

THE UNIVERSITY OF HULL

BAJAU GENDER: A STUDY OF THE EFFECTS OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC
CHANGE ON GENDER RELATIONS IN A FISHING COMMUNITY OF
SABAH, EAST MALAYSIA

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by

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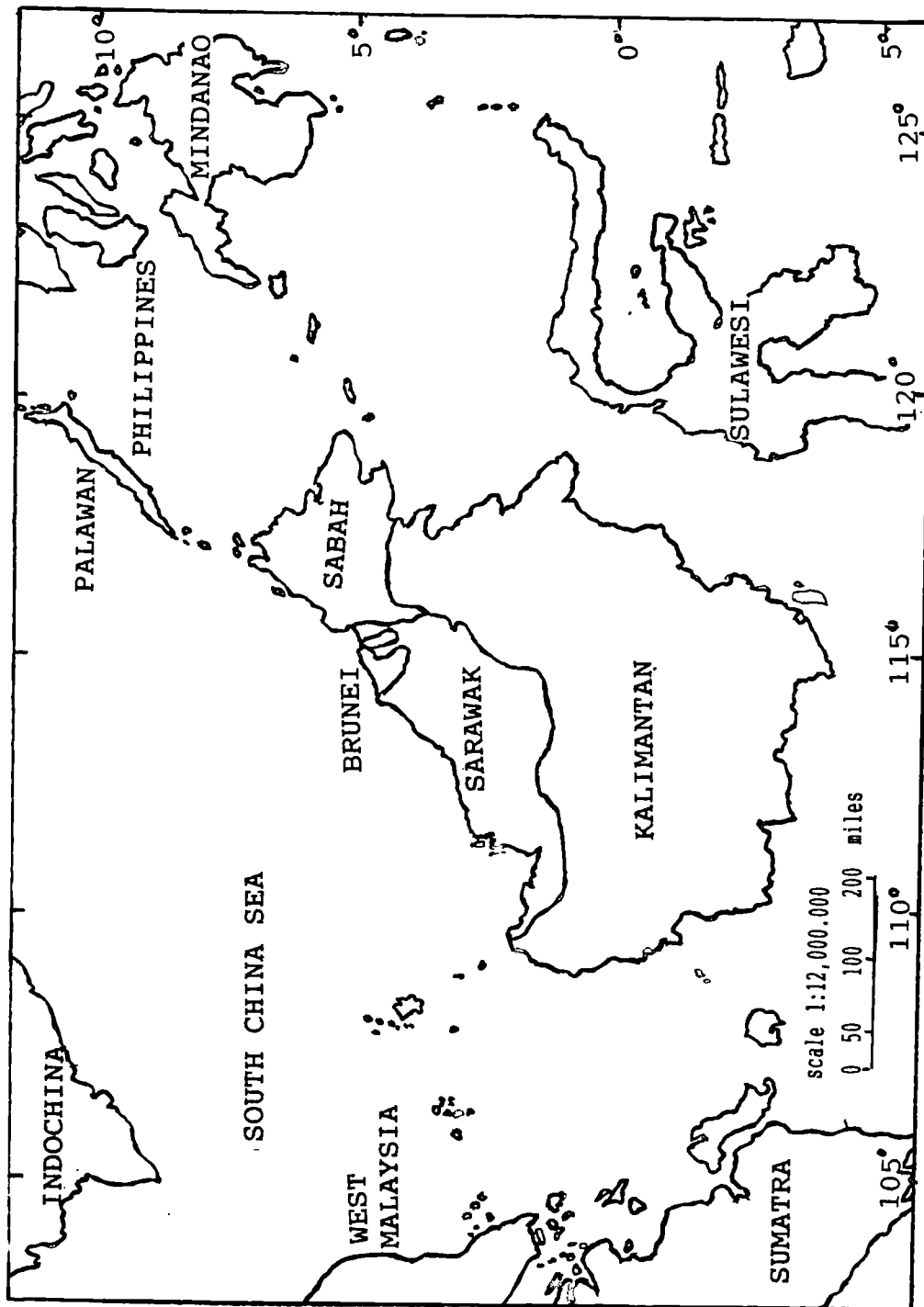
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CURRENCY NOTE

During the fieldwork period (1991) the exchange rate was approximately M\$4.00 per $\frac{1}{3}$ 1.00



Map 1: Location of Sabah

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Photograph 1: Kg. Mengkabong, Sabah in the 1950s.
(Taken by Mr. R. Knowles).



Photograph 2: Kg Mengkabong in the 1980s.

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INTRODUCTION

GENDER AND DEVELOPMENT IN MALAYSIA: THEMES AND PERSPECTIVES

"Development is a process that brings with it enormous changes in the very substance of people's lives. It touches their values, their cultural norms, and their perceptions of one another. It can bring an opportunity for personal growth and social harmony, or tragically, it can tear the social fabric asunder."

(Huston 1979:3)

Malaysia, like many developing countries, is currently undergoing a process of intensive socio-economic change. This involves a growing incorporation of people into the waged labour market and an increasing dependency on the cash economy and the competitive capitalist world market. This process of economic development has induced fundamental rapid transformation of traditional societies and cultures in Malaysia. The Bajau of Sabah, East Malaysia represent one important case where traditional cultural forms are currently undergoing extensive change. Whilst these developments influence all aspects of the Bajaus' lives they are most dramatically affecting gender relations within the Bajau community. The women in my study are experiencing changes in their involvement in the cash

economy, the penetration of national and political institutions and expanded educational opportunities. Consequently an examination of their lives reveals the impact of these changes, particularly within the realm of gender relations, and the villagers' responses to them. It is these profound transformations in female-male relations as a result of socio-economic development which I intend to explore throughout this thesis.

Gender and Development Planning - a brief overview

The ILO has recently pointed out that women constitute 50% of the world's population, do two-thirds of the world's work hours, receive 10% of the world's income and own less than 1% of the world's property (Inayatulla 1983). If these figures are disaggregated they would reveal that women in developing countries are arguably the most exploited and oppressed social group in the world today.

Whilst the role of women in the process of socio-economic development has been a growing concern of social scientists, planners and governments, the potentials of women as economic actors are not yet fully analyzed and the way in which gender affects women's participation in development is as yet not

adequately researched. In the field of development studies development has traditionally been measured in terms of the economic and social changes affecting the male population while ignoring the social structures which restrict women's full participation in social, economic and political life. Only recently have social scientists even begun to give serious consideration to the status of women in developing countries and their role in the struggle for economic and social change.

Recent years have seen the development of a number of different approaches to women and development. During the last two decades the term "women in development" or "WID" has become common currency in academic circles and beyond. The acronym WID first appeared in the 1970s in work conducted by the Women's Committee of the Society for International Development in Washington D.C. as part of an initiative to bring to the attention of U.S. policymakers the impact of development on women. The term quickly caught on and has increasingly been used to refer to a loose set of common concerns about women and development.

The WID perspective has been closely linked with the modernization paradigm that dominated mainstream economic thinking in the 1950s through the 1970s. In

that model modernization was closely linked with industrialization as the engine for economic growth. It was assumed that the fruits of economic growth would "trickle down" and benefit all equally. Recognizing that women were not benefiting from development as much as they could be, the WID approach led to various efforts to "integrate" women into development. Those who advocate this approach, such as Boserup (1970) and Rogers (1980), place primary emphasis on egalitarianism and on the development of strategies aimed at minimizing the disadvantages women face in the productive sector. Rathgeber summarizes the impact of this approach;

"Under the rubric of WID the recognition that women's experience of development and of societal change differed from that of men was institutionalized and it became legitimate for research to focus specifically on women's experiences and perceptions".
(1990:491)

Towards the end of the 1970s however there was growing dissatisfaction within feminist circles with the WID approach. It was justly accused of failing to examine why women seemed to fare less well from development policies as those using the WID approach focussed only on how women could be better integrated into ongoing development initiatives. Critics such as Mayra Buvinic

(1986) have pointed out that the WID approach focuses exclusively on women's productive roles, minimizing or ignoring other facets of women's lives. Whilst development projects based on the WID approach had been moderately successful in a variety of contexts, they proved only minimally successful in several important areas such as improving women's participation in decision-making and political representation. Furthermore, the WID approach is also ahistorical, and neglects the impact and influence of class, race and culture, (Rathgeber 1990:492). Achola Okello Pala noted in the mid-1970s that the notion of "integrating women into development" was inextricably linked to the maintenance of the economic dependency of Third World and especially African countries on the industrialized countries.

In the late 1970s out of this growing dissatisfaction with the WID approach evolved the "women and development" perspective, commonly referred to by the acronym "WAD". This neo-Marxist feminist approach focuses on the impact of inequalities in the international system on Third World men and women. They maintain that strategies which merely integrate women into development programmes sustain existing international structures of inequality. While

focussing on women WAD recognizes that both men and women are disadvantaged within oppressive global structures based on class and capital. Conditions for women will only change in the context of larger changes in international and local class relations.

Whilst the WAD approach offers a more critical view and deeper understanding of women's position than the WID approach, it has been strongly criticised for failing to focus on the problems faced by women independent of those of men, since both genders are disadvantaged within oppressive international structures. Women's condition is seen predominantly within the structure of international and class inequalities and consequently the question of gender and of divisions within classes are not systematically addressed.

A third approach, the gender and development or "GAD" perspective emerged in the 1980s as an alternative to WID and WAD. This socialist feminist approach moves away from economic determinism and takes a holistic perspective, examining, "The totality of social organization, economic and political life in order to understand the shaping of particular aspects of society", (Young 1987:1). GAD is not concerned with women per se but with the social construction of gender

and the assignation of specific roles, responsibilities and expectations to women and men. The great advantage of this approach is that it sees women as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance. Thus instead of framing the inquiry in terms of the "impact of development on women" it seeks to examine women's perceptions of and responses to development initiatives, including, in some cases, their apparent lack of response.

Although this approach is rarely put into practice in the formulation of development programmes, for it requires fundamental structural societal change, it is only by incorporating the ideas and concerns of the GAD perspective that the gender imbalances in development programmes can be overcome. In Malaysia, as elsewhere in the world, it is apparent that the gender dimensions of development have been seriously overlooked and that, to a certain extent, gender relations are being undermined by the current development strategies pursued by the Malaysian Government.¹

Gender and Development Planning in Malaysia

In Malaysia, there has been a recent upsurge of interest in gender issues which can be credited in part to the International Women's Decade launched in 1975 by

the United Nations.² As well as spawning a growing body of literature on women in Malaysia, a number of governmental bodies were established explicitly to deal with the issues of the roles of women in the development process.³ The National Advisory Council for the Integration of Women in Development, (NACIWID), was set up in the Prime Minister's Department in July 1976 as a direct response to the United Nations initiative. Consisting of both government and non-governmental female and male appointees, NACIWID's aims are to serve as a coordinating, consultative and advisory body to the government to enable women to develop their potential capacities to the maximum. Likewise, in Sabah the state government formed the Sabah Women's Advisory Council in August 1988, with its secretariat, the Sabah Women's Affairs Unit. However it should not be assumed that these initiatives have led to concrete improvements in the lives of Malaysian women. In the words of Sabah Women's Action Resource Group (SAWO)⁴,

"Often it is too readily assumed that the setting up of government councils/units/bureaus have done much to improve the status and position of women. This assumption stands in sharp contrast to the reality, where the majority of women, particularly among the poorer masses, are unaware either of the objective of or the impact of such government agencies."
(SAWO 1992:121)

Indeed none of the women to whom I spoke from the rural areas of Sabah were even aware of the existence of such bodies. The setting up of such machinery can often prove to be more a token rather than a genuine effort to improve the lives of women. Furthermore, as SAWO has pointed out, the leaders of the council are in the main political appointees who are not selected on the basis of their work on women's issues (ibid:122). It became increasingly clear to me that those involved tend to be middle or upper class urban women with little understanding or experience of the problems faced by poor rural women, and appear to be rather more interested in organizing tea parties with ministers and other dignitaries than in taking steps to make concrete improvements in the lives of the poor.

Development in Malaysia continues to be male-oriented and dominated by traditional economic approaches. It is based on the non-challenging welfare WID approach, its purpose being to bring women into development as better mothers. The only occasions in which women are accorded a mention in the Fifth Malaysia Plan (5MP) are in relation to their fertility levels and in one very brief paragraph entitled "Women in Development", which is quoted in full below;

"Women, who account for about one half of the population and constitute one third of the labour force, play an increasingly active role in the socio-economic development of the country, through their involvement in the mainstream of economic activities. They have and will continue to contribute towards developing a united and self-reliant society. Equal opportunities will continue to be given to women with respect to employment, education, and access to other social benefits. At the same time, the role of women in family development will continue to remain important in helping to build a united, just, stable and progressive society through the inculcation of good and lasting values in their children."

(Malaysia 1986:28)

Whilst lip-service is paid to women's economic roles, the identification of women in terms of their reproductive roles dominates policymakers' ways of thinking which, in turn, leads to an underevaluation of women's economic contributions to the country. This continues despite a growing body of research highlighting the need to design development programmes which take into account the needs of women as well as men. Unfortunately whilst Malaysian development thinking and analysis is slowly beginning to take into account the importance of the roles of women in the development process, this has not translated into policy and action. Nowhere is this more clear than in the formulation of "anti-poverty" strategies in

Malaysia. One of the main thrusts of the 5MP (Fifth Malaysia Plan) has been the eradication of poverty, but so far Malaysia's development strategies have not been effective in meeting the needs of the rural poor. As poverty is a recurring theme throughout this thesis a brief explanation of the current poverty situation in Sabah and the government's policies to deal with it are necessary at this point. I will also highlight the government's failure to take into account the gender dimensions of poverty in its anti-poverty strategies.

Gender and Poverty in Sabah

In terms of natural resources Sabah is often described as a rich state and has registered an impressive rate of economic growth. During the period 1976-1984 the rate of growth of GDP for Sabah was 7.3%, (Mohd. Yaakub 1989:12). It continues to register trade surpluses mainly because of its petroleum and timber exports which in 1986 accounted for 49% of the state's GDP. The impression that Sabah is a wealthy, developed state appears to be confirmed by the numerous modern multi-million ringgit (Malaysian dollar) buildings, such as the Sabah Foundation, which are all located in the capital city of Kota Kinabalu, and the state's investment in high-tech industries in Labuan. In reality however the situation is very different and

this becomes particularly apparent as one moves out of the city centre and into the rural areas. The rapid process of development that has taken place in Sabah over the last few decades has clearly not benefited everyone, especially the poor, and above all women. Even with a relatively high per capita GDP, Sabah has one of the highest rates of poverty in Malaysia. The Mid-Term Review of the 5MP 1986-1990, reveals that the incidence of poverty in Sabah is 35.5%, as compared to 17.3% for Peninsular Malaysia and 24.7% for Sarawak. Whilst "poverty alleviation" is at the top of Malaysia's development policy agenda it is clear that it is failing to meet the needs of the rural poor.⁵ Throughout Malaysia the pattern of capitalist development and export-led growth have resulted in a maldistribution of income. This has occurred despite the overall high rate of growth and the government policies aimed at redressing poverty. In Sabah the population is largely concentrated in rural areas. Moreover 90.9% of poor households in the State are located in rural areas. Much of the edifice of development in Sabah has been erected on the backs of rural people living at the lowest economic levels, and these people, particularly the women, experience little change in their own lives, except perhaps for the worse.

The ineffectiveness of government attacks on poverty can, in my opinion, be partly attributed to the government's failure to take into consideration the gender dimensions of poverty. Although issues of poverty in Sabah have long been researched, as in the work of the Institute for Development Studies (IDS), no research has been conducted on how women specifically are affected by poverty. A strong case can be made for taking into account the gender dimensions of poverty as, firstly, the poverty experienced by women can differ markedly from that of men in degree and/or kind and, secondly, women's economic contributions are distinctive and make a significant difference in the welfare of poor households.

The current Chief Minister of Sabah, Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, speaking at a seminar on gender sensitive development planning and implementation stressed that,

"...not only should our anti-poverty programmes be geared towards addressing the needs of the rural poor, more importantly they should also be aimed at meeting the needs of women who are the most affected in the sector."

Whilst this signals a recognition of the crucial roles of women in development, there has been no move to translate this into policy. It is still erroneously assumed that policies and programmes directed at rural households in general will benefit all household members regardless of gender.⁶ But any serious attack on poverty cannot succeed if it does not respond to the needs of and constraints faced by the poor, a large proportion of whom are female. The World Bank acknowledged this back in 1979;

"It can no longer be ignored that women make-up a disproportionate number of the poor whom development has passed by."
(World Bank 1979:1)

Despite the obvious close links between the failure of many attacks on poverty and their neglect of the roles of women in the household and economy, the government continues to fail to incorporate women as well as men into development plans and policies. So, whilst Malaysia's rather remarkable economic growth has received much attention from scholars, there remains very little understanding of the gender dimensions of development, of the specific roles women play in the household and national economies, how the development process has affected the quality of women's lives and their reactions to this. The failure of Malaysia's

male-dominated culture to acknowledge the reality of women's indispensable contributions to national development has the double effect of depriving their whole society of the further resources many women could offer and of condemning the majority of the country's women to lives that are lacking in many respects. I argue that this in turn has implications not only for the women themselves but for the country's children, whose lives are greatly conditioned by the opportunities available to their mothers. Effective development must include the active involvement of women; the creativity, imagination and commitment of women must be tapped just as surely as that of men.

Thus it is my intention in this thesis to examine how the development process is affecting the lives of members of a Bajau fishing community in Sabah, with particular emphasis on changing patterns of gender relations within the community. Whilst there has been considerable analysis of the many technological and social changes of the last thirty years or so at the regional and national level in Sabah, very little has been done to analyse the nature of the changes that have resulted at the level of individuals or of micro-units like the household. Only very rarely has there been any in-depth study of households, or indeed of

communities, even though the changes that occur there may have a strong influence on the attitudes, behaviour and aspirations of its members. I aim to elucidate the ways in which various processes of rural transformation have built up, extended, transformed or otherwise affected internal household relations, the gender division of labour and gender relations in general within the village (kampong), and how the villagers are reacting to these changes. In short, I seek to understand the impact of macro-events on gender relations at the household level, to bring women's participation in social change into focus and to indicate how this participation could be enhanced by policies designed to support households and women in the present and future.

Outline of the Thesis

During the course of this thesis I do not attempt to present a complete ethnography of Bajau culture and society. Rather I will focus on certain aspects of women's lives that most clearly shed light on the questions I am exploring. This thesis is divided into three parts corresponding to different areas of importance to the formation of Bajau gender relations.

The first section provides the background to the study. Chapter 1 contains an introduction to the Bajau community in Sabah as well as a brief note on the historical and geographical setting of the study village. Chapter 2 consists of a review of the relevant literature, on the Bajau, on the relationship between feminism and anthropology and also on the development of women's and gender studies in Southeast Asia in order to set my thesis in theoretical and historical context. This is followed by a third chapter in which I describe how I carried out my fieldwork. It provides an explanation of the research design and methods utilized during the fieldwork period.

The second section focuses on the household and the family. The family has become a primary agent for the ideological transformation of Bajau gender relations. This is particularly so in Malaysia where patriarchy has been reinforced by the Islamic inspired ideal image of women as passive, self-sacrificing, maternal and dependent. Women have internalized this image as "natural" so that many see the family as a refuge from the wider world and their reproduction and domestic roles as their most valuable function, but the

household is also the realm in which women have most authority and status. This section is thus primarily concerned with the range of social organizations which constrain or otherwise affect gender relations at both household and community level. Chapter 4 considers the composition of the household with particular reference to the principles and significance of the kinship system as it affects gender relations. Chapter 5 contains a detailed analysis of the marriage process by which households are formed, and in particular the roles of women at each stage of the marriage process, that is, from mate selection to the wedding day itself. Chapter 6 analyzes social relations within the household with special emphasis on female relationships. The final chapter in this section, Chapter 7, examines the significance of the kinship system beyond the household, that is, extra-household relations. This section serves as a background matrix for the subsequent section exploring the changing gender division of labour and economic relations.

The final section is entitled "Work, Women and Ideology in Kg Mengkabong". Here I examine the changes in and reorganization of the gender division of labour within the village as a result of the intervention of capital in the rural economy. In Chapter 8 I outline the

process by which many of the women's economic activities are undervalued and not recognized as "real" work. Chapter 9 examines how the gender division of labour within the village has been transformed over time. This is followed in Chapter 10 by a discussion of women's unpaid work within the home. The next two chapters analyse women's income-generating activities. In Chapter 11 women's involvement in petty trade and commerce is examined and this is followed in Chapter 12 with a discussion on Bajau women's waged work. The final chapter, Chapter 13, contains an analysis of household finance and budgeting patterns to determine whether these patterns are changing and any implications this may have for gender relations in the village.

