

Chapter 2

Some Preliminary Thoughts on Early Anthropology in Borneo

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Abstract The chapter argues that the early post-war study of Borneo, primarily undertaken by anthropologists, and predominantly in what was then the British Crown Colony of Sarawak should not be viewed in narrow, parochial terms. Unfortunately, apart from Sarawak, there was little that was done in modern social science during the first two decades of the post-war era in other parts of Borneo. What was accomplished with regard to the understanding of local social organisation and economies in Sarawak established an agenda for the next generation of researchers. These studies gave Borneo an academic legacy, a profile beyond the island; some publications, findings and the research training of postgraduate students were clearly more significant than others, and this chapter traces that variegated legacy. But importantly those early social scientists then moved on to expand their empirical and theoretical field of vision and link Borneo with major issues which were being debated outside Borneo Studies. Indeed, most of them had already undertaken research and training in other parts of the world prior to their research in Borneo. In that sense this formative research on Borneo was something of a staging post for the further development of our thinking about social and economic transformation in a rapidly changing world. The studies of Edmund Leach, Derek Freeman, William Geddes, Stephen Morris, T'ien Ju-K'ang, Rodney Needham, Tom Harrisson and George Appell, among others, are considered in a preliminary way to set the scene for some of the later chapters.

Keywords Anthropology • Borneo studies • Research methodology

2.1 An Early Encounter with the Anthropology of Borneo

In contextualising the objectives which provided the organisational framework for the workshop on Borneo Studies at Universiti Brunei Darussalam from which this edited book has emerged it is perhaps useful to include some personal reflections

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from someone who has been involved in research on Borneo for a considerable period of time. Some of these reflections were also presented in an introductory address at the workshop. My preliminary thoughts are devoted primarily to anthropology because this was the dominant disciplinary approach in the social sciences in those early post-war years. But I end this chapter with some consideration of more general overviews and compilations on Borneo in preparation for the subsequent contributions to this volume.

If I look back to the late 1960s and the early 1970s, when I first engaged with Borneo as a young researcher, what was the scholarly landscape like? In the course of about three years of reading around the ethnography, anthropology, history and geography of Borneo at that time, I think I managed to cover much of what had been published. If we compare what was available then to what we have now, then the development of the field of studies has been quite staggering. There are still major gaps in our knowledge, as we would expect. But for a newcomer to the field there is now a truly substantial and wide-ranging literature to cover.

What was it like then? There was not much that inspired me in the pre-war period. There were, of course, the ethnographic compilations of Charles Hose and William McDougall, *The pagan tribes of Borneo* (1912) and of Henry Ling Roth's *The natives of Sarawak and British North Borneo* (1896), and Owen Rutter's *The pagans of North Borneo* (1929). But for me there were two stimulating publications: Robert Hertz's *Death and the right hand* (translated by Rodney and Claudia Needham and published in 1960), which comprised two essays: the first, 'A contribution to the collective representation of death' (1907), which stimulated Peter Metcalf's admirable work on Berawan funeral rites *A Borneo journey into death: Berawan eschatology from its rituals* (1981, 1982) and with Richard Huntington, *Celebrations of death: the anthropology of mortuary ritual* (1991); and the second on 'The pre-eminence of the right hand: a study in religious polarity' (1909), which gave rise to a body of work in the late 1970s and 1980s on symbolism and structural analysis in Borneo, in which I was involved, especially in an exchange with Peter Metcalf and his 'Birds and deities in Borneo' (1976) (King 1977, 1980 and see King 1985). It had also influenced Erik Jensen in the 1970s, which was hardly surprising given that his supervisor was Rodney Needham, and Needham had then edited *Right and left: essays on dual symbolic classification*, celebrating the work of Robert Hertz and the *Année sociologique* (1973). These exercises brought the anthropology of Borneo into a loose alliance with structural anthropology, the study of symbolism and the influential school of French anthropology which had been founded by Émile Durkheim. The other important work, for me at least, was Hans Schärer's *Ngaju religion: the conception of God among a south Borneo people* (1963), again translated by Rodney Needham from Schärer's 1946 publication *Die Gottesidee der Ngadju Dajak in Süd-Borneo* (1946, Brill). This connected Borneo anthropology to the important stream of work that emerged from Leiden structuralism and the studies of Indonesian cultures undertaken by J.P.B. de Josselin de Jong, W.H. Rassers and their students.

