes than others and this in turn may lead to various forms of resistance (Parnwell & Rigg 2001: 205-211). However, we should not forget there are those, and there may be considerable numbers of them, who remain relatively untouched or disconnected from the forces of globalisation or at least they feel themselves to be so (Mittelman 2001: 213).

We must acknowledge that globalisation is not an entirely new phenomenon. There is much going on in the world which can still be contained and understood within the paradigms of modernity. Using such familiar concepts as modernisation, dependence, underdevelopment, world systems and the international division of labour, the character and direction of global interactions have been pondered and debated for some time, especially in their economic dimensions. I tend towards Will Hutton's view, expressed strongly in his conversation with Anthony Giddens, that … "we have to sort out what is new, and what is unchanging." (Giddens & Hutton 2000: 3-4; Giddens 2002: xi-xxxiii).

Globalisation has for many (and for me) become a vague, ungraspable set of forces and processes which appears not to be connected to any individuals, groups or concrete settings, which is expressed variously and unsatisfactorily in terms of 'transnational pressures and processes', 'impulses', 'external influences', 'supranational regionalisation', 'deterritorialisation' 'an all-enveloping process of erasure', and 'westernisation' (Parnwell & Rigg 2001: 206-209). Indiscriminate use of the concept can also lead to a displacement of responsibility; we are often told that we are all subject to mysterious forces which seem to emanate spontaneously from some part of the world or another, which affect us, and over which we have little or no control. This problem is deeply unsettling for anthropologists who are used to dealing with social interactions, encounters and everyday relationships among ordinary people. What seems to have happened is that because we consider ourselves to be living in a globalised world and we constantly articulate our current condition and status in these terms the various structures and processes which we used to address in the rather more specific terms of commoditisation, bureaucratisation, the re-invention of tradition, marginalisation and centre-periphery relations are now seen as globalised ones. In my view this does not necessarily increase our level of understanding or the quality of our analyses.

Clearly one area of interest in the globalisation literature has been the exploitation of natural resources on a world-wide scale by trans-national commercial interests, hence the importance of Borneo in this debate (see, for

example, Brookfield, Potter & Byron 1995; Padoch & Peluso 1996). On the positive side it has also led some researchers interested in environmental issues to consider the island of Borneo as a unit of analysis (see, for example, Cleary & Eaton 1992; Wadley 2005: 1-21). It has long been one of my main concerns that up until recently we have not treated the island as a whole and we have paid insufficient attention to Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo as parts of wider nation-states (Avé & King 1986). Thankfully this island-wide perspective has become more popular during the past couple of decades (see, for example, Rousseau 1990; Sercombe & Sellato 2007; Bala 2002, 2007). Nevertheless even those using a Borneo-wide frame of reference in considering policy-making and the politics of resource use and environmental change do not seem to me to engage in globalisation issues to any extent other than with rather vague reference to such things as the world market in natural resources, multi-national enterprises and the expansion of commercial agriculture (see for example Cooke 1999, 2002, 2003a, 2003b, 2006).

Perhaps it is in relation to the activities of international and local NGOs and to local resistance within global frames of reference especially in the struggle over natural resources that we might expect to see more explicit attention to globalisation, though, again it is often not explicitly conceptualised within a globalisation framework (see, for example, Eccleston 1995, 1996; Eccleston & Potter 1996; Lian 1993). I maintain that much of what we refer to as globalisation in this field of interest is quite appropriately addressed in political economy analysis and the progressive integration of Borneo into world markets and all that this entails (Kaur 1995, 1998a, 1998b). It is also still being examined within a relatively straightforward development studies framework (Rigg 2008).

GLOBALISATION AND RESISTANCE OR JAMES SCOTT AGAIN?

An overriding concern in the rapidly increasing literature on globalisation is the resistance (or the several resistances) to it and the 'widespread dissatisfaction' with it on the part of 'local people' and the 'powerless' (Parnwell & Rigg 2001: 205). This concern with resistance, which is much more complex than notions of outright opposition, is bound up with the equally problematical notion of civil society. Nevertheless, if we are concerned to address local agency (local meanings, identities, knowledge, customs, practices) we must also try to specify what precisely local people are resisting and whether or not what they are resisting is best conveyed, captured and analysed in terms of globalisation,

Parnwell & Rigg (2001: 208) raise the whole issue of what precisely 'the local' comprises and whether, in the cases which interest them, local action is much 'more about development than globalisation'. In similar fashion and from the other end of the global-local spectrum Mittelman attempts (2000: 920) to humanise the global and poses the very pertinent question of who precisely

sponsors, champions, controls, governs, and manages these apparently mysterious processes. So, despite the arduous task before us, what we must do, as Mittelman proposes, is to do something other than just focus on 'big, abstract structures' (ibid: 921).