Finally in the conclusion, I draw together what has been learned about Bajau gender relations and focus on some of the issues which require further consideration.

Footnotes:

¹ Marie-Andree Couillard (1990) draws similar conclusions in her short article on the effects of development on gender relations among rural Malay communities in Peninsular Malaysia. She argues that Malay women are finding it difficult to maintain their previous position of relative autonomy due to the penetration of capitalist relations of production and

the development strategies adopted by the Malaysian Government.

2 One important result of the United Nations International Decade for Women (1975-1985), which concluded with two conferences in Nairobi, was the Nairobi Forward-Looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women, commonly referred to as the FLS Document, to which governments made a commitment to the recommendations proposed by the conference. Essentially the FLS Document is intended "to provide a blueprint for action to advance the status of women in national and international economic, social, cultural and legal development to the year 2000", (IWTC 1987:1).

3 The UN initiative led to the proliferation of governmental bodies focusing on women throughout the world in countries as diverse as the Philippines, Zimbabwe and Belize, (Moser 1993:4).

4 SAWO was formed in March 1985 by a concerned group of women and men to take up the issues of violence and discrimination against women particularly in Sabah. They were formally registered in April 1987 and raise public awareness of the unequal structures in society and unequal gender relations. They are predominantly an action-oriented group and organize campaigns and workshops on gender issues in Sabah.

5 I agree with Norman Uphoff (1988) that the very concept of "poverty alleviation" smacks of paternalism as does the terrible term "target group". It strongly suggests doing things for or to the poor rather than with them. Uphoff prefers the term "strengthening the poor" and utilizes the concept of "assisted self-reliance" which although it sounds paradoxical represents "a strategy for using external resources - advice, funds, training, material assistance - not so much to produce direct results as to strengthen local capacities to initiate, manage, modify and sustain activities that produce benefits for which the poor are responsible", (1988:47).

6 Numerous writers have concluded that many development programmes targeted on improving the welfare and income of households have proved unsuccessful in improving women's economic opportunities. For instance, attempts to raise agricultural yields and to market more of the crops that the household produces have often increased the demands for women's unpaid labour, diminished the time

women have for producing food for consumption, and increased the welfare of households to a lesser extent than their gains in cash income suggest. For example, Caye and McGowan (1988) show that in Mali, whilst men have been successful in increasing their production of maize, generating a surplus to process for cash income, the grinding of maize - traditionally women's work - is difficult and extremely time-consuming, with the result that some women are refusing to undertake such work for which they receive no remuneration and at the expense of other activities which provide direct sustenance for the family.

SECTION ONE

CHAPTER ONE

"THE LAND BELOW THE WIND": THE GEOGRAPHICAL, HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL SETTING OF THE STUDY

THE LAND

Borneo is the world's third largest island, only Greenland and New Guinea are larger. The island lies across the equator between 4 degrees south and 8 degrees north latitudes and extends from east longitudes 108 to 119 degrees. To the north of Borneo, across the Sulu Sea are the Philippine Islands, on the east are the islands of Sulawesi. To the south are the islands of Java and Bali, while to the west lies the island of Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia.

Nearly 80% of Borneo is covered with tropical rainforest filled with valuable species of hardwood and inaccessible mineral deposits, including gold, diamonds, uranium and coal. Because it missed the ice ages its hot humid forest is a refuge and breeding ground for countless plants and animals which could not survive elsewhere. Larger animals include the rhinoceros, orangutan, various species of monkey, wild

rhinoceros, orangutan, various species of monkey, wild ox, pig, deer and wildcat. In the forest canopy there are more than five hundred kinds of birds, including eagles, parrots, swifts and hornbills. Insect life is profuse and the fresh and coastal waters teem with marine life, (Williams 1965:2). The remainder of the island is covered with coastal and swamp vegetation or with secondary forest regrown in areas of shifting cultivation. The forests spread over a complex of mountain ranges. A central range runs across the island along a northeast to southwest axis. Two other ranges spiral out in an east-west direction from the middle of the central range along to the coastal areas. There are eight major rivers in Borneo which are vital as routes of communication and trade because of the great difficulty of foot travel over the interior mountain ranges.

Though geographically a unity, Borneo is politically divided into four areas. The largest portion, Kalimantan, is a province of Indonesia. The smallest, Brunei, is an independent oil-rich sultanate, and Sarawak and Sabah (formerly British North Borneo), belong to the Federation of Malaysia.

Sabah, often referred to as "the land below the wind", covers an area of 29,388 square miles with a coastline of around 900 miles, washed by the South China Sea on the west and north and by the Sulu Sea on the East. The terrain is rugged with dense tropical forests, alluvial and swampy coastal plains intersected by numerous rivers and fertile valleys. Several mountain ranges of 4,000 to 6,000 feet rise from the coastal lowlands in the west and culminate in the majestic Mount Kinabalu (13,455 feet), the highest peak in island Southeast Asia. From Mount Kinabalu the massive Crocker Range stretches north and south dividing the north-western coastal plain from the interior and the east coast of the state. The majority of Sabah's population live to the west of this mountain range. A maze of rivers drain away the torrential rains and extensive swamps sustain the mangroves and other water tolerant plants which give Sabah a dark green border.

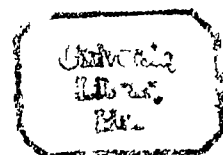
Sabah is subject to a climate of high temperature and humidity, heavy and violent rains and turbulent winds. These factors of climate are tempered by the different altitudes of the land causing relief contrasts in intensity and amounts of heat, rain and winds. Depending on cloud cover, temperatures can range in the lowlands from 68-95°F, and from 55-92°F in the mountain

areas above 2,000 feet. Local rainfall in the two monsoon seasons (October-March, and June-September) may be between 60 and 160 inches annually depending on the land forms. Heavy rains are often localized because of the mountain barriers to the movement of wet, low clouds.

HISTORY

From the earliest times human influence in Borneo has been concentrated around the coasts and along the major waterways. The rounded shape of the island means that the interior is much larger and more difficult to penetrate than say a long thin island like Java, or a deeply embayed one like Sulawesi. Only small populations lived inland among the rolling tracts of unknown jungle between the rivers, (Mackinnon 1975:27).

Trading peoples settled around the coasts of Borneo. Before the last two centuries their numbers and influence remained very small, but there were Chinese trading posts on the north and west coasts of Borneo for over 1000 years from the time of the Tang dynasty. From here a wealth of goods were exported to mainland China: gold, minerals, edible birds' nests, rhinoceros horn, colourful feathers, hornbill ivory, sandalwood,



beeswax, and other riches of the forest. They bartered for these in porcelain, metalwares, textiles, preserved food and beads.

Europeans did not arrive until the 16th century lured by tales of gold, sago, pepper and many exotic goods that could be bought and traded. For a long time they too made very little impact on the forest in their search for the island's natural wealth. During the next four centuries the European nations began accumulating empires, eventually claiming as their own every part of the world that they came across. But they had little success with Borneo. Apart from being difficult to control on account of its vast interior the island has few natural harbours. The British and the Dutch tried to establish trading stations, but time after time they were forced to admit defeat. It was only in the 19th century that Europeans finally managed to establish a firm foothold in Borneo. In the colonial period of the island's history the British took control of the north, establishing a protectorate over Brunei, Sabah and Sarawak. A Chartered Company was set up in Sabah (North Borneo), James Brooke, an English adventurer, became Rajah of Sarawak, whilst the Dutch took over the bulk of southern Borneo.

Sabah has had a colourful history. Early European accounts provide vivid chronicles of piracy attacks in the seas off Borneo during the 18th and 19th centuries. In 1773 the British East India Company set up a trading post at Balembangan, an island off the northern tip of Borneo, but within two years it was destroyed by pirates.

"...no merchant ship of the colonial powers was safe from sea-robbers, and no coastal village was immune from the attacks which, in their ferocity, made the buccaneers of the Spanish Main seem comparative gentlemen."
(Rutter 1930:3).

The last pirate's stronghold was not destroyed until 1879.¹ There has been considerable debate over the use of the term piracy: the "pirates" can alternatively be seen as engaging in guerilla warfare against interlopers from the West who had destroyed the traditional trade of the area and become greedy. This interruption of legitimate trade probably stimulated the attacks on colonial ships.

An Austrian Baron in partnership with a British firm founded the North Borneo Company in 1877 on leases of land from the Sultans of Brunei and Sulu respectively. Official recognition in 1881 upgraded the venture to a

Chartered Company. The Chartered Company continued to rule North Borneo until the Japanese invasion in 1942. In the latter half of 1945, North Borneo was liberated by the Allied Forces, who set up the British Borneo Civil Administrative Unit - or B.B.C.A.U. as it was known - to run the country. This was soon replaced by a stop-gap British Military Administration which was in turn replaced in 1946 by a civil government appointed by the Crown.

Sabah gained independence when it merged with Malaysia in 1963. There was some trouble after independence as Sabah's existence as part of Malaysia was disputed not only by Indonesia but also by the Philippines.

THE BAJAU COMMUNITY IN SABAH

The Bajau are a culturally fragmented population of Sama speakers.² Numbering some 72,000 persons in Sabah, they are spread unevenly in scattered villages and hamlets along the eastern and northwestern coasts of the state and southwards to Kimanis Bay on the west. An additional 90,000 Bajau are present in the southern Philippines, and a further 30,000 to 40,000 in eastern Indonesia, chiefly in Sulawesi, (Sather 1978;1985). In Sabah the Bajau represent the second largest indigenous

group after the Kadazan. The majority of Bajaus are found on the west coast of Sabah which is the most heavily populated region and live predominantly in rural areas; of the total Bajau community in the west coast region 93.1% reside in the rural zones, (Zulkifly and Sulong 1983).

The origins of the Bajau have not yet been successfully traced but several theories have been propounded. It has been suspected that they were originally sea-farers of the Philippines-Sulawesi coasts during the 18th and 19th centuries, but a tradition of royal origin from Johore is retained by many Bajau groups in Sabah.³ The Bajau in the village where I conducted my research recounted a similar tale of origin to that described by Owen Rutter in his volume "British North Borneo" (1922). They relate that several hundred years ago the Sultan of Johore had a very beautiful daughter, Ayesha, with whom both the rulers of Brunei and Sulu fell in love. Although Princess Ayesha favoured the Sultan of Brunei her father decided that the Sultan of Sulu was the better match and so she was sent off to Sulu with a royal escort. The ruler of Brunei, refusing to accept that he had lost the princess, intercepted her party and sailed off to Brunei with Ayesha. Her Johore escort feared returning to Johore after their failure

to protect the princess and deliver her safely to Sulu and so were forced to sail the seas living in boats until gradually a number of them formed communities along the coasts of Sabah.⁴

Although some confusion has arisen over the ethnic classification of the Bajau, for purposes of analysis they can be divided into two groups, the Bajau Laut (Sea Bajau) and the Bajau Darat (Land Bajau).⁵ These are not ethnically distinct groups of people, though a distinction is made not only by the other inhabitants of Sabah, but by both groups of Bajau themselves based on their diverse ways of life. Until around the mid-1930s almost all Bajau lived permanently afloat in small sailing vessels equipped with portable living quarters and depended almost exclusively on fishing and gathering for their livelihood. Since then most families have built pilehouses for themselves over the sea and only a few, less than 20% of the population, remain permanently boat-dwelling (Sather 1978).

Originally I had intended to conduct a comparative study of boat-dwelling and land-dwelling Bajau on the west coast of Sabah but on arrival I quickly had to abandon this idea as there were no longer any boat-dwelling Bajau on the west coast. The Bajau Darat, although strand dwellers retaining close ties to the

sea, supplement fishing with occasional farming, woodcutting and casual trade, and in the more heavily settled areas of Tuaran and Kota Belud districts of Sabah most Bajau live inland from the immediate coast and practice mixed farming based primarily on wet rice cultivation and cattle rearing. Thus traditionally the Bajau Laut relied heavily and/or exclusively on fishing and the exchange of fish and other marine products for their livelihood, whereas the Bajau Darat generally have a settled form of agriculture.

The Bajau in both Sabah and the southern Philippines are a much maligned people. Nimmo (1972a;1972b) describes the Bajau of Sulu as having the lowest social status in the entire Sulu Archipelago and I discovered that those in Sabah are similarly despised. Nimmo surmises that the strong stigma attached to the Bajau by "land-dwelling Muslims" may be due to their "pagan shackles" which have marked them as "outcasts" for centuries (1972a:50). He also feels that their boat-dwelling habit is another contributing factor (ibid:97). Another author, Cabrera, speculates that it is because sea people are viewed as crude, ragged and filthy (1969:110). Sather in his article "Sea and Shore People: Ethnicity and Ethnic interaction in Southeastern Sabah" (1984) notes that other Sama groups

refer to the Bajau Laut as "Luwaan" which means "that which was spat out", and refers to myths that the Bajau Laut were rejected by God and forced to follow their present way of life as a curse.⁶ Evidently the settled Muslim peoples of both the Philippines and Sabah have a strong apathy towards the Bajau and this distaste is by no means extinguished following Bajau conversion to Islam. The identity which other groups have ascribed to the Bajau in Sabah is underpinned by the belief that they are not "proper" Muslims, that is they are considered less orthodox and therefore inferior and they are regarded as pirates and thieves.⁷ This negative image of the Bajau appears even in European fiction writing as the following quotes from Agnes Keith's semi-fictional account *Beloved Exiles* (1972) illustrate;

"He had been forewarned that he could never trust the Bajaus".
(1972:5)

And again,

"I find the Bajau the most tiresome of all", said Robin. "Real sea gypsies and pirates by heritage and nature, and the laziest people alive - except when it comes to stealing water buffaloes. They are a menace to local farmers. Only useful thing they ever do is build boats".
(ibid:41)

This unfortunate stigmatization continues today for all Bajau groups.

THE VILLAGE

The water village of Mengkabong is located on the west coast of the state of Sabah, approximately 30km north of the capital, Kota Kinabalu, and falls within the administrative district of Tuaran. The small town of Tuaran itself, some 3km from the village, houses the District Office, the police station, post office and hospital. As well as being the administrative centre it is also the main focus of commercial life. It serves as the buying, selling and repairing town for a number of villages including the one in which I was to live. Villagers from Kg Mengkabong tend to buy most of their provisions at its shops and from the weekly Sunday market (tamu). A surfaced road, partially bordered by padi fields, leads from Tuaran to the village.

Kg Mengkabong is to some extent unique, with its own special history and character, yet there is little mention of the kampong in written records, and those references which do exist have a tendency to portray the villagers as troublesome pirates, slayers of

Chinese merchants, and allude to the use of the village as a slave marketing venue during the time of Brunei rule. The kampong does however warrant special mention in European historical accounts due to the villagers' participation in the sacking of Gaya Island, one event in a series of challenges against Chartered Company rule led by Mat Salleh.

Mat Salleh, of Bajau and Suluk descent, has been colourfully described by Alliston as "a kind of Far Eastern Mahdi", (1966:34). An extremely charismatic figure, he made constantly daring raids on Chartered Company settlements, one of the most spectacular being the raid on Gaya Island, the principal government station on the west coast. In July 1897, with the support of locals including the villagers from Mengkabong, he landed on Gaya Island, captured all its arms, ammunition, boats, stores and money and proceeded to burn the settlement to the ground. Salleh then vanished up the Inanam River. Viciously the Chartered Company struck back. A force swept up the Inanam and Mengkabong rivers destroying every village and all the rice crops. As these areas were still under Brunei control claims were instituted against the Sultan of Brunei for the destruction of Gaya. After long negotiations the Sultan surrendered his sovereignty

rights and the various local chiefs sold their territorial rights with the result that Mengkabong became part of North Borneo under Chartered Company rule. According to kampong history a poll tax was the instituted as a punishment for the villagers' part in the raid. According to European accounts Mat Salleh was later killed by the British but every villager I discussed the story of Mat Salleh with reacted vehemently against this version of the historical record. I unwittingly caused a virtual uproar when I casually mentioned Mat Salleh's demise at the hands of the British, and one of the oldest male villagers was called to relate the village's account of the story. "How could Mat Salleh be shot by the British?", he cried. "He was completely invincible to bullets and possessed ilmu batin (which loosely translates as "hidden knowledge") and sakti ("supernatural powers"). The villagers say that Salleh had the power to disappear and this is precisely what he did. No one knows where he is at present but they insist that he will return to help the Bajau if he is ever needed again.

The village itself is built on a lagoon on the mangrove-fringed coast, about 3km from the open sea. It is divided into seven sections or neighbourhoods,

each with its own name and headman (ketua kampong).⁸ Many villagers are unsure where one neighbourhood ends and another begins; there are no markers delineating the boundaries. Most confusion seems to arise over whether the dozen or so houses built on the land adjacent to the water village belong to Kg Mengkabong or the nearby land village of Raganan. Still, even if the boundaries are ill-defined, all but a very few households are quite unambiguously of Kg Mengkabong.

Whilst there are seven headmen, each representing their section of the village, one of them is generally regarded as the head of the entire village. It is he who represents the village in district level meetings and it is to his house that government officials and other formal guests are ushered when they visit the village. Women have no formal voice in formal village political organizations. The JKKK (Jawatan Kuasa Kemajuan dan Keselamatan Kampong/Village Development and Security Committee) is exclusively male. At these committee meetings kampong affairs such as forthcoming events, elections, offences committed by individual villagers and the appropriate punishments are discussed. The women usually listen in on these meetings and pass comment when they see fit. It is generally acknowledged that women play a decisive role,

albeit indirectly, in kampong political affairs through influencing and putting pressure on their husbands and other kinsmen.

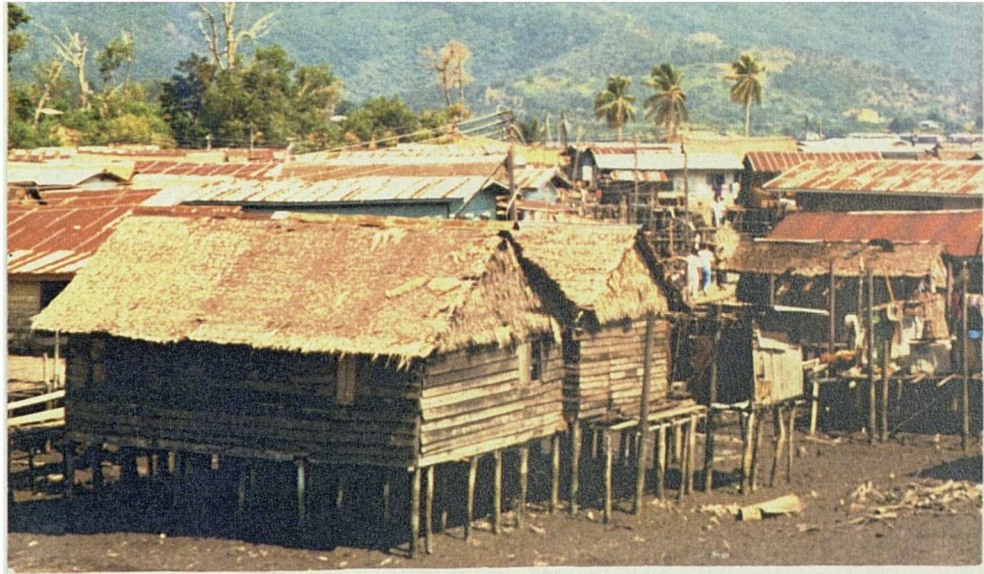
An elaborate network of catwalks connects the houses to each other and the land, like a giant web. These form the pathways of the kampong, many being no more substantial than a single wooden plank. During my first months in the kampong not every house was connected to the system of catwalks. The occupants of these houses therefore had the choice of using small canoes (sampans) when the water level rose, or squelched through the mud at low tide. Occasionally I saw these villagers wading through the shoulder-high water with their shopping baskets perched on their heads to keep the contents dry. Later during my stay the government supplied timber to extend and build new catwalks, so, by the time I left, virtually every house was connected to the catwalk system. I felt rather uneasy when informed that during the monsoon season crocodiles have been known to swim out of the surrounding mangrove swamps and mount the catwalks, occasionally even venturing into the houses. A neighbour told me, "Well, I've never seen a crocodile myself but I know lots of people who have. They're

really big!". Fortunately none of these reptiles were spotted during my stay in the village.