When I entered this field of studies I was faced with the overwhelming importance of studies of Sarawak and the internationally recognised status of the Sarawak Museum because and in spite of Tom Harrisson. I say in spite of because of the

tensions and conflicts between Harrisson and various of the overseas visiting anthropologists (including Edmund Leach, Derek Freeman and Rodney Needham; and see Heimann 1998; Sheppard 1977; Winzeler 2008; and obituaries of Harrisson by, among others, Sandin 1976; McCredie 1976; O'Connor 1976). The museum was founded in 1888 and the *Sarawak Museum Journal* first printed in 1911. Second, there were the major anthropological studies sponsored by the Colonial Social Science Research Council (CSSRC) in Sarawak in the late 1940s and early 1950s.

These pioneer developments gave Sarawak a considerable advantage over other parts of Borneo in the formulation, organisation, coordination and execution of research. Borneo Studies in the 1950s, 1960s and even into the 1970s was Sarawak-focused and -dominated. Harrisson had left Sarawak by the mid-1960s, and spent time supporting the development of the Brunei Museum along with its first director, Pg Dato Paduka Hj Sharifuddin, and contributing to the work and research of the Sabah Museum (McCredie 1976; Harrisson and Harrisson 1971). When I arrived in Kuching for the first time in 1972 Benedict Sandin was the curator and government ethnologist in the Sarawak Museum as the protégé and successor of Harrisson, and, among other activities, Stephen Morris, Clifford Sather and Hatta Solhee were working from the museum and were engaged in the Miri-Bintulu regional planning study; Michael Heppell, a student of Derek Freeman, had also arrived to do research on the Ulu Ai Iban (1975). The museum was the magnet which brought researchers together. Peter Eaton also appeared in order to undertake his doctoral research on education and school-leavers (1974). Carol Rubenstein was based in the museum involved in her oral literature project (1973), and Stephanie Morgan had returned from field research in West Kalimantan.

There had not been a great deal of research undertaken in the 1950s. Borneo Studies was dominated by the work that had emerged from Edmund Leach's report on Sarawak on behalf of the CSSRC (1948, 1950, and see 1954). Leach had been commissioned by the CSSRC to undertake social science surveys of Sarawak and North Borneo (see also Tambiah 1998). This gave rise to the studies of Freeman (1916–2001), William Robert (Bill) Geddes (1916–1989), Harold Stephen Morris (1913–1993) and T'ien Ju-K'ang (1916–) presided over by Raymond Firth (1901–2002), as the then secretary of the Council. Nevertheless, Leach (1910–1989) provided an important structure and reference point for a considerable amount of field research which was undertaken in those early post-war years and through to the 1950s (Strickland 1989). Subsequently, Stephen Morris provided an informal, insightful and amusing insider's view of the CSSRC-sponsored socio-economic studies which were undertaken by what local administrators referred to as the 'socio-comics' (1977).

2.2 The Commonwealth Connection

Interestingly, the New Zealand connection was dominant in these early CSSRC studies. (Freeman was a New Zealander, with an Australian father and a New Zealand mother; and though born in England and spending his childhood in

Rhodesia, Morris's mother was also a New Zealander; Geddes and Firth also hailed from New Zealand.) Although Leach briefly visited North Borneo in November 1947 for one week and produced a report, the momentum achieved in Sarawak was not replicated in North Borneo other than the study undertaken by Monica Glyn-Jones of the Penampang Dusun and the report which she produced in 1953. Given the brevity of his stay, his *Report on a visit to Kemabong, Labuan and Interior Residency, British North Borneo, 1–8th November, 1947* (1947) could never have matched his *Report on the possibilities of a social economic survey of Sarawak* (1948) published as *Social science research in Sarawak* (1950).

In North Borneo there was no obvious research institution to promote field studies, and, though its roots go back some way, a museum was not formally established there until 1965, when it was housed modestly in a shophouse in Gaya Street. In Kalimantan the situation was yet again altogether different; the turmoil occasioned by the Indonesian revolution and the continuing economic and political instability under Sukarno in the late 1950s and 1960s never provided the environment within which sustained social science research could be undertaken or scholarly institutions established and developed. The Indonesians were valiantly attempting to build an educational infrastructure in a situation of economic decline and the Dutch had long departed.

Finally, it was not until the late 1960s when research began to be encouraged by the Brunei government in the remaining British dependency in northern Borneo, still under British protection. The Brunei Museum was established in 1965 and it is then that we witness the first stirrings of anthropological-sociological research there. We should note here the important pioneering role that museums, especially in the northern Borneo territories, played in the promotion of advanced research, but their position in this regard has increasingly been marginalised since the 1980s with the establishment of universities and their importance in funding, organising and sponsoring field research in the social sciences. Nevertheless, there are fields within which museums continue to play an important role, particularly in archaeological and biological research, and in such obvious fields as material culture and local technologies.