Perhaps he would not have conceptualised it in terms of a response to globalisation but James Scott (1976, 1985) and others detected some time ago the kinds of resistances in specific cases that local people might be prepared to struggle or *in extremis* die for. In much of the recent work on local agency and resistance in Sarawak against logging, dams, resettlement and large-scale agriculture I wonder if we have really moved further forward than Scott in our thinking about 'globalised' resistance (see for example, Sabihah Osman 2000)? In this endeavour it is perhaps best to start by accessing 'the voices' and 'discourses' of indigenous communities and listening to them both in a structured way (Zawawi Ibrahim 1998, 1999, 2001, 2008) and in a more informal fashion (Kua 2001). In this connection nicely grounded studies which do address the issues of indigenous voices and narratives in the encounter with the state, logging companies and foreign environmentalists are those by Tim Bending (2006) and Peter Brosius (1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2001, 2003) on the Penan. The tensions and interactions between different perceptions of the environment, and the variations and transformations in human-environment relationships have been persistent themes in the study of environmental issues and processes in Borneo (see Eghenter et al. 2003). However, I must emphasise that they are especially well conceptualised in the field not of globalisation, but of what is usually referred to as 'political ecology' or 'resource politics' (see, for example, Bryant 1998; Parnwell & Bryant 1996).

WHAT IS LEFT FOR GLOBALISATION?

It appears that it is in the cultural realm, in the construction and contestation of identities (Appadurai 1996), and in the discourses which are generated in the interfaces between people and the state that the concept of globalisation can make a more substantial contribution to the study of Sarawak and Borneo more widely, though again in my view it has not had a great deal of impact up until now (but see Winzeler 1997a, 1997b; Tsing Lowenhaupt 1993; Zawawi Ibrahim 2008).

One might also expect that concerns about globalisation would surface most directly in studies of urbanisation in Sarawak where local people experience some of the most immediate effects of late modernity, through encounters with the state and bureaucracy, nation-building, the media, technology, international tourists, and representatives of other ethnic groups. However, attention to the urban context of globalisation in Sarawak has not been substantial, and even less so in other parts of Borneo (Hew 2003, 2007a, 2007b; Lockard, 1987; Sutlive, 1972, 1977). One researcher whose work does touch on these issues is Boulanger

(1999, 2000, 2008) with her interest in changing Dayak urban identities and the implications of modernity and 'being modern' for the identification with and conceptualisation of Dayak traditions and religion, and distinctions between the present (the future) and the past, and the urban and rural .

Another site to investigate globalisation is in the encounter with the modern media. Anderson's (1991) excursion into the mechanisms of nation-creation in the period of early modernity has to be augmented by attention to the effects of diverse forms of electronic and print media in the era of late modernity. One of the few researchers to address this subject in a Sarawak context is John Postill. In his work on the relationships between the media and nation-building in Malaysia, he examines the ways in which the Iban have responded to and been affected by state-led and media-directed Malaysianisation processes and global flows of information and knowledge in the arena of cultural politics and identity formation (John Postill 1998, 2001, 2002, 2006; see Gunn on Brunei, 1993, 1997).

Another recent and welcome addition to the literature on global communications in Sarawak is the doctoral research of Poline Bala (2007) on the Kelabit which develops her interests in identities, boundaries and change Poline Bala (2002). Her thesis examines the processes and consequences of the introduction of Information Communication Technologies (ICTs) in the context of the e-Bario development programme in the Kelabit Highlands (see Shamsul et al. 2004) and she explores a range of issues to do with local responses to state-generated development. ICTs and the recently constructed 'telecenter' have been mediated, used creatively and reconfigured, providing a focus and vehicle for social mobilisation and the formation of social groupings and factions. However, much of Bala's and indeed Postill's analyses can still be phrased in terms of centre-periphery relations and dependence even though the focus is on electronic media and wider systems of information exchange.

CONCLUSION: EMBRACING JOBBING

Therefore, in conclusion my plea is to embrace and rejoice in jobbing. I think there are advantages in explicitly recognising this as a perspective and approach. Given that the world of development and modernisation is here to stay then jobbing becomes an increasingly significant mode of approach and perspective. The informed social scientist who relates low level concepts to primary research, policy and practice should be allowed to flourish, and I hope, have a significant role to play in this rapidly changing and modernising world. On the other hand, I am still sceptical about the utility of higher level theoretical propositions such as globalisation theory. In reflecting on some recent research on Sarawak and more widely in Borneo I am forced to conclude that much of this literature has not yet addressed the issues and processes of globalisation directly, and perhaps, in many cases, there is no need to. What we seem to have done is contemplate

very general issues in globalisation without relating them firmly to on-the-ground situations. In other words the kinds of considerations to which commentators like Giddens (2002) Giddens & Hutton (2000) and Baumann (1998) draw our attention have not been brought into relationship with empirical material at the local level other than in a very general and speculative way (Shamsul Amri Baharuddin 1999; Zainal Kling 1999; Zawawi Ibrahim 1999). However, I do accept that some of the work on media, communications, identities and international discourses on the environment and indigenous communities might feed into globalisation debates, though even here I suspect that we already have very serviceable concepts to address these issues. In this context I also acknowledge that there has been an increasing and welcome interest in Borneo scholarship in flows, contacts and encounters across borders and boundaries (see, for example, Amster and Lindquist 2005; Bala 2002, 2007; Eilenberg 2005). But what matters more than anything else is that we continue to undertake detailed, sensitive, informed ethnographic research and bring to a wider audience, including various user communities, the diversity, complexity, adaptability and movement which characterises the societies and cultures of Borneo, characteristics which first attracted me to this great island in my early academic career and which continue to fascinate and preoccupy me today.

NOTE

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