The houses themselves are built on stilts of long-lasting belian wood (ironwood), standing just above the high water mark. There is no such thing as a "typical" Bajau house as they can range in size from a tiny one room hut to a large multi-room house. But, although the houses vary in size, floor plan and interior decoration depending on the size and affluence of the household, the basic outline is the same for all. When a man first builds his house he begins by building the base of his household's future, a square or rectangular building which can later be extended again and again. If the household can afford it the next additions will be separate sleeping rooms (bilik turi). These extensions to a house, some old, some new, stand as records of the household's growth and changing fortunes. The kitchen (dapur) is usually located at the back of the house although some households build a separate cooking hut. A central feature of this room is the large wooden cooking stove. Baskets, foodcovers and any cooking utensils the household may own hang from nails along the walls. There is usually a platform at the back of the house for hanging out the washing and performing kitchen tasks. The verandah at

the front of the house is also used for a number of household tasks such as repairing fishing nets and drying fish as well as being a place to sit and relax in the evenings.

The houses of the poorer villagers are often wretched in the extreme (see photograph 3), usually comprised of one room only roofed with nipah palm leaf thatch. This one room serves as an all-purpose area where household members sit, work, eat and sleep. A section at the back is divided off as kitchen space. Interspersed with the houses of the poor are the more substantial houses of the wealthier villagers, with their brightly painted walls, galvanised iron roofs and louvre windows (photograph 4). They stand in stark contrast to the dilapidated houses around them, and mark the growing income disparity within the village. The villagers classify themselves into two categories; susah (poor) and sederhana (moderate/comfortable), the vast majority of them falling into the former category.⁹ There are no villagers who classify themselves, nor are classified by others, as rich (kaya) in the kampong.



Photograph 3: The houses of poor villagers with their palm-thatched roofs can be seen in the foreground.



Photograph 4: House of a sederhana household. Note the galvanized iron roof and louver windows.

Frequent informal gatherings occur in the shops of the village, the majority of which are so small it is difficult for an outsider to identify them. Further up the catwalk from my house a family carried a small inventory of daily items such as matches, soap and soft drinks which they sell from shelves in their kitchen. The main store, and the one most easily identified as a shop, is located on the road into the village. Rice, spices, cooking oil and other essentials can be obtained here, along with cigarettes and snacks. This shop has the advantage of having a refrigerator so young men often gather here in the evenings to buy cold drinks and chat.

The community hall (balai raya) is one of the first buildings encountered on the road into Kg Mengkabong. It serves as a public meeting place but it is most frequently used in the early evenings by the young men as a sports hall. At one time there was a public telephone outside the balai raya but after being vandalized it was never replaced. Now on the rare occasions when the villagers need to use a telephone they have to make the journey into Tuaran. The road outside the balai raya is lined with pick-ups waiting patiently to ferry passengers into town. The primary school stands on the hill facing the kampong.

Alongside it is the tiny mid-wifery clinic, staffed on a part-time basis by a government midwife. This facility is sadly underutilized by the village women who often prefer to visit the clinic in town for all their pre- and anti-natal care. At the highest point of the kampong sits the mosque (masjid) with its yellow-domed roof, topped by a metal star and crescent. Whilst the different neighbourhoods of the village subdivide the kampong, the mosque as a focus of religious life serves to ritually unify it. These collective amenities, along with roads, piped water and electricity, have undoubtedly played some role in improving the material conditions of the villagers' lives.

The reasons for choosing this particular village warrant some explanation. I had visited the area several times before choosing Kg Mengkabong and locating a house to live in. Previous knowledge of the literature told me that the village had never been the focus of study. The first requirement I had was that it had to be predominantly a fishing village. Kg Mengkabong fits this description well as there are few households which are not now, or were in the past, involved in fishing activities. Additionally I was looking for a village undergoing transition. Although

Kg Mengkabong still has a very active fishing community, this is combined with a growing involvement in wage labour employment. Furthermore, the village is particularly interesting in that it is being aggressively promoted as a tourist attraction. I felt that research into the effects of this, if any, on the village economy would prove an important area of study.¹⁰ On a purely practical level, access to the capital, Kota Kinabalu, was another requirement. The village has a reasonable transportation system which meant that visits to the immigration offices, research libraries and so forth was not a problem. And finally, the villagers to whom I spoke on my initial trips to the kampong seemed happy to have me come and live with them. At least no objections were raised. It was agreed that I should move in with one of the headmen and his family and it was here that I was to stay for the next eleven months.

Given these ethnographic characteristics where can we locate Mengkabong in comparison to other Bajau communities? It is undoubtedly misleading to talk in terms of a "typical" village as if one could identify an average village in the historical, economic and cultural complexity of Bajau society, but I feel that Kg Mengkabong illustrates the processes of change

which, although uniquely manifested in each Bajau village, share a generalized directionality with other rural communities. Kg Mengkabong is interesting precisely because it combines elements of the past - subsistence fishing, labour exchanges - with the forces that shape rural futures - growing class stratification and involvement in the cash economy.

Footnotes:

¹ Even to this day piracy is not unknown in Sabah. It is particularly prevalent on the east coast. The route between the Philippines and Sabah across the Sulu sea is still a dangerous journey due to heavily armed pirates.

² In Sabah and eastern Indonesia Sama speakers are generally known as Bajau, whilst in the Philippines they are called "Samal" a Tausug ethnonym (Sather 1984:6).

³ Pallensen (1977:165ff) posits on the basis of linguistic evidence that the Bajaus original homeland was the eastern Sulu-Zamboanga region. From there it appears that Sama speakers spread to Borneo and eastern Indonesia well before the beginning of European contact.

⁴ Several variants of this "Johore Princess" origin story have been recounted by various authors including Helen Follet in *Men of the Sulu Sea* (1945) and Sopher in *The Sea Nomads* (1977).

⁵ Problems of nomenclature have arisen partly through the inconsistent use of terms applied to the Bajau. The term "Bajau" was originally applied to the group by the Brunei Malays with whom those living on the west coast maintained intermittent contact, sometimes hostile, especially during the 18th and 19th centuries (Sather 1978). Most Bajau groups use the autonym "Sama", with a modifier to indicate geographical or

subgroup affiliation, and refer to their language as "ling Sama". Its use implies recognition of common cultural links and the use of a shared language. It is important to note however that the Bajau have never constituted a unified cultural entity.

6 Sather (1984:13) recounts one of the common variants of these myths. The wife of the Prophet, Siti Aisiah, is molested by a Bajau Laut fisherman when she visits him to purchase fish. For this wrongdoing God causes the Bajau Laut to suffer. The fisherman asks the Prophet for forgiveness and the Prophet advises him to prepare a feast. The Bajau does so but as he has insufficient meat he butchers a dog and prepares its "unclean" flesh. The Prophet and his followers arrive. The Prophet recites prayers over the food and the meat begins to bark. The Prophet promptly leaves and the original homeland of the Bajau Laut sinks into the sea. The few Bajau Laut who survive are saved by clinging to drifting debris. From this time on The Bajau Laut are excluded by God from the society of the faithful and are compelled as a punishment to live in boats, drifting like the debris to which their ancestors clung.

7 It is also possible that the Bajau are despised because they are linked as subordinates to the Sulu and the Tausug and therefore considered as being of a lower class.

8 There has never been a female ketua kampong in the village.. It is interesting to note that when I broached the subject of whether villagers could foresee a female assuming this position in the future, men generally agreed that it may be possible, whereas women were more inclined to say no believing that women were unsuited to the role.

9 Occasionally the moderately well-off refer to their standard of living as "cukup makan" (enough to eat) whereas the poor refer to themselves as "tidak ada cukup makan" (not having enough to eat).

10 I soon discovered however that as yet tourism has had little impact on the village. This may soon change as there are plans to build a resort hotel a little way up the coast from the village.

SECTION ONE

CHAPTER TWO

BACKGROUND: BAJAU ETHNOGRAPHY AND GENDER STUDIES

Review of the Literature on the Bajau

Apart from a few books devoted specifically to one Bajau group or another, information on them is contained in a heterogeneous collection of travel accounts, geographical monographs, local histories and administrative reports.¹ The following two quotes provide an illustration of the flavour of these writings. Sixto Y. Orosa, who was a District Health Officer in the Sulu region of the Philippines, describes the Bajau as "Sea gypsies living in dirty vermin-loaded and foul-smelling vintas, constantly roving", (1923:62). Pryer, the British North Borneo Company's first Resident of the east coast of Sabah in the 1870s speaks of them as leading "a free roving life in the open air, untroubled by any care or thought for the morrow", (1887:230). Rutter in his "British North Borneo" (1922) finds little to commend the Bajau and viewed them more as a nuisance than an asset in the British attempt to develop North Borneo. He describes the Bajau thus, "He is utterly lazy and careless of tomorrow...He is generally wretchedly poor, though he

has no need to be..The Bajau", he writes, "is a graceful liar and an accomplished cheat", (ibid:74).

Evans writing on the Bajau of the west coast Tuaran and Kota Belud districts describes the Bajau as,

"...a lazy spendthrift, a liar, a cheat, a thief, a wheedler, a blusterer, and a swagger...Piracy, raiding and burning Chinese shops, which is the Bajau's idea of the highest kind of pleasure, gambling, buffalo- or pony-racing, cattle thieving, cock-fighting or hunting - all of these are, or used to be, indulged in with the greatest ardour."

(1922:19)

Evans does however have a better word for the Bajau women, praising their weaving and acknowledging that by comparison with the men they are "quite industrious" (1922;19). Both Rutter's and Evans' judgments date from the same year, 1922, though both writers were drawing on their experiences of the country prior to the First World War. They were therefore making their observations during a period when the Bajau were struggling to adjust to vastly changing conditions under Chartered Company Rule. This may account in part for the very negative image that the Europeans held of the Bajau.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study to date is contained in Sopher's ambitious work, "The Sea Nomads" (1977) in which he attempts to give a general economic

and cultural description, by geographical area, of the modern boat nomads. Here he records brief notes on Bajau culture, origins, religion and economics. Unfortunately most of his description is constructed from late 19th century and early 20th century reports. Warren (1971) also uses this type of material to describe the principal measures taken by the Chartered Company to secure the control of the maritime Bajau of Sabah during the first 30 years of its rule. The period he describes (1878-1909) ends with the first formal scheme to relocate the Bajau in consolidated settlements ashore. Besides resettlement a system of boat registration and licensing was introduced to curtail the movement of sea-faring groups and secure their recognition of Company sovereignty, taxes were imposed and encouragement was given to the development of a cash market for local goods. Warren's study, although wholly based on European documents, provides valuable insights into how the local responses provoked by these measures and the changes which they set in motion, continue to transform Bajau society down to the present time.

More recent writings on the Bajau tend to be concentrated on the Bajau of the Sulu Archipelago.

Systematic work on the society and culture of boat people in the Sulu area was undertaken in the early 1960s as part of the Coordinated Investigation of Sulu Culture sponsored by the Ateneo Institute of Philippine Culture. They sponsored the fieldwork by a number of ethnographers including Nimmo (1965;1972a;1972b). Several years later these preliminary investigations were complemented by Sather's important work among the Bajau of Semporna. Nimmo (1972a) deals specifically with the structural changes which have occurred among a group of Bajau of southern Sulu as they have abandoned their boat-dwelling lives to become house-dwellers. His data on Bajau social organization was the first rich collection of such material for any sea nomad group. Nevertheless his account contains some astonishing omissions, (Sopher 1977). He pays very little attention to the changing technological conditions which have affected intercultural contact. It is really only in the last third of Nimmo's monograph that one meets the first casual reference in any of his works to the Bajau's ownership of outboard motors. Nothing is said about their incidence or use, and the changes in range and mobility in fishing and travelling that they have brought about. Nor is there any awareness of the powerful centripetal force that the use of motors may exert because of the dependence

on a fixed place, providing fuel and repairs, that it imposes. And as Sopher (1977) comments, what of the other agencies of cultural change that have brought a much wider world into the circle of the Bajau moorage? Sopher himself, however, does not attempt to explore these issues further in his own work.

Sather (1978;1984;1985) and Zulkifly and Sulong (1983) address a few of these important issues. Sather's articles describe how the Bajau Laut of Semporna, a maritime coastal district of southeastern Sabah, were drawn into the monetary economy, partly through the introduction of outboard, then inboard motors and wage labour, which subsequently intensified the Bajaus' dependence on the town market and encouraged more boat-dwelling Bajau to become sedentary. In his 1985 article Sather describes how, since his earlier research in 1965, the fishing economy has undergone an almost complete transformation. He attempts to show how changes in fishing organization are linked to technological innovation as well as to changes in marketing, village exchange and social structure, as fishing becomes more and more commercialized.

In their article "The Bajau in a Transitional Economy: The Bajau of Serusup", one of the only studies of the

Bajau of west coast Sabah, Zukifly and Sulong state from their preliminary observations,

"It can be seen that the Bajau community in Kampung Serusup is experiencing a rapid transformation of their economic functions as well as in general social and economic relations."

(1983:142)

They perceive this change as stemming largely from the emergence of the general process of development and economic transition of rural Sabah. They predict that,

"The continuing encroachment of especially modernization and urbanization (and urbanism) into the life of the Bajau will disintegrate the existing social and economic order as well as the conditions of life in the Bajau community as has been seen occurring in many other rural communities."

(1983:142)

The only work which makes more than just a passing reference to Bajau women is a short article by Supriya Singh, a sociologist who conducted a study of a Siminul Bajau group on the east coast of Sabah. Unfortunately apart from a short article which she contributed to the volume "Malaysian Women" (1984a) in which she gives a somewhat superficial description of the position of Bajau women in the village and "On the Sulu Sea" (1984b) an interesting book based on her fieldwork experiences, she has not published further on her research among the Bajau.

From this brief review of the Bajau literature I maintain that each of the aforementioned accounts, with the exception of Singh's work, are characterized by an ideology dictating that women's lives are relatively uninteresting or unimportant. All have treated women and their activities as virtually invisible and describe what are largely the activities and interests of men. But the social world is the creation of both female and male actors and therefore any full understanding of a society must incorporate the goals, experiences and activities of both women and men.

At this point it is necessary to explore the history of the relationship between anthropology and feminism to set my study in theoretical and historical context, before turning to an examination of the ethnography of Southeast Asian women in general.

Feminist Critiques and Theoretical Orientations: their Development in the Field of Anthropology

Since anthropology is a field that noted the existence of women long before the feminist movement of the 1970s, the mere mention of the existence of women cannot be entirely attributed to the influence of feminism. Rather, the tradition of anthropology that

includes reference to the relevance of gender in collecting and analyzing data and the current powerful feminist critique draws attention to the continued presence of a substantial number of articles and ethnographies which still do not note the existence of women at all.² These stand as eloquent testimony to the strength of male bias in the discipline and raise important questions about whether the simple noting of women in some research can be taken as a harbinger for change in an entire discipline. Furthermore, the majority of ethnographic works in anthropology that note the existence of women do not take the next step of incorporating gender into the analysis. In this chapter I do not claim to provide an exhaustive review of the relevant anthropological scholarship, rather I have chosen specific examples that I feel highlight the importance of feminist scholarship in anthropology, to provide a useful framework for understanding its development, breadth and potential and to indicate where my study stands in relation to this.

The women's liberation movement in Europe and North America sparked a new appreciation for previous research on women and brought older anthropological studies into new prominence. In fact several important works on women appeared in anthropology from the 1930s

through the 1950s such as Ruth Landes (1938) "The Ojibwa Woman", Phyllis Kaberry "Aboriginal Woman: Sacred and Profane" (1939) and "Women of the Grassfields" (1952), Rosemary Firth (1966) "Housekeeping Among Malay Peasants", and the best known, Margaret Mead's "Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies" (1935) and "Male and Female" (1953). These works were particularly exciting to the new generation of feminist anthropologists because they presented full documentation of women's lives, and particularly in the case of Mead, investigated the plasticity of gender roles.³

Then in the 1970s feminist researchers turned their attention to the observation that research assumptions are bound to influence the conclusions reached; if the questions guiding research are designed so that only male activities can provide the answers then it is difficult, if not impossible, to obtain an adequate picture of women's roles in society, the way women live and their important contributions to history and culture. Once biased assumptions are challenged new questions and answers emerge and they in turn have the potential to create the necessary conditions for a radical restructuring of research frameworks so that women are no longer pushed to the margins of academic

inquiry, where analytical concepts and frameworks have taken the male experience as the norm for humanity.

Sally Slocum's article "Woman the Gatherer: Male Bias in Anthropology" (1975) is generally acknowledged as the earliest explicit critique of the habit of taking male experience as the norm. Although she focused on the particular questions of human evolution, her goal was to reveal the subtle and profound effects of male bias on general theories of human society and how, in turn, this may be countered.

Slocum maintained that the evidence does not support the traditional anthropological theory that male hunting activity, which required increased cooperation and toolmaking, was the significant factor in the development of human communicative and organizational skills. In this theory women waited idly at home for the men to return with dinner. Isolated by their domestic roles it was generally believed that they contributed little to human evolution. This view of "man the hunter" as the critical factor in human evolution completely ignores the cooperative activities of women and thus provides a distorted view of early human life. Indeed, Slocum made a strong case that men's hunting was not the key factor in the development of human communication, rather it grew out of

cooperative patterns already developed from women's gathering activities.

The basic elements of Slocum's criticisms of male bias as it affected the study of human evolution may be applied to all the major subfields of anthropology, but this bias does not always manifest itself in the same way. In the area Slocum studied, the theory of human evolution, women had been virtually ignored and the question of female evolution reduced to marginal absurdity as a result of these assumptions. In other subfields of anthropology women have not been overlooked in the same way or to the same degree. As Dubois has noted,

"No longer do women lurk as shadows in the background of these studies. They emerge as conscious actors living full, deliberate, complex lives".

(1983:40)

Since the early 1970s there has been a growing body of feminist anthropological literature which examines women's lives and the important roles they have in society. For instance, Betty Chinas' early ethnographic study "The Isthmus Zapotecs: Women's Roles In Cultural Context" (1973) presents a useful framework for revealing women's important roles in culture and society. "Perhaps we have overlooked the 'action' of

women's roles in many cultures", she speculates, "because that action is qualitatively different from that associated with male roles" (ibid:2). To redirect attention to women she challenges the traditional anthropological assumption that in any society, "the sexes perceive their culture and their own sex's place in it essentially in the same way...and that men and women share a common culture in similar terms", (ibid:2).⁴ She argues that all societies have formalized and unformalized roles and that men generally monopolize the former, women the latter. Seen in their own terms, women's social roles become significant. In her ethnography Chinas documents women's formal roles in the family and the market as well as their informal roles as messengers, mediators and maintainers of order in Zapotec society. In her ethnography women emerge as strong actors with a sense of identity as women and a feeling of sisterhood and solidarity. Chinas posits that their social contribution is so essential that despite an ideology that assumes male dominance, Zapotec society should be viewed as one in which men and women approach equality. Other feminist anthropologists challenge the assumption that only men engage in political activities. Jane Collier in "Women and Politics" (1974) demonstrates

women's covert efforts to defend their interests in a system where they have no overt political power. This approach is developed at greater length in Margery Wolfe's (1972) work on rural Taiwan. Her study reveals how Chinese women have attained power despite a strongly male-dominated patriarchal social structure. Previous research on Chinese society interprets women as passive pawns, but Wolfe shows how women develop an influential position with their husbands and their husband's lineage by forging strong ties with their children and their power increases as their children mature. Additionally, she shows how adult women's chat or "gossip", though informal, forms an integral part of social life, and has a strong influence on the men who do not want to lose face. Thus the indubitably oppressive circumstances of traditional patriarchy are seen in a new light whereby women do not merely submit to their assigned lot but are able to manipulate their situations to their own best advantage.

The framework of women's active social agency has become virtually axiomatic in feminist anthropological research. This does more than enlarge our understanding of women, it also elicits reinterpretation of old conclusions about societies contained in ethnographies. This type of revision can

be seen in the work of Annette Weiner on the Trobriand Islanders, "Women of Value, Men of Reknown" (1976). Although Malinowski had already acknowledged that Trobriand women had high status Weiner argues that he did not seriously consider women's lives nor question male dominance. Rather he made a somewhat superficial case for women's high status without documenting its basis. Weiner's research suggests that women's power in Trobriand society is not located simply in the world of politics and economics but is derived from reproduction. Through an analysis of women's life cycles she shows the value that both sexes allocate to women which is derived from the society's respect for the regeneration of human life, and the complete control that women have in this arena. Weiner suggests that it is our own ethnocentrism and gender-blindness that prevents us from seeing this base of women's power and from accepting the complex balance of Trobriand gender relations.