For me the highlights of the 1950s and the early 1960s were undoubtedly Freeman's publications on Iban agriculture and social organisation (1955a, b), and specifically on the concept of the kindred with special reference to his Iban ethnography, and on the Iban domestic family (*bilek* family) and its developmental cycle. At that time the Sarawak Museum, through Tom Harrisson and his staff, was increasingly involved in archaeological excavations at the Niah Caves and Santubong, and aside from that Harrisson published his rather idiosyncratic *World within: a Borneo story* on the upland Kelabit (1959) and was undertaking research on the Malays of southwest Sarawak as well as keeping up a prodigious published output in his own *Sarawak Museum Journal* and other regional journals (1970). Rodney Needham was also pursuing his research on the Penan of Sarawak in 1951–52 (1953) and publishing papers on them in the 1950s and early 1960s, though neither Harrisson nor Needham were part of these earlier specially commissioned CSSRC studies. (Leach had indicated in his report that these other groups were

worthy of study and Harrison did receive funding support from the CSSRC for his study of the coastal Malays.)

However, it is worth noting that, although he had never worked in Borneo, a scholar who influenced and directed work in the former British territories was Raymond Firth. He held court at the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) from 1944 to 1968 as the professorial successor to Bronislaw Malinowski, and during a formative period in British social anthropology. In my view, Firth was not only a central figure in sponsoring and supervising work on Borneo but also a vital figure in developing a programme of anthropological research on the wider Southeast Asia [following his own field research on Malay fishermen undertaken in the late 1930s (1946), and his wife Rosemary's research on Malay domestic affairs (1943)].

We have to keep in mind that most of the British-based anthropological work on Southeast Asia, and specifically on Borneo, in the first decade after 1945 was undertaken through or had a connection with Firth at the LSE, and his close associates, Maurice Freedman and Edmund Leach (before Leach went to Cambridge); the major exception was Rodney Needham at Oxford (see Leach 1984). And Freeman, though he wrote his doctoral thesis at Cambridge under the supervision of Meyer Fortes, had been trained at the LSE prior to leaving for Sarawak; even Fortes, who spent most of his senior career at Cambridge from 1950 and between 1946 and 1950 at Oxford, had been a research student at the LSE in the 1930s, had studied there under Charles Gabriel Seligman, and had trained with Malinowski and Firth (see Abrahams 1983; Herskovits 1941; Murdock 1943, 1960a, b; Macdonald 2002; and see Kuper 1996).

More recently in the postmodern, post-colonial, post-orientalist environment within which there has been an important re-evaluation of the work of early anthropology, the conduct of research in such places as Sarawak, the issues which were given importance (and those questions which were ignored or given little attention), the images of 'native' populations which were constructed and the ways in which research findings were interpreted have come under increasing scrutiny and criticism. Pamela Lindell's critique of Geddes's Bidayuh research (2008) and Robert Winzeler's examination of Tom Harrison's contribution to Borneo ethnology, ethnography and archaeology, and his relationships with visiting anthropologists (2008), are cases in point (and see Zawawi, Chap. 3).

2.3 Social Structure, Kinship and Descent

The period of the 1950s and 1960s, when E.E. Evans-Pritchard, Meyer Fortes, Raymond Firth and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown dominated British anthropology, was characterised by an increasingly sharp division between British social structural and American cultural anthropology (and see King and Wilder 2006). Freeman's work on the Iban demonstrated the unmistakable influence of the British preoccupation with social structure and the functions which social groups performed (and within

that kinship and marriage and the mechanisms and processes which provided social order and continuity), which was also reflected in Freeman's dialogue with British descent theorists who had worked primarily in Africa.

When I entered Borneo Studies in the early 1970s, one of the major preoccupations was kinship, descent and marriage as central elements within the study of social structure (and within that studies of the domestic family or household, or small family, the kindred, ambilineal, bilateral or cognatic descent, the structure of the longhouse or village, affinal relations, residential arrangements before and after marriage, and relationship terminologies).

Although Borneo societies were not constituted on the basis of unilineal descent groups, Freeman and others analysed the properties of kindreds and ego-focused kinship networks which functioned in some respects like clans and lineages in that they had the capacity to mobilise, organise and coordinate large numbers of people (1961). Even among the Bidayuh, Geddes managed to uncover the elements of 'community' which gave coherence and order beyond the household or small family (1954); and Morris examined and presented the main principles of local grouping, kinship, residence and descent and hereditary rank which served to organise and lend coherence and order to the coastal Melanau (see King 1978a, 1978b: 1–36; Morris 1953, 1978; and see Appell 1976a).

Subsequently, George Appell was to reveal in detail some of the inadequacies of Radcliffe-Brownian social structuralism, the failure to address indigenous concepts, the slow adaptation of the concept of the 'jural' which is at base founded on indigenous concepts, and the reasons why this approach fails to provide us with the analytical tools to understand and elucidate the forms and processes of cognatic societies like those in Borneo (see, for example, Appell 1973, 1988; also see 1969; and see the discussion of Appell's work below).

2.4 Anthropology in and out of Borneo

What was striking for me about this early post-war period was that the anthropologists who carried out research in Borneo overall did not continue to be pre-occupied with it as a site of fieldwork, nor had some of them commenced their early research career there. Probably this circumstance in part reflects the comparative perspectives of anthropology and the desire and need to draw out similarities and differences across cultures and communities. What this early period of research also demonstrates is that the four anthropologists sponsored by the CSSRC, though they met from time to time, did not work together as a team; they produced their monographs without much reference to their counterparts. Interestingly, the only significant collaborative project that I have come across is that between Freeman and Geddes, but it was directed to research on Oceania and not to Borneo (Freeman and Geddes 1959). It is also clear from Monica Freeman's diaries that relations between the researchers, and particularly between Freeman and Morris and Freeman and Geddes, were not close and collegial (Appell-Warren 2009).

These early researchers were first and foremost anthropologists and not regional specialists. T'ien produced his *The Chinese of Sarawak: a study of social structure* (1953; and see T'ien and Ward 1956), but he then carved out a career for himself in mainland China working and publishing on Chinese culture, society, history, and social and cultural change, primarily as professor of history and head of sociology at Fudan University in Shanghai (see, for example, 1986, 1993, 1997). Moreover, his PhD thesis, which was submitted in London before his departure for Sarawak, was on mainland Southeast Asia: 'Religious cults and social structure of the Shan states of the Yunnan-Burma frontier' (1948; and see 1986).

Geddes too had received his PhD in London in 1948, in his case on 'An analysis of cultural change in Fiji'. After his Land Dayak study he went on to become heavily involved in research and the application and administration of research based in the Tribal Research Centre in Chiang Mai in the hills of northern Thailand from 1959 through to the early 1960s, subsequently producing his volume *Migrants of the mountains: the cultural ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand* (1976). During this period of his research he also published on peasant life in communist China, based on a visit to China in the mid-1950s (1963). His inaugural lecture at the University of Sydney in 1959 also demonstrates his increasing distance from his research in Sarawak, though his interest in Land Dayak religion (1957) must have informed some of his thinking on the anthropology of religion (1959).

Like T'ien, Geddes never really built up a programme of studies in Borneo anthropology. In comparative terms Geddes and T'ien published very little from their Sarawak research other than the reports commissioned by the CSSRC. Geddes produced his report on the Land Dayaks in 1954 and, aside from a few papers, also wrote what most interested readers will remember him for, *Nine Dayak nights* (1957) and the way in which he entered Land Dayak culture through the story of a folk hero, Kichapi, told by a village shaman over the course of nine nights of festivities. His ethnographic films, too, have made an impact: two on the Hmong (Miao) of northern Thailand (*The opium people* and *Miao year*) and three on the Land Dayaks, *The Land Dayaks of Borneo*, *The soul of the rice* and *Brides of the gods*, which he made following his return to Sarawak and the village of Mentu Tapuh (Appell 2002). Overall Lindell was particularly critical of Geddes's failure to address in any sustained way various processes of social change, particularly in relation to conversion to Christianity, and the absence in Geddes's monograph of the interpretation of 'community' and social organisation in the context of social and cultural transformations (2008: 50–54; and see Golson 1989, 2007).

Morris is an interesting case in this respect too. He studied forestry at Edinburgh University in the early 1930s and then took up a career in law. It was not until 1945–47 that he moved into anthropology and studied for the postgraduate diploma in social anthropology at the LSE, which then took him to Sarawak. After writing his Melanau report which subsequently appeared in 1953, he spent three years in Kampala and undertook a study of the East African Indians. It was this subject and not the Melanau which was to preoccupy him for the next 20 years. He was 40 years of age before being awarded his PhD, not on the Melanau but on

'Immigrant Indian communities in East Africa' submitted to the University of London in 1963. His book on *The Indians of Uganda* appeared in 1968, and at this time he became interested in the concept of the plural society (1967a). In the late 1950s and into the 1960s he was publishing on East African Indians, though he continued a sporadic engagement with the Melanau (see, for example, 1967b, 1980, 1981) and unlike Geddes, Freeman and T'ien he was then to return to Sarawak on a fairly regular basis and ultimately to produce two important locally published monographs on the Melanau (see Clayre 1993).