Over the last two decades feminist anthropologists have also examined women's activities in the context of changing economic and political conditions in the Third World and there is now a huge body of literature on this subject. In taking this direction they are supported in the recent trend throughout anthropology

towards research that situates communities within worldwide social changes. The task of feminist anthropologists is nevertheless distinct; to take topics such as production, development, migration and so forth, traditionally associated with the "public" sphere and therefore men, and reconceptualize them so that they include women, (Brydon and Chant 1989). Development research also contributes to new conceptual frameworks used in the anthropology of women. For instance, Kate Young's (1978) study of the impact of capitalist development on the gender division of labour in Oaxaco, Mexico, shows how women's work was dramatically transformed as coffee production replaced the household manufacture of cloth. Women no longer organized their own work in the home as weavers but had to respond to the household's need for labour in the coffee harvest. In addition they lost their independent source of income for their labour in harvesting was an unremunerated contribution to the household economy. Young discovered, however, that these general changes had varying effects on women of different socio-economic classes. This type of study reorients feminist anthropology from a vague presumption of the underlying unity in the condition of women towards specific analyses that stress historical conditions and class forces.

From the beginning feminist anthropologists have been interested in exploring the determinants of women's status. "Status" has proven to be a very ambiguous, nebulous concept. Despite numerous attempts to measure women's status in many differing societies, (for example, Sanday 1974; Friedl 1975; Chafetz 1984), there is no standard definition of the term "status". Whyte (1978) concludes that the status of women is not a single phenomenon but many.⁵ This kind of research has established the complexity of women's social position and the need for a multidimensional analysis of status, which includes economic forces, social organization and ideology. Within academic feminist circles the debate continues over precisely which elements in social life are primary for determining women's status. In pursuit of clarity on these issues some scholars have shifted their framework from one which only considers women only to one which analyses patterns of gender relations and considers gender an organizing force in society; for gender hierarchy is a system of social relations between women and men which creates women's subordination and it cannot be understood by looking at women alone. Judith Shapiro (1983) argues forcefully for the necessity of this shift from studying women to the consideration of gender as a social fact. She states, "...the task before us, as I see it, is one of

making it impossible for social scientists to avoid dealing with gender in their studies of social differentiation as it is for them to avoid dealing with such things as race, class and kinship", (1983:112). Yet, many articles and ethnographies in anthropology that note the existence of women do not take the further step of incorporating gender into their analysis. The prevalence of this phenomenon in anthropology suggests that what we might be seeing is a new type of male bias, which pays lip service to the existence of women but refuses to incorporate them into the overall analytical framework of research.

Existing theories about women and gender range widely: not only is there a considerable divergence in overall approach, but there is also a notable lack of consensus within the various strands of analysis, (Brydon and Chant 1989). Feminist debates can be extremely confusing and inaccessible; Marxist-feminism, for example, contains a plethora of different points of view leading Michele Barrett (1986:8) to conclude that much of the work generated within this theoretical framework remains fragmentary and contradictory. There is also the important question of the relevance and application of Western feminist models and goals in the context of developing countries. Feminist research to

be really effective cannot be doctrinaire or based on theory that does not accord with the realities of women's lives in developing countries as seen from these women's own perspectives. Theory and practice are not separable things, rather they are in a dialectical relationship with each other. Theory should be pragmatic, practical and everyday. I believe that if feminist models of gender relations are to be applicable to Third World contexts they must prove themselves compatible with Third World women's experiences and their social and economic wellbeing as they choose to define it. As Goodman argues,

"In the articulation and elaboration of new roles for women which will be unfolding in the coming century the work of feminist thinking will be critical. The thinking which will emerge most constructively in this regard will not arise from a set of preconceived nostrums, sloganeering panaceas, readymade remedies, or atavistic reactions, but will define itself through dialogue, self-criticism, openness to diverse experience."

(1985:7)

Given the numerous standpoints in gender studies and particularly because so many of them are tied to the historical experience of Western women, I do not include a detailed overview of the current theoretical approaches to gender here nor do I draw on one conceptual framework in particular. Instead I have

taken a rather eclectic approach to this analysis and have used as much empirical data from my fieldwork as possible and synthesized the interpretations and arguments used by a wide range of authors working from quite different theoretical perspectives. If anything, however, my overall approach is pinned to the feminist paradigm outlined by Lourdes Beneria and Gita Sen (1981) in their review of the decade of research on women and development following the publication of Boserup's seminal work "Women's Role In Economic Development" (1970). Here they argue that the roots of women's oppression must be sought not only in economic structures but also in social and cultural structures, and that women's frequent loss of status in the course of economic development must be conceived in the context of an "interweaving of class relations and gender relations", (1981:288). This view is at one and the same time both precise enough and broad enough to permit me to organize and interpret a wide range of material relating to gender issues in Bajau society.

Review of the Available Literature on Women and Gender
in Southeast Asia - A Brief Regional Overview

During the 1970s, partly due to the Feminist Movement and the United Nations International Women's Decade, there was a sudden upsurge of interest in women's studies in Southeast Asia. Hing Ai Yun et al (1984) claim that before the 1970s there was a paucity of research and writings on Malaysian women, but since then a greater momentum in research activity and interest has been generated. There is now a growing body of literature on women written by both Euro-American scholars and local Southeast Asian scholars.⁶

Many earlier studies claimed that in Southeast Asia there is gender equality and that women have a relatively high status, as Penny Van Esterik points out in her introduction to a collection of essays on women of the region; "Southeast Asia has long been identified as an area where women enjoy high status", (1982:1). Heather Strange also concludes,

"...relative sex-role equality appears to be a general feature of Southeast Asian Society regardless of subsistence type."
(1981:197)

Geertz comments on Bali in a similar vein when he

notes,

"...sexual differentiation is culturally extremely played down in Bali and most activities, formal and informal, involve the participation of men and women on equal ground, commonly as linked couples. From religion, to politics, to economics, to kinship, Bali is a rather "unisex" society, a fact both its customs and its symbolism clearly express."

(1973:417-18 n4)

Many other examples of authors claiming high status for women all over Southeast Asia can be found in the literature exploring the region. Emphasizing the complementarity of the sexes, or alternatively downplaying the differences between them, is therefore common in Western commentary about gender relations in the area, insofar of course that gender is a topic of comment at all. It is then hardly surprising that in the 1930s until the 1950s several female scholars were attracted to the region: Margaret Mead in Bali from 1936-38, Rosemary Firth in Kelantan in 1939-40, Judith Djamour in Singapore in 1949-50 and Hildred Geertz in Java from 1953-54.⁷ These women were all struck by the participation of Southeast Asian women in economic life and the extent to which this afforded them autonomy, power and authority.

It is remarkable however how many studies make sweeping generalizations about the high status of women in Southeast Asia, without supplying further supporting evidence to substantiate their claims. Recently several Southeast Asian specialists have begun to question this assumption. As Van Esterik remarks,

"...when we look to Southeast Asia for documentation on women, what do we find? A delightfully refreshing cliché about the high status of women in this part of the world but very little else."

(1982:1)

Stoler concludes her study of "Class Structure and Female Autonomy in Rural Java" with the observation that,

"The simple generalization that women in Java have a relatively high position obscures fundamental differences in their shared access to and control over productive resources."

(1977:89)

Few publications focussing on women or gender in Southeast Asia exist and most concentrate on economic and development issues.⁷ The importance of women's economic contributions to the household and the nation has become a consistent theme in the work of anthropologists and economists writing about the

region. Chandra Jayawardena writes that among the Acehenese of North Sumatra, "Rice cultivation has not traditionally been regarded as the province of men" and the men admit that women know more about it, (1977:28). Boserup (1970) identifies Southeast Asian women as being actively involved in market trading and entrepreneurial activity. The entrepreneurial activities of women have also been documented by Alice Dewey in "Peasant Marketing in Java" (1962), and by Christine Szanton in "A Right to Survive: Subsistence Marketing in A Lowland Philippine Town" (1972). Rosemary Firth discusses the importance of petty trading, particularly for divorced and widowed women in rural Kelantan. A list of their activities includes,

"...the making and selling of snacks, betel-
and vegetable-selling, thread-spinning and
net-making, harvesting padi for wages, making
clothes, gutting fish for the dried fish
market and also dealing in fresh and cooked
fish."

(1966:30)

Of course trade is not always a lucrative business for the women involved; even so, it provides women with a regular income to meet immediate family needs and with a power base of sorts. Thus Stoler, writing on Java , comments that,

"...among poor households the woman's earnings provide her with an important position within the household economy".
(1977:84 emphasis in the original)

Regardless of their economic activities, women play a decisive role within the household, performing executive and managerial as well as labour functions. Commonly women handle the financial affairs of the households and act as conservers of the family wealth. Generally women can be seen shepherding resources and maximizing the worth of the household to guarantee the material welfare of the family and ultimately the community and thus they are often able to exercise considerable power. Willner, for example, notes that Javanese women are involved in and often determine transactions and obligations with respect to land, marketing, wages and harvesting in addition to everyday household matters and the welfare and care of their children, (1980:186). Further as women are assumed to be more adept than men at the management of money, they may be in a stronger position to secure loans and allow for capital expansion, (for example Strange 1980:140).

Much of the recent research on women in the region examines the effects of development. Most scholars would agree that colonialism and capitalism have restructured traditional economies in ways which have a

profound impact on women's economic activities, on the nature of the gender division of labour and on the kinds of social and political options which remain open to women, (Moore 1988:74). The penetration of capitalism into subsistence economies through the growth of commercial agriculture and wage labour is generally acknowledged as having deleterious effects on rural women. Development plans conceived during the colonial period and nurtured after independence by Western-educated elites and international aid officials, perpetuate these trends. Such generalizations however are only useful as a starting point to assess the impact of development on women in Southeast Asia.

Specific instances of women's losses with development in the region are manifold. Howell (1983) outlines how aboriginal Chewong society in Peninsular Malaysia is becoming stratified along gender lines with individual men beginning to emerge as leaders, as men rather than women were able to take advantage of new economic opportunities. Couillard (1990) argues that in pre-colonial Malay society, women enjoyed relative autonomy based on their participation as producers in the rural economy. Colonialism and the penetration of the capitalist relations of production has displaced this

relative autonomy and redefined the division of labour and distinct male-female spheres of production have been delineated. It is clear that the penetration of foreign capital, as much as mechanization, has often resulted in losses for women in the region. In Java, for instance, the importation of Coca Cola and Australian ice-cream displaced local soft drinks and ice-cream, manufactured predominantly by women, (Tinker 1976:27-28). Recent initiatives to attract foreign capital, such as the inducements offered to transnational corporations by the Malaysian Government, have provided young women with paid employment but at a price - arduous and monotonous work in poor conditions for poor wages, (for example, Ariffin 1983; Hing Ai Yun et al 1984). Economic development has in this instance had an important role to play in reinforcing women's secondary status; when they move into the wage labour force the nature of their work is often highly exploitative. Willner also suggests that women's authority has declined with industrialization and the diversification of the labour force. "When the sources of a man's income are far from the locus of his household, the wife tends to have less control over it", (Willner 1980:187).

Stoler's article "Class Structure and Female Autonomy in Rural Java" (1977) is now a classic expose of the effects of development on women in the Southeast Asian region. She provides rich detail of the ways in which women have been adversely affected by development in both trade and agriculture, although she stresses at the same time that structural changes in the colonial and present economy have not increased sex-role differentiation; rather these changes have increased the scarcity and concentration of strategic resources and adversely affected both poor women and poor men, (1977:89).

Maila Stivens (1984;1985) has demonstrated just how difficult it is to analyse the changing nature of gender relations and of women's access to resources under capitalism, in her study of the matrilineal Negri Sembilan people of West Malaysia. Most earlier accounts argued that Negri Sembilan women lost much of their land to men as a result of colonial and capitalist development, (Boserup 1970 for example). Stivens challenges this view, and asserts that women, in the villages she studied, actually hold title to almost all the ancestral rice lands and orchards and to half the smallholder rubber land, (Stivens 1985:3).

Stivens' refutation of earlier writers' accounts of the fate of Negri Sembilan women and of adat perpatih is detailed and complex. However, she begins by pointing out that, although the colonial authorities were ambivalent about Negri Sembilan matriliney, the desire to create a rice-growing peasantry in the region actually resulted in a series of legislative practices and policies which served to codify and preserve matrilineal customary law. Whilst it is true that the rubber boom in the early twentieth century brought about further changes in the economy, as peasant farmers became more involved in petty-commodity rubber production, Stivens makes it clear that cash crop rubber production did not lead directly to a loss of female property rights over land. Many new rubber land titles were registered initially in men's names, but Stivens argues the real issue is whether or not this implied the creation of a permanently male sector of ownership and a form of dual inheritance - subsistence land to women, rubber land to men. In Stivens view the evidence for this is lacking as she was able to demonstrate a considerable "feminization" of land - rubber land (women owned 61 per cent of the rubber acreage), as well as traditional rice lands and orchards. Stivens is able to cite many cases where a couple's jointly acquired land was subsequently

registered in the wife's name. In other cases daughters received land from their fathers. Stivens asked the villagers why men give land to women in a matrilineal system? Informants responses to this question all focused on women's more vulnerable position within the declining rural economy, the need to provide women with independent economic resources in case of divorce and a certain desire to protect tradition/family values associated with women and the matrilineal system. Thus, in short, Stivens argues that because of the traditional matrilineal inheritance system and the growth of petty commodity production in rubber, together with the decline in the position of the peasantry nationally, during this century more and more land has come under the control of women. In pre-colonial times Stivens suggests that there was much greater leeway in inheritance patterns and that only with colonial codification of the law has the feminization of land taken place.

The case which Stivens describes for Negri Sembilan is complex, but one of the most useful parts of her argument is her challenge to earlier accounts which reduced the impact of colonialism and capitalist development on women's land rights to a picture of men gaining individually and personally at the expense of

women, through colonial gender ideology. Stivens makes it clear that the significance of women's property relations and their access to resources within the rural economy can only be understood by analysing such relations historically, and by showing how gender relations and other social relations inform, and are affected by, the complex, contradictory and uneven processes of capitalist transformation. This kind of analysis is undoubtedly an advance on earlier studies which sometimes tended to portray women as victims of the processes of transformation of the rural economy.

Very few studies with the notable exceptions of Stivens (1985) and Stoler (1977) relate the topic of "women" to contemporary feminist and anthropological theories. Even fewer approach the topic as an issue of "gender" (as opposed to "women") that is, as a cultural system of practices and symbols implicating both women and men. Sadly, as yet, there has been almost no notable research undertaken on gender relations in East Malaysia. The recent publication of "Female and Male in Borneo" edited by Sutlive (1991) for the Borneo Research Council is an attempt to remedy this. The papers in this collection examine gender relations in indigenous Borneo societies. Although most of the

papers are fragmentary and inconclusive, it is hoped that they will stimulate further research on this much neglected area. Several unpublished MA theses exist on gender relations in Sarawak, almost all concentrating on the Iban people. One interesting example is Hew Cheng Sim's (1990) thesis examining how gender relations amongst the Iban have been affected by agrarian changes in Batang Ai largely as a result of the siting of a hydroelectric dam project in the area. She describes how the transfer of subsistence hill rice farmers to a resettlement scheme where cash crops are cultivated on a plantation basis have altered Iban gender relations, leading to a situation where the position of women has largely worsened as control over productive resources has shifted to men.⁸

However, to date there is a complete dearth of material on gender relations among any of the ethnic groups in Sabah. The published material on the Bajau, as previously mentioned, makes passing reference to women; information relating to women is hidden away in footnotes and parenthesis. This survey of the available literature on both the Bajau and on gender studies in Borneo and Malaysia in general reveals important deficiencies that need to be remedied. It is hoped that this thesis, with its emphasis on Bajau

gender relations, will make a contribution to these much neglected research areas.

Footnotes:

1 The various spellings of "Bajau" found in the literature include, Bajao, Badjao, Badjaw, and Badjau. I have adopted the spelling "Bajau" because it is phonemically more correct and it is in keeping with the standardized spelling currently used throughout Sabah.

2 I am, of course, not the first to make this observation (see Moore 1988; Stacey 1988). Marilyn Strathearn in particular has written a series of articles on the subject (1987; 1989; 1990).

3 Judith Okely (1991:3) outlines the intellectual rewards to be gained from looking again at our "intellectual mothers and great-aunts", in her re-examination of Phyllis Kaberry's work. She observes that, "Many of the questions raised by Kaberry's work fall straight into current debates within both feminist and general anthropology", (ibid:3).

4 Edwin Ardener (1975) also recognized the significance of male bias for the development of theory in social anthropology. He suggested that men and women have different worldviews or models of society and that anthropologists who are either males or females trained in a male-oriented discipline have a bias towards the kinds of models that male informants provide rather than towards any that women may provide.

5 Whyte's (1975) cluster analysis of fifty-two variables produced nine loosely correlated dimensions of the status of women. Similarly Chafetz (1984) identifies eleven conceptual dimensions of status, with the caveat that the list is not exhaustive.

6 Much of the published literature on gender issues by Malaysian scholars tends to take the form of general overviews utilising national statistics rather than being based on village level data and case studies, that is, they tend to deal with macro rather than micro level issues (eg Hing & Talib 1986; Nik Safiah Karim 1989; Arrifin 1992).

7 It is interesting to note, however, that each of the women mentioned here went to the region either as husband and wife teams or with male partners.

8 Collections which do study women in Southeast Asia include Barbara Ward's (1963) edited volume, Esterik (1982), Manderson (1983) and Chandler, Sullivan and Branson's (1988) collection on women and development. Each of these illustrate the stunning social, cultural, religious and political diversity in the region.

9 Another example is Komanyi's (1972) PhD thesis in which she makes the rather dubious claim that Iban women enjoy parity with men.

SECTION ONE
CHAPTER THREE

STUDYING BAJAU GENDER RELATIONS: RESEARCH DESIGN AND
FIELDWORK METHODS

In order to understand the impact of socio-economic change on people's lives, to assess transformations in gender relations and to gain useful insights into how Bajau women themselves view these changes one first must have a complex and rich sense of people's experiences. Attempting to gain such insights I employed a number of research techniques which probed for information at different levels of experience. The types of material collected whilst in the community and the way in which they are presented here were largely determined by the methods employed during the fieldwork process. A combination of "participant observation", interviews, life history, household survey and a time utilization survey were used.¹

The Hallowed Practice of Participant Observation

In "Argonauts of the Western Pacific" (1922) Malinowski was the first to outline the technique which has come to be known as "participant observation". It involves

living with the community or group that is to be studied and joining in their activities and social life as much as possible. However I find the use of the phrase participant observation highly problematic. As Sharma correctly points out, it has tended to foster the illusion that the total social process has been observed when nothing of the sort has really taken place. With reference to her work in rural India she notes,

"For a start there is one vital respect in which participant observation is seldom complete; the anthropologist cannot participate fully in a rural society since he or she never relies entirely on agricultural production for a living as most villagers do. The anthropologist may become a ritual sister to the headman and be invited to feasts and domestic ceremonial, but will never participate more than superficially in the productive process which sustains all these other activities, so has to study a central institution from the outside."

(Sharma 1986:32-33)

Thus it is with reservations that I employ the phrase participant observation to describe my fieldwork technique. Rather than launching into a discussion of participant observation in abstract terms I feel that it would be much more useful to provide my theoretical standpoint on the writing up of fieldwork experiences followed by a discussion of a few of the concrete problems I encountered whilst living in the Bajau

village which influenced the ways in which my research was conducted.

Due to the influence of "postmodernism"² which has become fashionable in academic circles few anthropologists now subscribe to the vision of the transcendent anthropologist who effaces his or her personality from ethnography, but surprisingly the public revelation of participatory details of fieldwork experience is still considered unprofessional by some anthropologists. As Paul Rabinow explains,

"As graduate students we are told that 'anthropology equals experience'; you are not an anthropologist until you have experience of doing it. But when one returns from the field the opposite immediately applies; anthropology is not the experiences which made you an initiate, but only the objective data you have brought back."
(1977:10)

In the past a common way of dealing with personal fieldwork experiences was simply to exclude them from the published account as though the material had been collected by impersonal methods, with no relationship between the "observer" and the "observed". The only context deemed appropriate for the revelation of such experiences was as amusing anecdotes to entertain dinner guests. As James Clifford notes in his

introduction to the volume "Writing Culture" at best the author's personal voice is viewed as a "style in the weak sense; a tone, or embellishment of the facts", (1986:13). Devereux goes even further when he describes the suppression of personal experience in anthropological works as a professional defence mechanism, producing "scientific (?) results which smell of the morgue and are almost irrelevant in terms of living reality", (1967:97). Whilst few anthropologists have written about fieldwork as personal experience personal narratives are not entirely unknown. Malinowski kept a diary but, as is often pointed out, it was certainly never intended for publication. Other writers take care to distance themselves from the work by using a pseudonym, the best known example being Laura Bohannan's highly acclaimed "Return to Laughter" (1954) published under the name Elenore Smith Bowen. Furthermore, although the self-reflexive fieldwork account has slowly emerged as a subgenre of anthropological writing, these works are usually preceded by a "formal" ethnography, for instance Paul Rabinow published his standard, distanced ethnographic monograph "Symbolic Domination" (1975) before his first person fieldwork account "Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco" (1977). One of the principal reasons for this is, as Mary Pratt explains,

"...the formal ethnography is the one that counts as professional capital and as authoritative representation. The personal narratives are often deemed self-indulgent, trivial or heretical in other ways."