In any event, Stephen Morris's monograph *The Oya Melanau* was published with the Sarawak branch of the Malaysian Historical Society in 1991, two years before his death. Another of his legacies was the work which he encouraged on the Melanau language by Iain F.C.S. Clayre and Beatrice Clayre. Iain Clayre received his PhD on the Melanau language in 1972, at Morris's old university, Edinburgh (and see Beatrice Clayre 1997; Chou 1999). And it was the close relationship which Stephen Morris forged with Beatrice Clayre that enabled her to see to press Morris's posthumously published *The Oya Melanau: traditional ritual and belief with a catalogue of Belum carvings* (1997, *Sarawak Museum Journal*, 52 [73]).

The most prolific researcher during this formative period of research on Borneo, however, was undoubtedly Derek Freeman. He too had undertaken research outside Borneo prior to his Iban studies. He had been a language teacher in Samoa in 1940–43, and he wrote a postgraduate thesis in anthropology on Samoan social structure which was presented to the University of London in 1948; this was around about the same time that Freeman, along with Geddes, Morris and T'ien were undertaking their postgraduate training under Firth at the LSE. From 1949 through to the early 1960s Freeman was engaged primarily with his Iban materials, but then for the next three decades he returned to his Samoan research and became engaged in a sustained critical analysis of Margaret Mead's work on adolescence and social organisation in Samoa.

Freeman completed his doctoral thesis at Cambridge under Meyer Fortes in 1953, 'Family and kin among the Iban of Sarawak'. His classic reports on Iban shifting cultivation and social organisation were published in 1955 (1955a, b), and then a series of papers on Iban social organisation from 1957 until 1961, including his chapters on the developmental cycle of the Iban *bilek* family (1957) and his general chapter on Iban kinship and marriage (1960) which culminated in his superb Curl Essay Prize paper 'On the concept of the kindred' (1961).

2.5 Derek Freeman's Legacy and Wider Debates

One of the major legacies from this period was left by Freeman (see Appell and Madan 1988a, b). He revisited Borneo in March 1961 where he was said to have suffered a nervous breakdown as a consequence of the acrimonious and intense rivalry and argument with Tom Harrisson arising specifically from Harrisson's alleged mistreatment of Freeman's research student Brian de Martinoir (who at that

time was undertaking a study of the Kajang in the Belaga area). Freeman became convinced that Harrison was psychopathic and suffering from extreme paranoia. It is said, and Freeman also confirmed this, that the whole experience was part of his personal and academic transformation ('a cognitive abreaction', something akin to a religious conversion) and it marked his change of perspective in anthropology from a British-influenced social structuralism to an approach which was directed to discovering the universal psychological and biological foundations of human behaviour. He embraced an 'interactionist' anthropological or sociobiological model drawing on neuroscience, evolutionary psychology, psychoanalysis and a range of studies of the brain's functions. Perhaps to mark this redirection and rebirth he changed his publication name from J.D. Freeman to Derek Freeman (this is something John Barnes remarks upon in his autobiography *Humping my drum*, 2008; and see Appell and Madan 1988b; Caton 2005, 2006; Fox 2002; Hempenstall 2012; Heppell 2002; Tuzin 2002).

I remember when I had written a critical piece on Freeman's work on the kindred in the 1970s, drawing on the doctoral research of John E. Smart (1971), Freeman said that he would respond to this, and sent me a detailed questionnaire relevant to the issues which I had raised (King 1976; and see Appell 1976d). But to my knowledge he never drafted a rejoinder. Instead he sent me theoretical papers on sociobiology which argued strongly for a radically different approach to anthropology (1966, 1973). He informed me in a letter that he had moved on from concerns with kinship and social organisation, and was no longer so much engaged in his Iban material.

From the late 1960s Freeman became intensely preoccupied with Margaret Mead's work on Samoa and how his new interests and approach to anthropology could decisively demonstrate the fallacy of Mead's approach which focused on the role of culture in the explanation of adolescence, and sexual and other behaviour. He returned to field research in Samoa in 1966–67 and in 1983 his *Margaret Mead and Samoa: the making and unmaking of an anthropological myth* appeared to enormous controversy, particularly in the American anthropological establishment (and see Freeman 1996). Freeman later also published *The fateful hoaxing of Margaret Mead* (1999), again to much controversy, in which he argued that Mead's ethnographic and conceptual errors in her study of Samoan culture were due to her having been 'hoaxed' by two of her female Samoan informants.

The shift to concerns with sociobiology and evolutionary psychology can also be illustrated, I think, in Robert J. Barrett's later penetrating work on Iban psychology and culture (for his publications and data see Chur-Hansen 2008; Chur-Hansen and Appell 2012; and see Barrett and Lucas 1993). Yet the Freeman–Mead controversy rumbles on after Freeman's death with the more recent questioning of Freeman's 'trashing' of Mead and his argument that she had been the victim of a 'hoax' (see, for example, Shankman 2009, 2013).

There were two subsequent and important scholarly interventions, among others, in which Freeman did return to things Bornean. First, his engagement with Rodney Needham's paper 'Blood, thunder and mockery of animals' (1964), which Freeman addressed in his subsequent paper 'Thunder, blood and the nicknaming of God's creatures' (1968). This latter paper gives expression to Freeman's conversion to

biological anthropology, while Needham tended to keep to his particular tradition of Anglo-French-Dutch structuralism and his interests in social organisation [an important and influential comparative and structuralist paper which emerged from Needham's Penan work was 'Age, category and descent' (1966)]. Nevertheless, both Needham and Freeman were moving towards explanations of symbolism and cultural behaviour and interpretation based on the assumption of the unity of humankind.

Needham continued to pursue the fundamental and universal principles of logic which structured 'collective representations' and he embraced the notion that certain symbols like fire and stone were 'archetypal' or 'natural' symbols; while Freeman had moved further down the road of psychoanalytical explanation, the importance of the unconscious processes of the mind and the principle that we share a universal biological heritage and character. His commitment to explanations in psychological and biological terms and to the complex interrelationships between culture and nature can also be seen in other publications on the Iban (see, for example, his analysis in 'shaman and incubus' 1967; and his interpretation of 'severed heads that germinate', 1979).

Second, there was the rather acrimonious criticism of Jérôme Rousseau's paper on 'Iban inequality' (1980); Freeman's *Some reflections on the nature of Iban society* (1981) addressed Rousseau's argument in robust terms. Contrary to the position taken by Freeman and others that the Iban are 'egalitarian' and their society and culture characterised by a high degree of individualism, Rousseau proposed instead that the Iban possess an 'unequal social structure', though Rousseau recognised that they also hold to an 'egalitarian ideology' (1980: 61). Freeman, in his response, reaffirmed his earlier pronouncements on Iban equality, democracy, individualism and autonomy, but the interrelationships between equality and hierarchy are much more complex than we have hitherto allowed.

Therefore, following a flurry of publications on the Iban, and with the occasional return to his Iban field materials after the mid-1960s, Freeman then moved into other theoretical and ethnographic fields. He usually only revisited Borneo when he wanted to demonstrate the importance of an interactionist paradigm in relation to the interpretation or reinterpretation of the Iban ethnography, and to engage with other anthropologists who had restimulated his interest or had challenged some of his fundamental understandings of Iban society and culture.

But what the early anthropology of Borneo served to do, connected as it was to the wider world of anthropology through the work of Freeman and Needham in particular, and to some extent Leach, was to situate Borneo Studies within wider debates in anthropology. This is most obvious in Freeman's arguments against what he viewed as the flawed position of 'cultural determinism' within anthropology and what he saw as its misguided and radical separation of culture from nature. Moreover, and with reference to Needham's contribution to Borneo Studies and the wider field of anthropology we should note that Needham had read Claude Lévi-Strauss's *Les structures élémentaires de la parenté* (1949), and much else in French sociology, and was very well acquainted with Dutch or more particularly Leiden structuralism before he embarked on his fieldwork among the Penan.

Perhaps this structuralist perspective compromised, if this is the right word, his desire to pursue and develop his study of Penan social organisation. After Sarawak, Needham then went on to undertake research in Mamboru, Sumba, eastern Indonesia (where he was confronted with the kinds of kinships and marriage systems that he was then to spend a large part of his career analysing). And beyond that he undertook a wide range of total structural analyses (embracing both symbolic and social structures) in mainland and island Southeast Asia, as well as supervising a large number of research students who worked mainly in Indonesia and Malaysia and within the Needham-generated, Oxford-based structuralist tradition (see Forth 2010).