(1986:31)

What is needed then is a recognition that fieldwork is a personal experience and that these experiences be accepted in ethnographic writing. Feminist writers have long insisted that personal experiences cannot be invalidated or rejected and should become explicitly present in our work, as these experiences are central to the research process. As Barbara Tedlock has recently noted,

"Just as writing for and about the feminist movement by feminist scholars has provided a dynamic public sphere within which these ideas can be discussed in both a politically and personally engaging manner, so writing for and about the ethnographic community in which one has lived and worked at length should produce engaged writing centring on the ongoing dialectical political-personal relationship between Self and Other."

(1991:81)

Throughout this thesis I write in the first person for not only is it in keeping with the principles and beliefs inherent in the feminist movement but it seems to me the best way of sharing the sheer vibrancy and colour of Bajau life that I encountered.

Living Fieldwork

"People are strange when you're a stranger."
(The Doors)

The time I spent in the Bajau village was filled with a curious mixture of elation, depression, pleasure and confusion. I respected the villagers and liked them but there were also moments when I was irritated and even enraged by them. The nature of Bajau society is such that as a young single woman it would have been impossible for me to live alone in the village. Living with a family made possible relatively unobtrusive but continuous observation of daily activities and interpersonal behaviour, and participation in all sorts of conversations. Although I owe the family who "adopted" me an enormous debt of gratitude, this living arrangement brought with it a host of unexpected problems. I soon learned that privacy counts for very little in Bajau society. People simply do not understand why anyone would want to be alone. I began to appreciate the truth of Jean Duvignaud's comment,

"For the most part, the village yields itself to the investigator and often he is the one to take refuge in concealment."
(1970:217)

Being the first foreigner to reside in the village, crowds of people tended to gather wherever I went and I was to be the object of close scrutiny for months. Everyone was intensely interested in my possessions which were taken out and examined almost daily by the female members of my household. I came to loathe sitting, surrounded by villagers discussing me, my appearance, my eating habits and so on. Later the feelings of claustrophobia would become so intense that I would invent "official" errands so that I could escape from the village for a few hours.

In the first few weeks there were battles to be fought. My adoptive family feared for my personal safety and therefore decided that I should not leave the house unescorted and preferably surrounded by a bodyguard of several young men - far from ideal conditions for conducting fieldwork. It took a great deal of patient persuasion on my part for them to finally agree to let me leave the house unaccompanied, though even up until the time of my final departure I had to inform them always exactly where I was going and what time I would be back. Many times I was accused of "makan angin", a rather delightful phrase which can be literally translated as "eating the wind". What I regarded as

work, visiting and talking to people, collecting data, looked suspiciously to them like aimless wandering around. These restrictions on my movements were a constant source of frustration and severely dented the image I had of myself as an independent woman and researcher. So many things I had previously taken for granted were constantly being questioned and renegotiated throughout the fieldwork period. I stumbled through the first few months wondering if I would ever get used to it all, and the villagers used to me. Madan perceptively describes fieldwork as the act or feat of "living intimately with strangers". He explains,

"It is the dualism inherent in this situation which yields understanding. The anthropologist is an outsider trying to become an insider to understand what the insiders do and how they make sense of it."
(1975:147)

I never made the mistake of thinking I was totally accepted within the village, despite the close kinship terms by which I was addressed - I was, and remained, an outsider - but the villagers' acceptance of my presence did allow me a close look at some of the more intimate and personal aspects of their lives. I formed close friendships with several of the women there and

feel that on reflection they accepted me as much as they could accept any stranger.

Interviewing

All discussions and interviews were carried out in both Bahasa Malaysia and Bajau.³ People were usually interviewed in their own homes, but in some cases the workplace provided a more convenient venue. Some women preferred to be interviewed in the company of female kin who were also to be interviewed and this often led to lively group discussions. Not all conversations were taped: in several cases people preferred not to be recorded and in other instances taping proved impossible due to the level of background noise.

I decided to use "guided" interviews rather than conducting structured interviews, and therefore elected not to use a formal questionnaire. The unstructured format - letting the villagers speak for themselves - has a major advantage over the question and answer format of questionnaires and survey methods which predetermine the topics addressed. It also has the advantage of providing respondents with the chance to shape the content of the conversation.

This style of interviewing inevitably meant that I was asked many questions about myself. Fieldwork methodology textbooks are filled with cunning strategies on how to avoid precisely this. In Measor's opinion,

"In a research relationship one presents a particular "front", or a particular self. My own view is that it is important to "come over" as very sweet and trustworthy but ultimately rather bland."
(1985:62)

And again in Sjoberg and Nett,

"Never provide the interviewee with any formal indication of the interviewer's beliefs and values. If the informant poses a question...parry it."
(1968:62)

But do we really want the flow of information to be one way? I think not. Those interviewed were entitled to ask me questions about my life and about my research as they attempted to clarify their own understanding of my presence. The practice I followed was to answer all personal questions as honestly as possible.

The fact that I interviewed men as well as women represents a methodological decision which I consider important. Initially I had planned to interview women only, but quickly realized that a combination of female

and male interviewees would be much more productive in the process of attaining information on gender relations. It is understandable why some feminist researchers insist on surveying women only with the noble concern to right the imbalance in data available on women as opposed to men. However in this case I felt that male respondents allow useful and often illuminating comparisons between the views of women and men on the topics discussed within this study. Thus, although much of the information presented here is from the female perspective, I have endeavoured throughout to correlate the data obtained from both sexes. Originally I had anticipated that my age and sex would restrict my freedom to ask men questions but was surprised by the openness of many of them who showed great willingness to be interviewed. As an outsider I was able to establish "neutral" roles vis-a-vis men in ways in which few female members of Bajau society could.

I employed one additional, rather unconventional, interview technique for eliciting information, namely, the use of tarot cards. I certainly had not planned to use these cards as a fieldwork tool having taken them to Sabah purely for my own recreational purposes. On one of her many perusals of my belongings my adoptive

mother, Wan, discovered them in my rucksack. Her curiosity was immediately aroused and she inquired what they were. On discovering their use she pressed me to "tengoh nasib" (look at the future) for her. Not wishing to offend her I duly complied. News of these "magical" cards quickly spread throughout the village and before long there was a queue of people at my door asking for a reading. Rather than using the cards for predictive purposes I decided that they might prove a useful and entertaining method of probing the personal lives of the villagers.⁴ It enabled me to uncover the most compelling problems of people's lives as they openly discussed the issues which were uppermost in their minds. Mothers came to me with their fears for their children's futures; will my son ever get a job, will my daughter find a suitable marriage partner in the near future? Wives expressed their worries about their husbands suspected infidelities; is my husband seeing other women, will he want to take a second wife? Men also came to discuss their conflicts with in-laws, relationship difficulties with their spouses and a host of other problems. In this way I was able to quickly establish a rapport with villagers and probe their personal lives and fears for their own and their children's futures. I gained invaluable insights into intra-household dynamics which otherwise may have

proved difficult, if not impossible, to obtain. Other anthropologists have utilized a host of other unusual rapport-building tools such as performing simple magic tricks or playing a musical instrument and I strongly believe that such methods should not be discounted for they play an important part in establishing oneself within a community.

Life Histories

During my research with the Bajau I faced the problem of reconstructing the history of a people with no written history. Attempts to piece together their history from scant European records did not prove very fruitful, particularly since women's lives were rarely documented. As I consider gender relations an integral part of any historical analysis of a people, I elected to use oral life history methods to elicit information on this neglected area.

One of the great strengths of the life history method is that it enables the narrators to shape their own history, even when their views contradict the assumptions of historians.⁵ It has the potential to generate full documents about women's lives, whose experiences are absent from the historical record. I discovered that individual life histories proved

significant in filling a number of the gaps in the Bajau community's undocumented past, and in the process, directed my research along new paths leading me to reconsider certain areas of research. Jean Stubbs arguing forcefully for the usefulness of life history, even for quantitative-oriented social scientists, explains,

"The dynamic two-way process of eliciting/telling/recording a life story not only helps clarify conceptual issues: it can pinpoint factual as well as attitudinal questions that need to be asked, and indicate what information is relevant, and what conditions would be conducive to obtaining reliable information. In short, it can shed light on both the unquantifiable, substantive and normative, in often unexpected ways."
(1984:34)

During the process of conducting interviews and in casual conversation I met many Bajau people with colourful, illuminating and often very moving life stories, a number of whom volunteered a great deal of information about themselves and their lives. A number of these people were selected and asked to narrate their life stories, which were recorded in their own homes. The life stories were recorded in the latter part of the fieldwork period when I felt that the villagers were less inhibited by my presence and I knew a great deal more about the community. As with informal interviews some narrators preferred to have

others present and this occasionally proved useful in jogging the narrator's memory.

My purpose was not only to collect and record individual life stories, but also to use these as a basis for reconstructing the history of the community. Each oral history was treated as an historical document, taking into account the gender and socio-economic position of each narrator and how this may affect their accounts. I also had to consider how my presence may have affected the information received and the ways in which I translated the narrator's stories. After translating the life stories I juxtaposed all stories with one another to identify any emerging patterns or contradictions. These were subsequently checked with other sources such as the European historical documents and labour statistics. Contradictions frequently emerged but most of these, I believe, are mainly due to the complexities of village life rather than deliberate attempts to deceive or faulty memories on the part of narrators.

In the process of narrating their life stories informants constantly compared past and present conditions and this often led them to begin to articulate their needs and problems that they are

currently encountering. This in turn proved invaluable in gauging their assessment of and reactions to socio-economic change as they themselves were experiencing it

Time Utilization Survey

I conducted a time utilization survey of ninety villagers, comprised of forty women and forty men from susah (poor) households and five men and five women from sederhana (relatively comfortable) households. This sample corresponds roughly to the socio-economic class structure of the village. Collecting data on how people utilize their time is notoriously difficult. Some of the main problems involved are summarized by Dixon-Mueller,

"...respondents lack of awareness of time on the clock, inevitable trouble with estimation and recall, deciding when one activity ends and another begins...the fact that people are sometimes asked to report as 'proxies' on what other members are doing, and so on."
(1985:36)

I particularly found the difficulties of collecting time use data from women compounded by the greater likelihood of them doing several things at once, for instance, combining childcare with household production. Some of these problems were minimized by using a combination of direct "random instants" observation and interviews incorporating the sequential recall method.⁶

Direct observation is an extremely time-consuming method of time-use data collection. It involves following individuals around all day, recording the nature and duration of their activities. Peluso (1979) accompanied eight female Javanese market traders for five consecutive days each in order to obtain details of their routines. Following people around in this manner is clearly intrusive, requiring a great deal of patience and cooperation on the part of the observer and observed alike (Dixon-Mueller:1985). In order to minimize the risk of annoying villagers I elected to use the technique of "random instants" observation developed by Johnson (1975), that is, making frequent but brief random spot checks of the activities of each household member.⁷ With this method several household members are inevitably missed but with a large number of such quick visits composite estimates can be created of typical patterns of time use for each household member. Furthermore, interviews with household members absent during parts of the day were necessary to fill in the observational gaps. I found this method particularly useful for obtaining information on time use for household members of my own house cluster and section of the village as it was accepted as normal for me to pop in and out of their homes without formality

The sequential recall method is much quicker than direct observation. It involves asking respondents to remember everything they did the preceding day, from the moment of waking until going to bed. All activities are noted with an estimate of the time of day so that the entire waking hours are accounted for. Some allowance must of course be made for under and over estimation, but the restriction of the recall period to just twenty-four hours should have minimized error.⁸ I asked each person to report on his or her own activities with some cross checking with other respondents or by direct observation. When this was not possible certain household members were asked to report on others, but I never asked the men to estimate their womenfolks' activities as I feared that this would lead to considerable under estimation on the part of the men as to how much time women spent in productive work, (see Anker 1983). Further details of my use of the time utilization survey can be found later on in Chapter 8.

Footnotes:

¹ After an initial household survey to familiarize myself with the village and to introduce myself to everyone, I started a series of interviews with both female and male villagers. Life histories and the time utilization survey took place at a later stage when I was more familiar with the community, and they with me.

² I use the term "postmodernism" with some trepidation as it has proven so ambiguous and means many different things to different people. As I

understand the term postmodernism is a deconstruction of modernism and rejects homogeneous, monolithic, omnipotent ideologies.

3 The sedentary Bajau of Kg Mengkabong have long been acculturated by contact with the Malays. That they have acquired numerous Malay cultural and linguistic traits explains the fact that many of the Bajau terms I use in this thesis are the same as, or very similar to, Malay terms. Everyone except the very old is fluent in the national language, Bahasa Malaysia. A combination of both Bajau, "ling Sama", and Bahasa Malaysia is spoken in the village. On arrival in the village my command of Bahasa Malaysia was inadequate but within a few months I was able to converse quite easily in both Bahasa Malaysia and Bajau.

4 The use of "fortune-telling" techniques is not alien to Bajau culture. Bomohs (magico-medical practioners) are frequently consulted on various matters of importance such as the suitability of potential marriage partners and the divination of the best dates for the performance of rites such as the launching of a new fishing boat. On one occasion I had not returned to the village after a trip to Jakarta on the date that I was expected so a bomoh was consulted and after meditating over a bowl of water he was able to reassure my worried friends that I was safe and sound.

5 This is especially important when, as in the case of Sabah, most historical accounts have been written by white, European male historians.

6 It must however be noted that the time-use data I collected is rather imprecise, but it does provide a general picture of the work patterns of village women and men.

7 Johnson (1975:303) successfully used this method to study time use in a Machinguenga community in the Amazon. I adapted the method for use in Kg Mengkabong.

8 Many researchers appear to agree that the use of recall periods longer than twenty-four hours does not yield reliable results (see Asia Society 1978).

SECTION TWO

INTRODUCTION: DYNAMICS OF THE BAJAU HOUSEHOLD

This section focuses on the household for two important reasons. Firstly, anthropologists generally consider the household to be the most important social, economic and ritual group in Borneo societies, and the Bajau are no exception to this. King observes,

"Obviously, the presence of households is not a positive defining characteristic of bilateral social organization or of a Bornean type of society exclusively, since most societies have them; but in the absence of an overall descent group structure the hallmark of studies on Bornean peoples has been the detailed analysis of the composition, characteristics, functions and developmental cycle of these units."

(King 1978:13)

In Kg Mengkabong each household is an autonomous unit which is responsible for its own food supply. It is the basic unit of production, acquisition, consumption and distribution of goods, and is regarded by the Bajau themselves as the most significant unit in their society.

Secondly, the household is a particularly important unit for analysis as it represents the primary site for the restructuring of gender relations in Bajau society. Olivia Harris observes generally, and in relation to women that,

"The English term household denotes an institution whose primary feature is co-residence; it is overwhelmingly assumed that people who live together within a single space, however that is socially defined, share in the tasks of day-to-day servicing of human beings, including consumption, and organize the reproduction of the next generation. Co-residence implies a special kind of intimacy, a fusing of physiological functions, or a real distinction from other types of social relations which can be portrayed as more amenable to analysis. It is undoubtedly the case that whether or not it coincides with a family of procreation, household organization is fundamental to ideologies of womanhood, and that households are in material terms the context for much of women's lives."

(1981:52)

Whilst there is some understandable resistance amongst some feminist researchers to using the household as a framework to study women, seeing the danger of stereotyping women as homemakers, I feel that is a potential source of new insights into women's part in socio-economic change. Households are crucial in feminist analysis as they organize a large part of women's lives and labour. As a result the composition and organization of households have a direct impact on women's lives and in particular on their ability to gain access to labour and to income. The household is both the origin and destination for the labour and resources of its members. It is the primary living unit in Bajau society where people are reproduced and

nurtured, the base from which individuals participate in the whole range of tasks and activities that shape and change a community. The household is therefore a critical unit for analysis of gender roles and relations and is the focal point for the gender division of labour.

This section is therefore concerned primarily with the range of social organization which constrains or otherwise affects Bajau gender relations at both the household and community level. It is also intended as a background matrix for the subsequent sections which deal with changes in the gender division of labour and women's roles in the Sabah economy. I consider first the characteristics and composition of the household with particular reference to the principles and significance of the kinship system as it affects the Bajau household in Chapter 4. The next chapter, Chapter 5, contains a detailed analysis of marriage as the process by which households are formed. This is followed in Chapter 6 by a detailed examination of the social relations within the household. The final chapter in this section analyses the significance of the kinship system beyond the household, looking at wider forms of social organization, that is, extra-household relations.

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER FOUR

THE HOUSEHOLD, KINSHIP AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE MATRIKIN

Feminist anthropologists have demonstrated that even in the realm of kinship, where one might expect to find an emphasis on gender relations, women have often remained "invisible", (Moore 1988:132). Kinship relations, particularly where they are examined in terms of their role in political and jural structures, can turn out to be the study of kin-based links between men, and women are considered merely one of the mechanisms for establishing those links. An important aspect of Bajau kinship which is ignored in the literature is the female-centredness in household organization and close kin ties. Sather (1971; 1978), for instance, in his analysis of the Bajau kinship system largely ignores women, especially as independent social actors, due to his overt focus on men and male concerns. In his work kinship relations are defined solely in terms of relationships between men. This chapter will show however that Bajau kinship although basically cognatic is strongly female-centred.

King has claimed that kinship is not the most important principle for the formation of social groupings in many

Borneo societies. He proposes that residential propinquity is a more important factor and that bilateral societies lacking corporate descent groups "may be expected to permit greater emphasis on choice in cooperating with kinsmen and generally lay less restraint on kinship relations", (1978:12). However in Bajau social organization kinship is more important than King proposes for Borneo societies as a whole. The norms which orient household composition are those of kinship ideology, and kinship can be viewed as a fundamental principle of social organization in Bajau society. Kin relations structure marriage and procreation, the inheritance of property and the economic and ideological reproduction of the labour force. Traditionally they also played a significant part in structuring the organization of labour in production. Although the kin basis of the general organization of labour has been eroded by the introduction of the cash economy, fishing crews are still predominantly recruited through kinship, and the decline of the kin-based unit as a productive unit does not automatically undermine the strength of kin ties, hence kinship is a crucial consideration in Bajau society.

THE WEB OF KINSHIP

In Kg Mengkabong kinship relations are ordered on several important principles - bilaterality, distance, generation, seniority, and gender - and these form the structural basis for Bajau family life.

Kinship is traced bilaterally, the kin of the mother and father, at least ideologically, being regarded with equal importance. Similar terms of address are applied to both sets of relatives. The inclusion of these two sets of relatives in the same terminological category also means that there is significant similarity in the customary behaviour due to both. But, as we shall see, in everyday social intercourse relations with matrilineal kin are stressed.

The concept of distance is important in Bajau kinship. In Kg Mengkabong the Bajau refer to their circle of blood relatives as dinakan. Each group of full siblings (adik-beradik) has a unique circle of kin or kindred, although the ego-centred kindreds of those who are not full siblings overlap and intersect. The kindred endures only for the life-span of the individual whose transient needs it serves. Dinakan in its widest sense includes the whole village as everyone within it is said to be related. Non-kin are referred

to as orang lain. Villagers state "Tidak ada orang lain di sini, semua orang dinakan", (There are no strangers here, everyone is related). The range of kindred among the Bajau varies from individual to individual, but exact genealogical relationships are not commonly known beyond second or third cousins (duapupu and tigapupu respectively). There appears to be no matrilineal or patrilineal bias in the knowledge of precise genealogical relationships. Dinakan are further distinguished as dinakan sekot (close relatives) and dinakan toh (distant relatives). Dinakan sekot include the members of a person's nuclear family, grandparents, grandchildren, great grandparents and great grandchildren, siblings' children, siblings of parents and their offspring. Having the closest ties of kinship dinakan sekot occupy the most important place in a Bajau's life, and are those to which he or she has the greatest obligations. The dinakan toh, consisting of all other blood relatives outside the circle of dinakan sekot, are by comparison of less importance.

A person's behaviour, responsibilities or obligations towards their circle of kin is not only determined by the closeness of kinship ties, but also by the principles of generation, seniority and gender. Among

the Bajau the young are expected to defer to their elders and look after them in their old age, whilst seniors are expected to take responsibility for the welfare of juniors. Older folks should not be addressed by their personal names but by a set of terms which indicate generational relationship, seniority and gender. The second ascending generation are called nenek moyang without regard to sex, or, ma to'oh for males and yang to'oh for females. In the first ascending generation bapa or pak refers to father and mak or sometimes ya to mother. Babo is used for mother's sister and father's sister, whilst bapa is used for mother's brother and father's brother. Kakak is applied to older female relatives of the same generation and abang to older male relatives of the same generation. Those of the second descending generation are referred to as cucu regardless of sex. It is acceptable for older relatives to address younger ones by their personal names, otherwise the term adik is used. Table 4.1 below lists these consanguineal kinship terms.