It is intriguing and instructive with regard to the social organisation of nomadic peoples that Needham, though he published much in article form on the Penan, never completed a monograph on them after submitting his DPhil thesis in Oxford on 'The social organisation of the Penan: a Southeast Asia people' (1953). When I asked him, in our correspondence about Borneo anthropology, how we, as anthropologists, might understand the Penan in organisational terms, he responded that we should present them ethnographically 'in terms of a range of cultural particulars'. As Endicott has indicated, and as I discerned in my meetings with Needham, he was rather dissatisfied with his Penan materials (though he had a large amount of data) in providing him with the tools to construct a coherent and ordered social and cultural account, or, perhaps to put it another way, Penan social organisation did not lend itself to the kinds of structural analyses to which he committed much of his professional life; infuriatingly, for him they lacked social structure (Endicott 2007: 16–17). And in describing his doctoral thesis he indicated that it was 'purely descriptive ethnography', apart from the last chapter which compared the Penan with other hunting-gathering groups (Sather 2007). I was privileged when he showed me extracts of his handwritten manuscript on the Penan on which he was working in the 1980s during one of my visits to All Souls College; he was intending it to be the monograph which he had never managed to commit to publication. Unfortunately it is now lost to us.

Within the space of 10 years from his Penan doctoral thesis Needham had published his masterpiece of structural analysis of alliance systems in his *Structure and sentiment: a test case in social anthropology* (1962), essentially a sustained criticism of and the presentation of a radically different perspective from the work of George C. Homans and David M. Schneider in their *Marriage, authority and final causes* (1955). This was a statement of the fundamental differences between Anglo-French-Dutch structuralism and American cultural anthropology (and see Endicott 2007).

This connection to wider debates in the work of Freeman and Needham did not really happen to any extent through the work of Geddes, Morris and T'ien. They moved into other fields but this did not seem, in my view at least, to provide major contributions to anthropological theory. It did, however, present us with some important and substantial ethnographical material. Nor did they provide a training ground for research students in Borneo Studies; they invariably supervised students who were pursuing research in other parts of the world. This also applies to Needham and Leach. In the case of Needham, he supervised an astonishing range of

doctoral work on Southeast Asia, though very little on Borneo, perhaps because, in part, the structural project in anthropology was not realisable in cognatic societies. Erik Jensen was an exception in that he provided one of the first major studies of aspects of Iban religion (1974; and see *Iban belief and behaviour: a study of the Sarawak Iban, their religion and padi cult*, 1968), though Freeman was to have a number of criticisms of it (1975: 275–88).

Leach also supervised a considerable number of research students, though again under Leach's supervision only Jérôme Rousseau undertook field research in Borneo (1974), and Leach had adopted an important advisory and mentoring role in Derek Freeman's work. It is worth noting here that Rousseau was another anthropologist who moved beyond Borneo from his Cambridge thesis 'The social organisation of the Baluy Kayan' (1974) to undertake more general theoretical work in the area of social inequality and stratification (for example, *Rethinking social evolution: the perspective from middle range societies* [2006, and also 2001]). Apart from his major monograph on *Kayan religion* (1998) Rousseau's most significant contribution to the understanding of Borneo societies and their interrelationships (in a wide-ranging perspective on identity) must be *Central Borneo: ethnic identity and social life in a stratified society* (1990). This major excursion into the study of identity was prefigured in his important 1975 paper when he explored, among other things, the 'folk' classification of the Kayan in identifying and naming their neighbours (1975).

However, in making an assessment of this early period in Bornean anthropology, it was Freeman above all who left a very substantial legacy. A landmark event to my mind was the publication in the LSE Monographs series in 1970 of *Report on the Iban*. Prior to this, Freeman's *Iban agriculture* (1955a) and his *Report on the Iban of Sarawak* (1955b) had been out of print for some time and difficult to obtain. He had also had a hand in supervising George Appell's thesis on the Rungus Dusun, 'The nature of social groupings among the Rungus Dusun of Sabah, Malaysia' (1965) (which for me serves as a hallmark of the kind of work that was being done in Borneo in the 1950s, 1960s and into the 1970s). Appell undertook field research on British North Borneo/Sabah as a research scholar at the Australian National University from 1959 until 1964. He received his PhD in 1966. Freeman was his supervisor but then, according to Appell, Freeman moved away from the kind of anthropology that Appell was doing (which was much more in the British tradition focusing on social structure, corporate groups and jural rules); John Barnes took over as supervisor.

Moreover, recent communication with George Appell in April–May 2013 has helped me develop my understanding of what he was attempting to achieve in his fieldwork among the Rungus (personal communication, 'Response to King', 7 May 2013). Above all he wanted to discover the social entities or units that the Rungus themselves identified in order to reflect the social world, including the jural domain of the people under study. He was especially concerned with the concepts of 'corporation' and 'corporate group', and argued that the major diagnostic feature of a corporate group presented by British social anthropologists—that these units existed in perpetuity—was a misleading characterisation, and that corporate groups should instead be defined by their capacity to 'enter into jural relations' (Appell

1983, 1984, 1990a). What he also draws attention to is that when he was working on these issues in the late 1950s and into the 1960s, unbeknown to him at that time, a group of Yale anthropologists including Ward H. Goodenough and William C. Sturtevant were working on the same set of problems (that is, the identification of local or indigenous concepts), though they were primarily concerned with the ‘cognitive world’ rather than that of social organisation. Furthermore, his focus on corporate groups, their definition and capacities became of crucial significance in another major area of work on which he was to focus, that of land tenure.

Among Appell’s important legacies, apart from a truly substantial corpus of published work on Borneo, was the founding of the *Borneo Research Bulletin* (Appell 1990b, c), the organisation of the biennial international conferences, the BRC’s publications series, the advocacy on behalf of Borneo, and the enormous range of networking that he has undertaken, in addition to the work of his daughters, Amity Appell Doolittle (see, for example, her sociohistorical study of property rights and power struggles in Sabah, 1999, 2005) and Laura P. Appell-Warren (see her thesis on the social construction of personhood among the Rungus, 1988, and her editing of Monica Freeman’s diaries, 2009), and his wife Laura W.R. Appell (see, for example, 1991; and with G.N. Appell 1993, and G.N. Appell and Laura W.R. Appell 1993, 2003) have been indispensable in Borneo Studies. Appell too connected Borneo anthropology to broader issues in anthropology (property rights, jural personalities, development and ethics in particular). I have already referred to his two important edited books on *The societies of Borneo* (1976a) and *Studies in Borneo societies* (1976b).

Like others before him Appell also engaged in wider debates within anthropology, particularly in what he referred to as ‘cognitive structuralism’ (1973), on the impacts of social change and modernisation on indigenous peoples (numerous papers), on the concept of ‘corporation’, corporate social groupings and cognatic descent, and on the ethics of anthropological enquiry [in, for example, papers in *Current Anthropology* (1971a), *Human Organization* (1971b) and *Anthropological Quarterly* (1976c), and his book *Dilemmas and ethical conflicts in anthropological enquiry: a case book* (1978)]. There is also his important co-edited book with Triloki N. Madan, in celebration of the work of his one-time doctoral supervisor and mentor, Derek Freeman: *Choice and morality in anthropological perspective: essays in honor of Derek Freeman* (1988). In that volume Appell, in part at least, returns to his long-established concerns with the relationships between jural relations, social isolates and social structure, but there he also investigates the ways in which choice, individual action and opportunity can be included within his paradigm of social isolates and social groupings, and specifically jural isolates, jural aggregates and jural collectivities (1988). Here too Appell contributed to more general debates in anthropology.

Freeman’s legacy in Iban studies was also continued through his research students who went on to produce important published work on the Iban: Michael Heppell (*Iban social control: the infant and the adult*, 1975), James Masing (*The coming of the gods: an Iban invocatory chant [timang gawai amat]*, 1977, 1981), and Motomitsu Uchibori (*The leaving of the transient world: a study of Iban*

eschatology and mortuary practices, 1978). Heppell, in particular, went on to undertake research in other parts of Borneo and to publish on a range of issues in Borneo anthropology. For a time Freeman also supervised Brian de Martinoir, a Belgian anthropologist (with no discernible result) and Roger D. Peranio, an American, who studied the Limbang Bisaya (but who returned to the United States from Australia without completing his thesis at that time, and eventually submitted it at Columbia University in 1977). I should also mention my own PhD student, Traude Gavin, who worked on Iban textiles in her *Iban ritual textiles* (2003/2004), and who received advice not only from Rodney Needham but especially from Derek Freeman, who kindly agreed to allow her access to his field notes, and to Monica's, his wife's drawings. Penelope Graham and her work on Iban shamanism also benefited from Freeman's direction and support (1987).

2.6 Concluding Observations

The roughly two decades after the Second World War comprised a formative period in the development of the anthropology, and primarily a British-influenced social anthropology of Borneo (though focused on the British Crown Colony of Sarawak). These pioneer fieldworkers defined the major issues and formulated the concepts which were to preoccupy researchers during the next two decades and they set down the foundations for those of us who followed. But preoccupied as they were with Sarawak and to some extent Sabah they had little guidance to provide on the vast territories and the complex mixes of populations and cultures to the south in Kalimantan. We should also note that the scholarly terrain was set out and delimited by a handful of (male) anthropologists who undertook detailed ethnographic fieldwork. What was to follow was a burgeoning of research on Borneo, an increase in the number of female researchers and locally based social scientists, a widening of the range of perspectives, concepts and issues, as well as a movement into more applied, developmental issues, and some reliance on collaborative research. I shall take up the story again in Chap. 5 and commence and develop these themes from the later 1960s and 1970s.

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