Table 4.1 Bajau Consanguineal Kin Terms

<u>BAJAU CONSANGUINEAL KIN TERMS</u>		
	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Address</u>
MM, FM	nenek or yang to'oh	nenek or yang
MF, FF	nenek or ma to'oh	nenek or ma
M	emak or mak	mak or ya
F	bapa	bapa or pak
MZ, FZ	babu	babu
MB, FB	bapa	bapa
D	anak perempuan	name of the child
S	anak laki-laki	name of the child
eZ	kakak	kakak or kakak and name
eB	abang	abang or abang and name
yZ or yB	adik	adik or name
Step father	bapa tiri	bapa or pak
Step mother	emak tiri	emak or mak
Step child	anak tiri	name
MBD, MBS, FBD	sepupu	if older and male
MZD, MZS, FBS		abang and name;if older and female, kakak and name;if younger, female or male, name
FZD, FZS		
DS, SS, DD, SD	cucu	name
second cousin	duapupu	as for sepupu
third cousin	tigapupu	as for sepupu

Adoption

Full adoption is rare in the village, unless the child is orphaned. More frequent is the practice of "borrowing", an arrangement by which a child is temporarily cared for by kinspeople of the parents. In some cases the parental surrogate takes over the complete care of the child and the relationship becomes permanent. The Bajau do not make any terminological

distinction between the two. In both instances the adopted child is referred to as anak angkat, (literally "lifted up or carried child"). The terms anak angkat, bapa angkat (adoptive father) and emak angkat (adoptive mother) are more generally employed as a way of designating a special bond and of incorporating someone who is not connected to one through an actual biological relationship into one's family. In this way I was "adopted" by a Bajau family and incorporated into the village community for in Bajau society everyone needs a family and kinship connections.

It is generally held that it is better to place a child in the care of a female relative rather than a male relative, and to a matrilateral relative than a patrilateral one. It is the women who care for children therefore if the child is not a blood relative of the woman who is caring for it, it is felt that she may not give it the same care as she would her own children. The "borrowing" of a child by its mother's sister is seen as the most satisfactory arrangement within the kampong.¹ Villagers state that they would never consider giving their child to non-relatives (orang lain). The adoption network is therefore predominantly matrilateral and rarely goes beyond the social boundaries of the village.

Adoption occurs for various reasons. After the death of its parents an orphaned child is normally taken in by relatives. The babies of unmarried mothers are usually given in adoption to a female relative to raise. Childless women, women whose children have already reached adulthood, or those regarded as having too few children (usually less than three) are generally regarded as potential adopters. Persistent failure to procreate is often imputed to the wife. A woman can only become a full member of the community when she becomes a mother, so a childless couple may ask their siblings for one of their children to raise. Childless couples are pitied and so their request to "borrow" a child is often complied with.

If a child is habitually unwell a bomoh may prescribe a temporary change in parents to see if this aids the child's recovery. If a woman has only given birth to short-lived babies, a subsequent child is sometimes given away to a woman endowed with healthy children. In one case, a village woman had given birth to twelve children. The seven male babies had grown up healthily into adolescence and adulthood, whilst each of her female children had died in infancy. When she became pregnant again, and gave birth to her sixth daughter,

the midwife (bidan) suggested that the child be adopted by the mother's sister who lived in another part of the village. It was felt that this woman emanated a strong vital force (semangat) of which a weak child (possessing low semangat) would benefit once it was placed under her protection. The baby girl went to live with her maternal aunt and grew into a healthy young woman.

It is interesting to note that in the vast majority of cases the child given in adoption is female. For practical reasons a female child is often desired to help with household tasks. King (1985) describes a similar practice amongst the Maloh of West Kalimantan. He explains,

"Girls were preferred for adoption. Daughters were considered a greater asset than sons because they helped in domestic chores and were less likely to travel and leave their parents."

(1985:115)

Massard (1988:104) also notes that in Malay communities in Pahang adoption usually involves the transfer of female children between females.² Similarly, adoption in Bajau society tends to be a predominantly female sphere: the women are the givers and receivers of the

adoptive children and the majority of the adopted children are also female.

Affines

The Bajau make a distinction between relatives by marriage and blood relatives. There is no general all encompassing term for relatives-in-law, but the term dinakan ipar is often used, particularly with reference to relatives by marriage in ego's generation. Djamour (1965), in her classic study of Singapore Malay kinship, writes that an affinal relationship is entirely based on a particular marriage and if that marriage is dissolved the affinal link is automatically severed. The high rate of divorce may then account for the lack of precision in labelling affinal relatives. This may also be the case in the Bajau context. In general the Bajau apply the principle that one should treat one's spouse's relatives as if they were one's own and use the same kinship terms of address as one's spouse uses. Below, Table 4.2 represents Bajau affinal terms.

Table 4.2 Bajau Affinal Terms

<u>BAJAU AFFINAL TERMS</u>		
	<u>Reference</u>	<u>Address</u>
W	bini or isteri	name
H	Laki or swami	name
WM, HM	Emak mentua	emak or mak
WF, HF	Bapa mentua	Bapa or pak
DH, SW	anak mentua	name
Spouse's	ipar	as for own
siblings		
siblings		

Fictive Kinship

Relationship terms for kin and affines are extended to include unrelated individuals in a variety of contexts. The most important use of fictive kinship occurs within the village. Kinship terms of address and reference are used reciprocally in the same manner as between real kin. In this sense almost all the women in the village will be fictive sisters, daughters and aunts to each other even when no known relationship can be traced within their families. Similarly, all village men are viewed as brothers, sons and uncles to each other. Only on the most formal occasions, such as the determination of marriageability, will the real nature of such kinship ties be closely examined. The use of kinship terms between unrelated villagers is primarily oriented towards social relations operating in day-to-day interaction within the village. Villagers all

become kinspeople because the rights and duties between villagers are expressed in the idiom of kinship. As Crain (1970) explains with reference to his work among the Lun Dayeh,

"While a certain social cohesiveness may exist between villagers as residents of a territorial entity such as a village, the values of living and working together are expressed in terms of kinship sentiment."
(1970:106)

A second form of fictive kinship used by Bajau villagers is what is often termed "courtesy" kinship. This involves the extension of kinship terms as a matter of politeness to any person whom one meets in the course of everyday activities. It includes the use of parental terms of address as honorifics in speaking to an individual of a senior generation. As a stranger residing in the village there was considerable confusion over how I should be addressed. After much debate amongst the villagers it was finally decided that the English term "sister" would be the most appropriate whilst my adoptive parents preferred to address me by my name, Jean. The practice of temporary adoption and the use of fictive kinship terms of address indicates the flexibility in kinship reckoning since unrelated individuals can in this way be incorporated into one's family and kinship networks.

Rethinking Bajau Kinship

Although I stated above that the Bajau system of kinship is bilateral this situation is complicated by several factors: formal family law is Islamic, which stresses the male side, on the other hand many Bajau customary laws and traditions embody principles of gender equality. For instance, under Islamic law daughters inherit half of the amount that male children receive, the argument being that a woman will be supported by her husband, a view that ignores the realities of village life. When survivors include a widow she receives one quarter of her husband's estate if there are no children, and one-eighth if there are. Bajau adat practices however modify Islamic law in this case. Inheritance in the village is bilateral with sons and daughters inheriting equally. There is however a general understanding that the parental house will be inherited by one of the daughters.

Another important factor is the degree of female-centredness in Bajau household organization and kinship relations. Post-marital residence is uxorilocal with the husband moving into his wife's natal household. The husband is therefore an outsider, with women forming the core of local groups. In everyday social

and economic activities relations with matrilateral kin are stressed. Social scientists have frequently labelled female centred kinship patterns "matrifocal" (Smith 1973; Tanner 1974).³ Smith (1973) coined the term to describe an underlying pattern in which women were the focus of relationships in both male- and female-headed households. It now has wider connotations, being used to describe various situations of female-centredness in kin relations. The common features of woman-centred kin patterns have been well documented. They include women playing a central, if not dominant, role in kin relationships, a strong sense of female kinship solidarity, frequent interaction among female kin, strong geographical and sometimes economic concentrations of female kin and considerable material and other aid flowing through female links (Stivens 1985:179).

Let us now examine Bajau social organization in some detail to determine the degree of female-centredness.

Household Composition

Usually a household, referred to as dapur meaning "kitchen" or "hearth" or occasionally as umahtangga, is usually the same as a group of people who live in a house, but sometimes there are two or more households

sharing the same living space.⁴ Within the village there are a range of possible domestic arrangements, with different degrees and areas of sharing, from shared budgets (makan sekali, eating together) to separate budgets (makan suku, eating separately) with other forms of intermediate arrangements. For the purposes of this analysis I have adopted White's definition of households according to whether the individuals concerned cook and eat together signifying "a general though not necessary total pooling of day-to-day resources, work opportunities and social obligations, even though the individuals concerned may retain separate control of landholdings and other forms of wealth", (White 1976:217). Using this criterion has the practical advantage that it is also used by the villagers of Kg Mengkabong. Although polygyny is permitted it is rare; when it does occur the household of each of the wives is usually separate and therefore each is very much similar in pattern to a monogamous household.

Table 4.3 below reveals that the extended family is the primary unit of Bajau social organization.⁵ A survey of one hundred households revealed that in Kg Mengkabong households range in size from seven to twenty-nine persons, the average being thirteen. There

are no one person households in the kampong; everyone prefers to live with kin for company and support. Anyone living alone would be viewed as very odd indeed.

Table 4.3 Variations in Household Composition in Kg Mengkabong	
<u>Household Composition Type</u>	<u>Number</u>
Nuclear	9
Sibling group	1
Matrikin	67
Patrikin	16
Both Matrikin and Patrikin	7
Others	0
TOTAL	100

Table 4.3, however, gives no indication of the internal dynamics of households and the developmental cycle of expansion, dispersal, fission and replacement. Bajau households are in a continual process of change, as children are born, marry, leave or bring a spouse to join the household. Other changes occur as various single adults attach themselves for a while or as children of kinsfolk stay for a few years or so before returning to the household of their own parents. The general outline of the development cycle of a Bajau household does not differ significantly from the usual Bornean norm, which King describes as follows,

"There is a desire on the part of married couples to achieve independence during their lifetime and apart from one child, who is usually charged with the care of the ageing parents, most married children set up independent residence and establish a separate household."

(King 1978:14)

The Bajau make the eventual partition from the natal household as late as possible. Newly-wed couples do not establish a household of their own. The husband comes to live in the household already established by the bride's parents and composed of the bride's mother and father, married sisters and their husbands and children, the bride's unmarried sisters and certain of her unmarried brothers. The composition of such a household can vary considerably from instance to instance and can alter radically in a short period of time. A household established on this uxorilocal pattern is frequently depleted by factors, such as death, to the extent that what starts as such a household may come to resemble a second residence pattern, the nuclear family household. A married couple, when their finances permit, some years after marriage may build a house of their own. Sather relates a similar pattern for east coast Bajau groups,

"It is only after a number of years, when the pair has established their own family of procreation, and their eldest children have reached, or are approaching marriageable age, that the couple are likely to secede from the parental household..."

(Sather 1978:180)

Several informants told me that it would be a source of considerable shame to the bride's family if the newly married couple did not reside with them as it would imply some degree of inadequacy on the part of the parents. The couple usually build their new home adjacent to the woman's natal home if space permits. This household in turn, through the accretion of kin - a widowed mother, an unmarried woman from the mother's house, infant nephews and nieces - can come through time to resemble the extended family pattern.

In Kg Mengkabong there is, as yet, no sign that the extended family unit is increasingly breaking up into nuclear households as has been shown to be the case amongst other Malaysian communities as a result of socio-economic development. On the other hand it is clear that amongst the young there is a growing sense of individualism. Whether, in the future, this will translate into a desire to break away from the extended family, with the myriad obligations and responsibilities it entails, remains to be seen.

House Clusters

In Kg Mengkabong groups of houses form clusters which are identifiable as blocks of kin. These clusters are termed "kumpulan rumah", literally, "collection of houses". Not every house forms part of a cluster, a few stand alone, but the vast majority do. Figure 3 below provides a diagrammatic representation of four such house clusters in Kg Mengkabong.

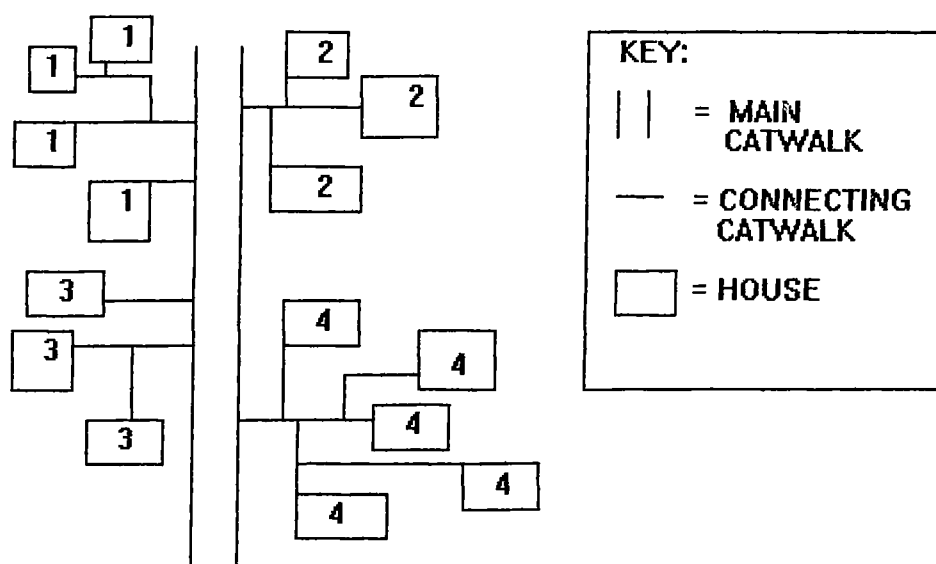


Fig 3 : Diagrammatic Representation of Four House Clusters in One Section of the Village

Table 4.4 below shows that the largest cluster in my survey consisted of ten households; the smallest contained just three households.

Table 4.4 Composition of House Clusters in Kg Mengkabong

	<u>Number of Clusters</u>	<u>Number of Households</u>
	2	3
	2	4
	1	5
	4	6
	2	7
	3	8
	1	9
	1	10
TOTAL	16	100

The formation of clusters is directly linked to household partition. Most often a house cluster is composed of people who at one time lived in the same house. When a household undergoes partition the members who secede often build next to the original household, therefore forming a group. The composition of a cluster is also determined by the space available for building houses. As matrikin predominate at the household level, it is often the tie with female kin which is important in determining where a couple build there new house. This is clearly shown in Table 4.5.

<u>Table 4.5 Type of Kin Relationship in House Clusters</u>		
<u>Type of Relationship</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percentage</u>
Matrikin	11	69
Patrikin	1	6
Both	4	25
Distant Relatives	0	0
Non-Relatives	0	0
TOTAL	16	100

Almost 70 per cent of the house clusters surveyed have only female links connecting them. These clusters are formed around groups of consanguineally related women and their families. Therefore matrikin can be seen to predominate at both household and cluster levels of social organization. A detailed analysis of house clusters and extra-household relationships can be found in Chapter 7.

Conclusion

The above discussion indicates the continuing importance of family and kinship in Bajau life. The Bajau continue to conceptualize their social universe largely in terms of kinship and links through matrikin play a special role in their interpretation and articulation of social bonds. As we have seen it is with their matrikin that a person forms the closest kinship ties. Uxorilocality, besides constituting an essential building block in the kin-based economy, also produces certain social patterns which are especially important in the lives of Bajau women. Crucially, it results in a particular household formation that increases the influence and autonomy of women by placing them in the central positions in household structure and also by providing a female support group

to help each woman meet various emotional, social and practical needs.

Whilst in Kg Mengkabong there is, as yet, no sign that the extended family unit is breaking down into nuclear family units as has shown to be the case amongst other Malaysian communities as a result of socio-economic development, it is clear that there is a growing sense of individualism amongst the young. Whether this translates into a desire to break away from the extended family structure remains to be seen.

Footnotes:

1 Hildred Geertz (1961:40-41) observes that in Indonesia there is a similar preference for giving a child to a female relative, particularly the mother's sister. Judith Djamour (1965:93) states that amongst Singapore Malays grandparents frequently bring up children. Josiane Massard (1988:104) notes that grandparents and mother's sisters are the preferred adopters of children in Malay communities in Pahang and Janet Carsten (1991:432) reports similar findings for Malay communities in Pulau Langkawi.

2 Carsten (1991:432) notes that in Pulau Langkawi roughly equal numbers of female and male children are brought up by kin other than their biological parents, though she noticed that there was a slight imbalance in favour of girls.

3 There are problems however with the use of this term. As Sivens point out the use of the term "matrifocal" to describe female-centred patterns of social organization is problematic because it "suggests a narrow concern with women as mothers and confuses

domestic groups with kin structures", (1985:179). For this reason I prefer to use the term "female-centred".

4 It appears to be common amongst Malay communities for a household to be defined as those who cook and eat together. For instance, Carsten writes in reference to the Malays of Pulau Langkawi "To a great extent shared cooking and consumption create the shared substance that is at the heart of kinship and co-residence", (1991:427).

5 The term elementary family or nuclear family refers to the grouping of parents and their children. "An extended family is any persistent kin grouping of persons related by descent, marriage or adoption which is wider than the elementary family in that it characteristically spans three generations from grandparents to grandchildren" (Rosser and Harris 1965:84).

6 It should be noted however that in a few cases male charisma may be a contributing factor in house cluster formation. If a headman is particularly wealthy or powerful his daughters may be seen to be especially desirable to young men and their families may endeavour to forge alliances with these headmen through marriage. In these few rare instances there is the possibility of house clusters forming around these powerful men.

7 Sather (1985:180-181) also identifies house clusters amongst Bajau communities in Semporna, east Sabah, which are essentially localized kindred-based groups known as ba'anan. He does not however examine the principles upon which such clusters are formed and thus does not comment on whether it is male or female kinship links which are important in the formation of these groupings.

8 McAllister (1987) describes the growing importance of the nuclear family, as opposed to the extended family household, in Negri Sembilan, Peninsular Malaysia, as a result of capitalist development. This is consistent with the historical development of capitalism in the West. In Western Europe the rise of industrial capitalism helped to further break down the extended family households that remained after the earlier transition from kin-based to class-stratified feudal societies (for example, Tilly and Scott 1978).

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER FIVE

SOCIAL RELATIONS WITHIN THE BAJAU HOUSEHOLD: WOMEN AS WIVES, MOTHERS, SISTERS AND DAUGHTERS

"I think that anthropologists have been over reliant on their informants' own stereotyped accounts of relations within the household and village. An enumeration of cultural expectations and roles prescribed for women's relationships with the various members of the household does not provide a full or reliable map of women's social experience."

(Sharma 1986:154)

Bajau social relations within the household are an interesting area of study largely because of the contrasting, and at times contradictory, relationships which are involved in household organization. A given relationship can involve dominance, submission, solidarity or division. Through time such factors can replace each other as the most important element in a given relationship.

In this chapter I will be discussing the following:

- the concept of family honour
- relations between husband and wife
- mother-daughter ties
- sister-sister ties

Both female and male are qualitatively distinct entities in Bajau thought. This gender differentiation

in Bajau society is commonly expressed in terms of morality. Their code of morality is often explained in terms of men's greater rationality and self-control (akal) and women's greater susceptibility to lust (nafsu) (see Table 5.1). Females are easily lead into temptation so to control their sensuality it is necessary for men, through their greater strength and judgment, to control the vulnerable females. The mechanisms most commonly used to establish control over female sensuality are behavioural restrictions on women and a degree of sexual segregation. Sexual ideology symbolically fortifies and justifies male dominance.¹ This conception implies a view of inherent female weakness/vulnerability which calls for masculine control/protection. These views are accepted by the women; they work as mystifications (Dwyer 1978).

Table 5.1	FEMALE AND MALE QUALITIES
<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>MALE</u>
sensual weak easily tempted emotional	sensual strong self-control reasoning

The treatment of a Bajau woman varies during the course of her lifecycle and centres on her relationship to sex and reproduction. Little girls are given some freedom,

they can run around naked within the house and play with boys of similar age, but the nearer they approach puberty the more they are restricted and kept from contact with males. From puberty until menopause women are viewed as sexual, sensual beings who must be protected from their baser instincts. At the onset of the menopause women are no longer assumed to be sexual. Post-menopausal women can therefore mix more freely with men and can express their opinions and views on subjects much more easily.

One of the key values in Bajau society is that of honour and family honour depends most critically on the modest, chaste and discrete sexual conduct of women as daughters, sisters and wives. Honour is a basic social principle, and a family's reputation and standing in the community depend on its vigilant maintenance. It is this principle of honour which structures Bajau gender relations and is the guiding principle behind the behavioural restrictions on Bajau women. A basic aspect of a man's role is that of guardianship of his womenfolks' virtue. By extension all village men are responsible for the moral status of all village women. Women are the guardians of male honour and because of this they themselves must be guarded. This applies to all village women, but it applies most strongly to

young unmarried women who are perceived as most likely to threaten the purity of family honour. The importance of honour as a key principle explains why males accept full responsibility for their daughters, wives and sisters, both morally and economically. The economic, the material and the cultural are all combined here.

Masculinity depends largely on a man's economic power and on his moral and Islamic authority over the women in his household. In exerting this control men receive judicial and religious support. Islamic emphasis on female chastity imposes restrictions more rigorously on young unmarried women than on unmarried males, although promiscuity in either sex is heavily criticised. A daughter's public behaviour is judged much more stringently than a son's actions. A boy over sixteen years may absent himself from home for a day, and even overnight, without informing his parents. Such behaviour is unthinkable for a young woman. If a young girl is seen chatting to a boy who is not a close relative both will be criticised for impropriety but she will be most heavily criticised for having no sense of shame (tidak malu) as the case study below illustrates.

Zarinah a 15 year old single woman in the kampong had become friendly with one of the young fisherman from a neighbouring house cluster. During the day he was out fishing and she was kept busy caring for her younger siblings. The only opportunity they had to meet was at dusk when he played volleyball with his friends in the community hall. They arranged to meet there secretly several times a week. When her maternal aunt discovered them talking together one evening she was extremely angry and dragged the weeping Zarinah home where she reported the incident to Zarinah's parents who promptly confined her to the home at all times. Zarinah's improper behaviour then became the subject of much malicious gossip within her house cluster. "What a wicked, lustful (gatal) girl. How dare she bring such disgrace to her poor parents. That one will become pregnant before long. The girl has no shame", fumed one elderly relative. There were no such comments expressed about the behaviour of Zarinah's boyfriend.

Unmarried women and men are forbidden from associating with one another except when they are strictly supervised by relatives. Most young women will have several "boyfriends" before marriage but most of these relationships preclude any form of physical contact. After finishing their schooling, when there is much less opportunity for social mixing between the sexes, much of their (illicit) communication takes the form of smuggled love letters which are kept carefully hidden in books and under linoleum mats. Younger siblings are persuaded or bribed with snacks to deliver these missives.

It is not only young single women who are viewed as a potential danger to the honour of the household.

Widows and divorcees (janda) are considered both vulnerable and dangerous by both men and women. Many married women in particular see young divorcees as a threat to their marriages for once a woman has been divorced she can move around much more freely than she could before marriage and her behaviour in the presence of men tends to be more relaxed. She is viewed as a sensual being with considerable sexual experience on the prowl for a new husband by other women and, to a lesser extent, by men as well.

Sanctions against adultery permit sexual intercourse between spouses only. As Aihwa Ong comments, "This did not prevent premarital or extramarital sex, but the Islamic ban on khalwat (illicit sex outside wedlock) made having affairs a risky business", (1990:262). The villagers prefer to deal with such matters themselves rather than involve the Islamic court which they feel would bring shame to the entire community. If an unmarried couple are found to be having an illicit affair they are usually compelled to marry as soon as possible. There were several such marriages whilst I was in the village. I was told that in the past the couple would have been severely beaten and in extreme

cases put to death, either bound together and dispatched with a spear through both or tied up and drowned in the river, but I was unable to obtain specific details of actual cases.

Relations Between Husband and Wife: The Ideology and the Reality

"The male is defined as the head of the family within Islam: his age superiority buttresses his position."

(Strange 1985:107)

Within the Bajau social structure a woman's place is traditionally determined by two factors, adat and Islam. Under Islam mutual respect and cooperation between a husband and wife are emphasized, but, "Men have authority over women because Allah has made one superior to the other and because they spend their wealth to maintain them" (The Koran Surah 2:24). Under Bajau adat, as well as Islam, men are placed over women with the recognition of the husband as head of the household. The rule of respect for seniors tends to reinforce the position of the husband. Villagers in Kg Mengkabong laugh at a couple where the wife is older than her husband. It rarely happens that a man marries an older woman since this would create an internal contradiction in the relationship between husband and wife.

A married woman is expected to be obedient to her husband. In both private and public she is expected to defer to him in all matters. A woman is also required to ask her husband's permission before absenting herself from the home. He, however, does not have to account for himself and his movements. At the level of ideals, five levels of accountability and five levels of authority can be discerned within the Bajau extended family structure. Household members are ranked by both gender and generation. Figure 1 below illustrates this ideal pattern.

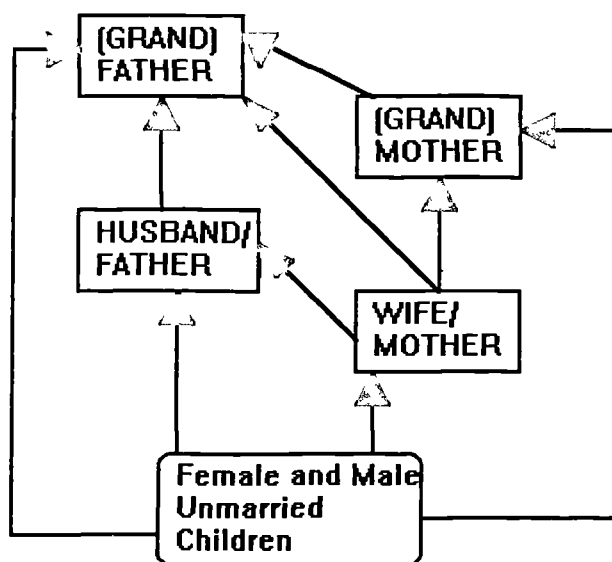


Fig. 1 Ideal model of accountability, hierarchically ranked in order of authority with grandfather at the top.

In practice, within the Bajau system the wife is in a very important position within the household. Her husband's status in the household is conferred largely

by her. She is the connecting link between her father and her husband. The husband is usually in the position of living in the shadow of his wife's father. Often there is a great deal of mediating for her to do since her father and her husband have interests which may frequently be opposed to one another. The son-in-law is eager to take control and the father-in-law is reluctant to relinquish it. There is no relationship of long standing as there would be between father and son to ease the conflict since the son-in-law joins the household when the daughter is an adult, and nowadays more and more by her choice. The effect of this is to give the woman an important voice in the management of household life, a position of power which comes from her place in the structure of the household. Thus the specific type of structure has the effect of increasing the importance of women, even though formal authority is vested in men. It can be argued that the practice of uxori-local residence is crucial in reinforcing the high degree of female decision-making power and esteem characteristic in Bajau society.²

Whilst married women are supposed to be obedient to their husbands at the same time they assume most of the responsibility for managing their households. Their economic and social responsibilities take them out into

the community, the market and workplace and it would be highly impractical for them to seek their husband's permission each time they wished to leave the home. In addition women commonly act as treasurers of the household's wealth, and often contribute money in their own right.³ Furthermore, husbands and wives share in family decision-making informally consulting each other on major decisions or each making minor decisions on their own. Women possess a high degree of decision-making power within the household concerning such matters as the raising and education of their children, household expenditures and purchases, the planning of celebrations and the economic choices of household members. The existence of the substantial female support group in which a woman is embedded due to Bajau social organisation is clearly important in allowing women both to exercise their influence in family matters and to enjoy a fair degree of personal freedom. Thus the ideal of obedience to the husband is balanced by the real responsibilities that a woman has which encourage her independence of action. Figure 2 below shows us the real levels of accountability and authority within the Bajau household. In Figure 2, in contrast to the "ideal" model presented in Figure 1, household members are ranked by generation only.

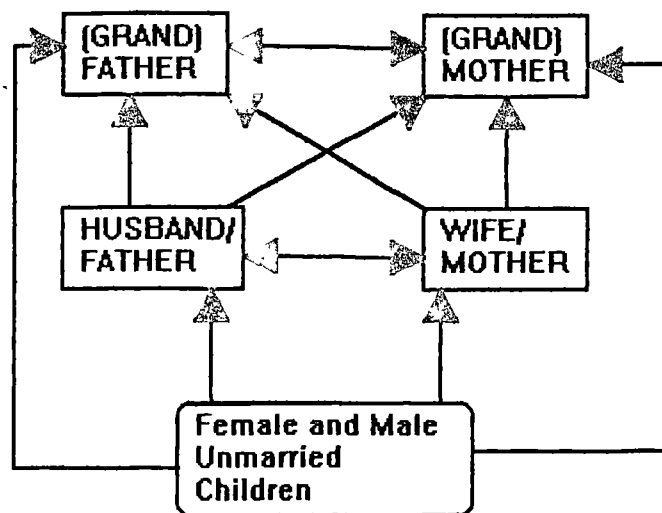


Fig. 2 model of real levels of accountability and authority within Bajau households.

It should be noted that the husband-wife relationship on a day-to-day basis is not as formalised as may appear from the above discussion. Whilst a couple have rights, obligations and duties to each other this does not preclude strong affective feelings from developing. Whilst it is considered improper to be demonstrative in public, couples can often be seen showing small signs of affection for one another within the home. Others enjoy joking with and teasing one another.

Sexual Relations between Husbands and Wives

Initially I was rather surprised to discover that within many Bajau households sex is a fairly frequent topic of conversation. Women can often be heard

discussing their sexual problems whilst preparing the evening meal. Even in mixed company, if those present are closely related, sexual matters are discussed and joked about quite openly without the prudery and embarrassment that I had anticipated. Occasionally they will employ euphemisms to refer to sexual matters but this is rarely an attempt to veil the topic in obscurity, rather they use them to inject humour into the conversation.

Adolescent Bajau women and men are informed about sex by their parents and older relatives, mothers and aunts educating females, and fathers and uncles educating males. This sex education takes the form of gender differentiated "secret" knowledge which is imparted over a period of several months to all over the age of around 16. Young women are taught how to ritually bathe themselves after sex, how to keep themselves attractive for their husbands, how to sexually please their husbands and how, through magical means, to prevent their husbands from straying. Although I was unable to collect much detail on the secret knowledge imparted to young men I was told that it is similar in nature to that of the women. It should be remembered however that adolescents are expected to refrain from sexual intercourse until marriage.⁴

For the first few weeks following the wedding ceremony it is expected that the newly-married couple will refrain from any sexual contact. It would be very unseemly for them to have sexual intercourse during this period. The wife is supposed to rebuff each of her husbands attempts to touch her. Often she will insist that he sleep on the floor for the first week or so. After this initial period the man will gently coax his new wife into allowing him first to sleep in the bed with her and then to have sexual intercourse. A couple both in their late 30s described to me their first few weeks of married life.

"The first night we were awake most of the night talking to our wedding guests", Sarinah explained. "At about 5 am I crept into the bridal chamber and fell asleep. When I woke up at 9 am Harun was sleeping on the floor beside the bed. This continued for the first eight nights or so. The second week Harun slept in the bed with me and we slept back to back at opposite ends of the bed. We didn't touch at all. I lay awake shivering most nights, frightened that he would lay his hands on me." "You were frightened!" her husband, Harun, interjected. "I was terrified. It took over three weeks before I plucked up enough courage to even touch her. I was also worried that she would scream and wake everyone in the house. I was just as sexually inexperienced and embarrassed as she was."

Some new brides resist their husband's advances for up to two or three months, but if the marriage goes unconsummated for much longer than this both sets of

parents will put pressure on the couple. If the wife continues to resist there is the possibility that the marriage will be annulled. It is rare for this to happen but if it does the couple have the option of either remarrying by staging the akhad nikah ceremony again or separating permanently.

After the first child is born, the couple have very little privacy or time alone together. Sexual activity tends to be brief due to the crowded nature of most households. Children sleep on mats adjacent to their parents so any sexual activity tends to be furtive and silent. They must take advantage of the moment before a sleeping household member awakens to ruin the opportunity. Partners rarely see each other naked. The husband will crawl under his wife's sarong when they decide to make love. Either partner may initiate intercourse. Several couples complained to me that their sex lives were unsatisfactory, unfulfilling, and for the women, often painful due to the lack of foreplay.⁵ A wife has the right to sexual attention from her husband but has no right to withhold sex except when menstruating or pregnant. Likewise the husband has the right to sexual attention from his wife and will be criticised if he refuses her sexual demands. If either partner refuses their spouse sexual

intercourse for a prolonged period it is considered grounds for complaint, and possibly separation and divorce, indicating the importance placed on sexual relations within marriage in Bajau society.

Gender Inequalities Within Marriage: Divorce and Polygyny

Two practices which have far-reaching effects on Bajau family structure and husband-wife relations are polygyny and divorce. Both practices are ones over which women have very little, if any control. Every Bajau woman is aware of the possibility that her husband may take another wife, or divorce her with relative ease. According to Strange,

"This awareness can affect the way in which a married woman relates to her husband and other women, and fosters her perception of young divorcees as dangerous competition...it is the possibilities, the potentials, as much as local instances of divorce and polygyny that affect a woman's thinking and behaviour."

(1981:139-140)

Polygyny

As Muslims, Bajau men may take as many as four wives at once. The Koran states, "You may marry two, three, or four wives, but not more" (Surah 4:3). Muslim women however are required to be monogamous. This is an important area of gender inequality. Polygyny can no

longer be exercised on the husband's discretion. There must be a written application with justifications to the Syariah court followed by a court hearing in the presence of both parties and with prior written permission from the Syariah judge. It is important to note however that although failure to comply with this procedure is punishable by law this does not invalidate polygynous marriages outside the court.

In Kg Mengkabong polygynous marriages are extremely rare. In the three cases of polygynous marriages I came across the men were currently living with only one of their wives, in one instance with the first wife and in two cases with the second wife (referred to by the condescending term madu, literally "honey"). In the first case the reason given for the husband having taken another wife was that his first wife could no longer bear children. In the two other cases the men had become attracted to younger women.⁶ A fourth, and highly unusual, case of polygynous marriage occurred whilst I was living in the village. A young man with the highly appropriate nickname "Playboy" had been conducting illicit sexual relationships with two of the young village women. This was only discovered when both women became pregnant and named him as the father. After the initial uproar two separate weddings were

arranged several weeks apart, the woman who was visibly further on in her pregnancy becoming the first wife.

One need not look far to find explanations for why polygyny is found so rarely in practice. In the first place, generally only a relatively wealthy man can afford to have more than one wife. A polygynous man must not only pay a marriage settlement for each wife he marries, but he also has the added expense of providing for more than one wife, and more than likely, an increased number of children.

In the second place, whilst the Koran allows a man more than one wife, it also places stipulations on polygynous marriage: it states that if "a man cannot deal equitably and justly with more than one wife, he shall marry only one" (Surah 4:3). This verse has been interpreted to mean that co-wives must be treated equally by their husbands, an injunction which is very difficult to live up to in practice. For a man to divide his time, income, concern and affections absolutely equally between his wives is almost impossible. One first wife in the village had to suffer the humiliation and indignity of sending her youngest child around to the second wife's home to ask for money every month. This was because the husband

often failed to deliver her share of his earnings, without which she was unable to support her children.

In addition to the economic burdens and possible social pressures involved in taking another wife, a man cannot overlook the possible interference of his first wife with his plans. None of the women I interviewed spoke positively about polygyny. Although an unwilling first wife may be eventually forced to accept an additional marriage, there are strategies she can use both to discourage it and to render it problematic if it occurs.

Samillah, a mother of seven, had been married to her husband, Din, for 15 years when she learned that he planned to take a second wife, a young divorcee from a neighbouring village. The wedding went ahead with very little ceremony. Samillah was furious with him, but even more so with the other woman who she declared had used magical means to steal her husband.⁷ As well as having to deal with Samillah's anger, he also had to deal with the obvious disapproval of his mother, Samillah's close relatives and his older children. He was also being pressurised by his second wife to divorce Samillah. He refused fearing the outrage of his kin who were very fond of Samillah. After several months, being part of this triangular relationship became so disruptive that Din divorced his second wife and returned to live full-time with Samillah.

While Samillah was criticised by a few who felt that it was her duty to accept her husband's right to take more than one wife, the majority of women I spoke with admired her for the stand she had taken against her co-

wife. When questioned young women in particular often said that they would rather press their husbands for a divorce than accept their husbands taking other wives. For these reasons divorce and remarriage are frequently seen by men as the more attractive option should they wish to take a new wife.

Divorce

The Bajau place high value on harmony and balance in their personal relationships. Raybeck considers that values of interpersonal and village harmony to be important ideological contributors to divorce in Malay communities; although tension and feelings of animosity usually result from a divorce, they are short-lived, while bad feelings between married persons continue to promote tension among their kin and in the village generally, (1974). In Bajau society divorce is often considered preferable to an unhappy marriage for similar reasons.

In the past, theoretically, according to Muslim law a Muslim woman could not dissolve a marriage, only a man could, but in practice it was usually quite easy for a woman to pressurize her husband into divorcing her. The grounds for divorce are now more stringent for a husband wishing to divorce his wife. It has been made

more difficult by the setting up of the Syariah court to which all petitions must be addressed and divorces are granted only after some reconciliatory efforts have been made. Although divorce is more highly regulated through legally defined procedures, as in the case of polygynous marriages, divorces which take place outside the court are not invalidated. Although women have been known to appeal successfully against their husbands' divorce petitions, the fact is that many kampong women have neither the information nor necessary support and resources to do so. Muslim women can seek the services of the Marriage, Divorce and Reconciliation Division within the Administration of Syariah Law Department (MUIS) who provide advice, counselling and assistance in filing papers to the Syariah Court including claims for maintenance and property. Unfortunately this service is only available in the capital, Kota Kinabalu, and very few rural women are even aware of its existence. The grounds upon which a woman can apply for an order for the dissolution of marriage (fasakh) are outlined in Appendix 2.

The majority of divorces appear to take place during the early years of a first marriage, the most common reason given being incompatibility. Those who have

been married longer state jealousy, arguing, barrenness of the wife (fertility problems in a marriage are almost always blamed on the female partner) and the desire to marry someone else as reasons for petitioning for divorce. Almost all divorces in the kampong were initiated by men, but it is unclear in how many of these cases the wife manipulated her husband into divorcing her.

Under Islamic law a woman at the time of divorce retains any property she owned prior to marriage. Property acquired during marriage is supposed to be divided equitably. Many villagers own very little in the way of joint property so in reality there is nothing to divide. This is particularly true in the case of young couples whose parents are still alive. They have inherited nothing and will have been unable to accumulate much capital or property during their brief marriage. Women's property rights have become more problematic since many men have entered wage employment and argue that any property acquired using their earned income is their own property and not the couple's joint property.

Should a woman be divorced her husband must support her for a short time. The Koran states, "For divorced

women maintenance should be provided on a reasonable scale. This is a duty for the righteous", (Surah 2:241). The husband is responsible for his wife's support for a limited period only, immediately after separation - three months and ten days or three menstrual cycles (the iddah period). During this time the woman may not remarry and if she is found to be pregnant during the iddah period the child is the responsibility of the husband. Under Islamic law a mother is given custody of a daughter until puberty and a son until he is seven. Then custody of both is given to the father. Contrary to this, in practice in Kg Mengkabong children generally live with the mother after divorce. The husband is required to contribute something to the support of his children while they are young and can be forced to do so by the officials if he is financially capable, though many of the women to whom I talked were unaware of this. The economic burden of supporting children normally falls on the mother and her kin.

I will now turn to relationships between women within the household, concentrating on the two most important ones, namely mother-daughter ties and sister-sister

relationships. In previous research on the Bajau kinship relations among Bajau women have not been examined, but this study will show that there are clear indications of the importance of these relationships for women. The following two chapters examine these relationships in greater depth.

The social world of adult women in the kampong is largely encompassed by their everyday interactions at work, in the home and community and their interactions with their own and husband's kin. Women generally have few friends (kawan-kawan) who are non-kin. Within the village the concept of "friendship" among men is more distinctly recognized than the idea of friendship amongst women, the main reason being that men are usually more mobile. Men are more likely to leave the village to work and socialize and hence form friendships with people totally unrelated to them. Even men who fish in kin-based groups have greater opportunities to meet people outside their circle of kin than their womenfolk as these men have greater freedom to move about in public. Women seem much less likely to form friendships not already subsumed under the category of kin. They therefore spend most of their working and leisure time with female kin with the

result that interactions with other female relatives are of prime importance in Bajau women's lives.

The Mother-Daughter Relationship

Because of the social segregation of the sexes in Bajau society it is not surprising that the mother-daughter relationship is a crucial one. It is the first relationship which a woman has with another woman. Mothers in Bajau society are expected to be warm and caring, and fathers authoritarian and distant. The closeness of these mother-daughter ties makes women especially desire a daughter. Many women expressed the preference for a daughter, followed by a son and so forth, which they expressed as atur bunga (flower arranging). Children of both sexes are therefore wanted and loved, and daughters are valued as much as sons.

The mother-daughter tie is of great importance to women as a source of support and protection. Women in the village expressed concern that my mother was not with me; there was no concern on their part that none of my male kin were with me. To be alone without one's womenfolk was clearly the greatest disaster which could befall any woman.

Ideal behaviour for her future roles as wife and mother is inculcated in a girl during her early years. She learns, through being a daughter and sister, appropriate behaviour and her gender role. A young girl learns about child care and how to perform household chores through watching and helping her mother. She is taught by her mother to be dutiful, self-effacing and modest. If a young woman is a hard worker her mother will be credited, but if she is lazy or clumsy it is assumed that her mother was remiss in training her.

Daughters often depend on their mothers and other uterine kin for protection against the actions of males. As will become evident in the course of this study women together can form a phalanx which is effective in manipulating or thwarting the actions of men. Sometimes a mother will turn a blind eye to visits in the afternoon by her daughter's friends. For instance,

When Aminah's father was out fishing her male friend, Toh, would call round in the afternoon to chat with her through the open window of her neighbour's house. Although their conversations were conducted under the watchful eye of Aminah's mother, her father was not told. Aminah knew that if her father were aware of their conversations she

would be forbidden to continue her relationship with Toh.

Thus mothers often help their daughters in practical ways to avoid their father's control. Mothers are likewise a major source of support for their married daughters when conflicts with husbands occur.

While, as might be expected, the mother-daughter relationship is largely one of dependence by the daughter on the mother we also find elements of dependence by the mother on the daughter. A mother, for example, relies on her daughter, as the males of the family do, to maintain the family honour through the adherence to the moral code. If the daughter breaks the moral code, the mother will share in the general family shame. It is a mother's duty to train all of her children to behave properly, but she is most concerned with how her daughters act. As we have seen a family's women bear its honour. She also depends particularly on her eldest daughter to take care of younger siblings and perform household chores.

In addition, the Bajau, as we have seen, have a bilateral kinship system and uxorilocal residence so on marriage the household retains the daughter's labour and income and gains the labour and income of her

husband. Whilst sons will move out of the parental home on marriage at least one daughter will remain at home to support her elderly parents. By providing her family with household help and by assuring her parents of her care for them in old age, a daughter is no less valued than a son.

Female family relationships remain intimate throughout a woman's lifetime. Because of the long and close cooperation involved, the mother-daughter tie is deeper and more relaxed than the father-daughter one, and even that between mother-son.

Sister-Sister Relationships

A woman's relationship with her sisters is often one of supportive affection, but because it is seen to have no structural significance it has often been neglected by anthropologists in their accounts of family relationships. The relationship between sisters is not marked by any formal ritual celebration. It is however a source of important emotional and practical support for many of the kampong women. Carsten (1991) also recognizes the importance of the sister-sister bond in the Malay community in Pulau Langkawi when she notes,

"Siblings are expected to render each other aid and remain close through life and this is especially clear in the warm, affectionate relations that obtain between adult sisters."
(ibid:427)

The sister-sister relationship may generally be described as one of mutual aid. Elder sisters are instrumental in teaching their younger sisters household skills such as food preparation and sewing and they help one another with their household responsibilities. Sisters usually have a very informal relationship. As young women's mobility is restricted a young girl tends to spend a great deal of her leisure time in the home in the company of her sisters. One young woman expressed a common sentiment when she told me, "I would be very lonely without my sisters. Who would I laugh and joke with if I did not have them?". Young boys tend not to have the same close relationship with their brothers. Their movements are not restricted and so they are more able to spend their time with other friends.

Whilst the sister-sister relationship can generally be characterized by solidarity and cooperation, occasionally there is conflict between sisters if both are married and residing in their parental home.⁸ In

this situation there can be hostility between the sisters' husbands who compete for household resources and space and protest if they feel that the other is receiving preferential treatment. Any quarrelling between their husbands tends to affect social relations between sisters. The resultant changes in the sister-sister relationship from intense solidarity to hostility are linked to the dissolution of family unity and the imminent onset of partition. At this point one of the couples may decide to leave and build a new house. It is usually, but by no means always, the elder sister who departs with her husband and children. Once the source of conflict has been removed sisters are then able to resume their close relationships.

Arrindah and her husband Tebin lived relatively harmoniously with her elderly parents, unmarried brothers and sisters and their two small children until one of her younger sisters Onoy, married Tuanis, a fisherman from a neighbouring kampong. Tebin was furious that he and Arrindah along with their two children had to move out of their sleeping quarters to make way for the newly-wed couple. The house was far too small to make any further divisions for a new bedchamber and it is customary for a newly married couple to have a degree of privacy at least for the first few months of married life. Tebin was also jealous of all the attention that Onoy and her husband were attracting in the house cluster. As Tuanis was a newcomer from another village the other members of the household and other relatives made quite a fuss over him to ensure that he felt welcome in his new home. This was compounded by the fact that Tuanis was a very gregarious, charming young man and much more likeable than the rather sullen Tebin. Tebin's constant

grumbling about his brother-in-law began to generate considerable tension in the household and this clearly affected the relationship between his wife and her younger sister. Whilst Arrindah was initially annoyed at her husband's constant complaints she began to feel a little resentful herself at what she perceived as the preferential treatment meted out to her younger sister and brother-in-law. The couple felt slighted on numerous occasions and felt that they were not being given their due respect as the senior couple of the two. This situation was not helped by Tuanis' mischievous teasing of his brother-in-law in private and in public. The increasing tensions came to a head a year later when Onoy gave birth to her first child and the household prepared for the baby's hair-cutting ceremony. Tebin was greatly angered that he was expected to contribute a portion of his earnings towards the cost of the feast. He argued bitterly with both his parents-in-law and brother-in-law to such an extent that it was finally decided that the only way to resolve the conflict was for one couple to depart and set up a home of their own. Arrindah and Tebin elected to move out and construct a new house in a vacant space adjacent to her parent's home. They needed more space for their growing family and possessed the financial resources to purchase all of the necessary housebuilding materials. After several months the two brothers-in-law were back on speaking terms due to gentle pressure from their wives. Indeed they worked long hours together constructing Tebin's new home. Both sisters were much happier with the new living arrangements and were able to resume their warm, close relationship.

Mother-daughter and sister-sister relationships appear to be the base of a system of relationships among Bajau women. On these primary ties a woman can build a system of links to other women, for example, to her mother's sisters and her family and to her sister's children. The activation of these networks of female

kin for practical, emotional and social ends will be explored in chapter 7.

Conclusion

The Bajau household is organized in a complex way. It is based on the dynamic interplay of two factors: the relationships between women which determine the social structure and determine the important relationships between men and the higher social status and formal authority of men. Formal authority is passed from man to man, but by virtue of relationships to a line of women, that is, it is passed affinally from father-in-law to son-in-law. Relationships between a woman and the males of her household are based on a system of mutual rights and obligation, whilst relationships between a woman and the other females of her household can generally be characterized by cooperation and solidarity.

Footnotes:

¹ It has been well-documented that women's perceived rapacious sexual appetite has also been used as a moral justification for female seclusion and legal disfranchisement throughout much of the Mediterranean region. In Morocco women are viewed as evil seducers corrupting men through their uncontrollable and insatiable lust (Dwyer 1978:151). In many parts of North Africa women are unambiguously considered more sexually assertive than men (Geertz 1979:332). Without delving into sexual psychology it is obvious that this attitude is redolent of male projection and fantasy.

2 Tanner (1974) indicates the importance of such female-centred residential groupings for promoting the high status of women among both the Achenese and Minangkabau of Sumatra, Indonesia.

3 Women's role as treasurers and their budgeting skills are obviously crucial areas of investigation in any examination of women's position within the household. For this reason chapter 13 is devoted to this subject.

4 This contrasts starkly with Nimmo's findings among the Bajau of the Sulu Islands of the southern Philippines. Here, he reports, "Premarital sexual relationships are common and expected; consequently when the Bajau youth begins to feel the stirrings of his sexuality, he needs only to find a willing partner, which is rarely a problem, to satisfy his urges", (1970:252). The Bajau of Kg Mengkabong have largely been acculturated into the dominant Islamic Malay culture and patriarchal ideology. This may partly explain the differences between the two Bajau groups concerning premarital sex. It is also interesting to note that among the Sulu Bajau groups if a boy and girl are caught having a sexual relationship the boy is always assumed to be responsible for the act whilst in Kg Mengkabong often the female is presumed as guilty as, or even more guilty, than the male.

5 In the past many women did not fully enjoy their sexual relationships with their husbands due to fears of endless pregnancies. Traditional herbal contraceptive potions were consumed but proved unreliable. Abortions could be secretly arranged with sympathetic village midwives but this was obviously a last resort. Now women in the village are aware of a variety of methods of contraception and many of them use the pill. Most of them claim that their husbands approve of them taking birth control precautions after they have had the desired number of children.

6 Rosemary Firth (1966:55) views polygyny as a "further sexual outlet" for a man, especially when he takes a much younger woman as his second wife.

7 Second wives are often said to use magic to entrap and marry a man. Strange (1980) points out that this magical interpretation removes some of the onus and humiliation from the first wife because her husband was helpless. Furthermore, if he was entrapped by magic,

his taking of a second wife is not due to any inadequacies of the first.

8 Carsten (1991) maintains that in the Malay community she studied in Langkawi married siblings never co-reside and that this is explicitly in order to avoid disputes between them. "It is an attempt to avoid any conflict of interests that might arise between siblings through their obligations to their spouses and children...harmony within a group of married brothers and sisters can only be achieved through their residence in separate houses", (ibid:427).

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER SIX

BAJAU MARRIAGE PRACTICES: THE CIRCULATION OF MEN

Lévi-Strauss (1969) in his attempt to discern the structural principles of kinship, sees the essence of kinship systems lying in an exchange of women between men.¹ He adds to Mauss' theory of reciprocity the idea that marriages are the most basic form of gift exchange, women being the gifts and men being the exchange partners. If women are being transacted then it is the men who give and take them who are linked, women being a conduit of the relationship rather than a partner to it. The assumption of women circulating like currency permeates the whole terminology of kinship studies. There are no male equivalents for the terms "exchange of women", "bridegivers" and "bridgetakers". Lévi-Strauss himself addresses the question of whether it would be conceivable to exchange the roles of women and men in kinship models, and his answer is clear,

"The total relationship of exchange which constitutes marriage is not established between a man and a women where each owes and receives something, but between two groups of men, and women figure only as one of the objects of exchange, not as one of the partners between whom the exchange takes place."

(1969:115)

This view of women as the objects of exchange in marriage is implied in most of the anthropological literature on kinship, but this assumption is not supported by empirical ethnographic data.

Postel-Coster argues forcefully that whilst many examples can be collected from all over the world of women being given in marriage, the assumption is that,

"... this principle excludes both the possibility of men being exchanged and of women acting as partners in the transaction. Curiously, descriptions of women as actors or even initiators in the exchange of children, sons as well as daughters, are neither scarce nor hard to find in the ethnographic literature. Somehow this evidence must have gotten lost in the process of selection that is inherent to observation, description and analysis."

(1988:65)

She proceeds to illustrate her argument with numerous examples from all over the world, including both unilineal and cognatic societies.

In the case of the Bajau the view of marriage as the exchange of women is not supported by ethnographic evidence. Because the formalities, such as the signing of the marriage contract, are largely carried out by men it has been difficult to see the extent to which women are involved in the marriage process. However the indepth study of Bajau matrimonial practices which

follows provides clear indications that women have important decisional power in marriage planning and indeed can be said to some extent control the circulation of men. This section therefore examines the realities of Bajau women's roles in the marriage process.

The traditional Bajau wedding is a long, elaborate and increasingly expensive affair, although the grandness of the occasion depends greatly on the socio-economic position of the families involved. According to Islamic tenets a wedding ceremony must consist of:

- (i) the marriage contract (akhad nikah) which has been agreed upon by both parties
 - (ii) two witnesses to confirm the contract
 - (iii) a male guardian of the bride (wali)
 - (iv) a marriage settlement
- (Mohtar 1979:8)

The actual Bajau wedding preparations and ceremony can be divided into three stages:

1 Marriage planning

- a) prospecting for the bride/groom
- b) engagement
- c) delivering the marriage prestations

2 Malam Berinai (the night before the wedding
(ceremony))

- a) henna dyeing ceremony
- b) ritual bath

3) Wedding Day

- a) akhad nikah (signing of the marriage contract)
- b) ceremonial sitting in state (bersanding)

Each of these stages will now be examined in some detail to determine the level of female participation and control. My account of the marriage process follows for the most part a chronological sequence, dealing with the events and preparations as they unfold from mate selection to the wedding ceremony. The activities surrounding the institution of marriage constitute the most significant social events in Bajau society and provide illuminating insights into the complex interplay of gender relations.

1) MARRIAGE PLANNING

Mate Selection

Traditionally the selection of a first mate was undertaken by an individual's parents or guardians. Collecting data on the ways in which women's marriages were "arranged" in the past was not an easy task. Many older women could not recall how their families had come to marry them to the particular husbands chosen for them. However in the majority of cases in which I was able to collect data the marriage had been arranged on the basis of information about available partners received through networks of female members of the household. Sitting with a group of older women I asked them if they had ever seen their husband before their wedding day. Several of them explained that as small children they had played with the boys who were now their husbands but on the whole partners to arranged marriages rarely met before marriage. But even if a woman had never seen her husband until their wedding day she was often able to obtain a great deal of information about him (just as he could about her) through the contacts of her mother, sisters and other female relatives with his mother, sisters and other female kin.

Although a young woman was relatively powerless at the time of her marriage she was certainly not helpless. It was her parents who arranged her marriage but she could then give her consent or refusal. Forced marriages though theoretically possible were not common according to informants. Djamour (1965) notes that among Singapore Malays a bride's resistance to a marriage could only take place after marriage. Following the wedding ceremonies she could refuse to consummate the union thus pressuring her husband to divorce her. This does not appear to have been the case in Bajau society for women employed various ingenious strategies to object to their parent's choice of partner well before the proposed wedding day. One woman in her early forties, Sumah, laughingly related to me how she rejected four prospective partners before accepting the fifth. She did this by going on a form of hunger strike, storming around the house and refusing to speak to her parents. I was surprised when several women told me that they had employed similar tactics to voice their objections to their parents' choice of partner. In many cases however a woman took the option of acceding to her parents wishes out of respect and obedience to them, trusting their judgement in a decision which was traditionally considered to be theirs not hers. It is important to realize that in

this situation the husband-to-be is as much manipulated as the bride-to-be. The statements above apply equally to him. Therefore in terms of power and powerlessness it was the parents, both mother and father, who had more power than did the potential spouses, both bride and groom. We are dealing here with a differential in power between generations, not between genders. Thus whilst traditionally it may have been a time of relative powerlessness for a daughter, this does not preclude significant female input into the marriage arrangements through the mother, and other female kin.

In the past women were married as young as twelve years old and in the majority of cases by the age of fifteen. Now women tend not to marry until their late teens or early twenties. This rising age at marriage is a fundamental change implying changes in the way Bajau society views the place of women in the household and society at large. It is therefore important to understand the causes of this rise. During my research I found that the increased availability of secondary education for women was a particularly important factor. Nowadays many young girls are pursuing their education until the third year of secondary school and so it is uncommon for them to marry early. Older women often remark on the relative freedom and mobility of

young women and girls today as compared to twenty or thirty years ago. They can now be seen outside the home, going to school and to relatives' homes to help with the preparations for feasts. As well as providing opportunities for wider same-sex relationships, school activities obviously allow for a certain amount of contact between the sexes, as does travelling to and from school, which can lead to affective relationships developing and the desire to take an active role in mate selection. Young women who work in the village shops or outside the home also mix more freely with members of the opposite sex. It should not however be deduced from this that most young women have relaxed social contacts with men. Young women are expected to be shy in the company of men and the majority of them conform to this expectation. Purposeless wandering around is still not acceptable for young women and any woman who does can become the target of malicious gossip. Generally a woman leaves the house for a specific destination and must be accompanied by a child or female relative. She must have recognizable business to justify her movements. The level of social mixing also depends greatly on the particular household. Some parents permit their daughters to go shopping and to visit the local cinema with female friends, whereas others prefer to keep their unmarried

daughters in the home. In general however the great majority of young people nowadays have more control over their choice of partner and this freedom in spouse selection can be related to the later age at marriage. From around the the late 1970s young people in the village increasingly began to make their own marriage choices. By the end of the 1980s the majority of young people played a major role in finding their own mate and making important decisions concerning this matter. This can be linked to the recent influx into Bajau society of new sets of values centred on notions of individualism, personal independence and "romantic love".

It is important to note that although marriages are no longer formally arranged for young people marriage choices still affect a wide circle of kin. A person's choice of spouse inevitably affects other kin for the newly married couple are embedded in larger kinship networks. Clearly then kin have a stake and a legitimate concern in the marriages of younger members, particularly in the case of the woman's family for the husband will be moving into the wife's natal household. Whilst young people have a degree of freedom in finding their own spouse or vetoing potential partners suggested by their parents they do continue to seek

guidance on these important matters from close relatives. Any decision a young man or woman makes is ultimately subject to parental approval.

Parents in the village now recognize the potential dangers of prohibiting their children from choosing their own marital partners. Everyone is aware of the fact that over the last decade at least two young women and one man have committed suicide when parents refused to allow them to marry partners that they had chosen for themselves.² I was also informed that there had been a spate of attempted suicides for the same reason. Others have eloped and married without parental consent, usually with the aid of sympathetic relatives. There is a general feeling in the village that often it is best to let young people make their own decisions to avoid these problems which bring shame, pain and dishonour to the families concerned. If a person marries against the advice of parents and other kin the responsibility and blame should the marriage fail falls on him or herself. Generally there is less sympathy in the kampong for a couple who separate when they had chosen their own marital partners.

Whoever makes the final decision, the parent or the child, several traits and qualities are looked for in

the selection of a potential spouse. The male should be several years older than his bride. Very rarely are marriages contracted between a younger man and an older woman. It is also generally agreed that a man must be occupationally stable before entering into marriage. A divorced male may be considered a suitable match for a female virgin (anak dara) but a divorced female is not viewed as a good match for an unmarried youth (teruna) since a woman should not be more sexually experienced than her husband. Several categories of relatives cannot be chosen as marriage partners. Those who are closely related, (most of ego's dinakan sekot), are forbidden to marry as these unions, which are regarded as incestuous, that is, they are considered "hot" and liable to bring harm not only to the couple involved but also to their descendants. They may be cursed with diseases, infertility and general ill fortune. Among the Bajau cross cousins are considered suitable marriage partners. This form of marriage was preferred in the past in order to help strengthen the kinship ties of the families concerned. Parallel cousins on the father's side should never marry; that is, a woman cannot marry her father's brother's son.³ Geertz (1961:59) explains that, in the Indonesian context, this is due to the law that a woman's father, father's brother, brother, or in the absence of these, father's

brother's son, is her guardian (wali). This is contrary to the father's brother's daughter/father's brother's son preferential marriage in most Muslim countries, that is, a father marries his son to his brother's daughter.

The Engagement

The man's family investigates the young woman's background and character. Girls are taught the "womanly" virtues of discretion, obedience and chastity from a young age and these are part of the "package deal" displayed to prospective husbands. The woman's family also make discrete inquiries into the man's behaviour, schooling, work and family background. This process of investigation of a potential spouse's background and personality continues to prove important in the village. Whilst young people are choosing their own mates they are often making their choices in a vacuum. Due to the restrictions on interaction between unmarried people there is little opportunity for them to meet and get to know each other well before marriage. The parents and other kin must therefore try to determine whether a potential spouse is suitable. The man's family then tries to ascertain whether or not the offer of betrothal will be accepted, and this is commonly undertaken by the man's female kin.

Approaches are made very subtly and indirectly in case there is no interest in the proposed union. A refusal of betrothal is rarely given directly: it may be hinted that another offer is under consideration. If however the woman's family assent the two families arrange to meet. On the appointed day the party which represents the groom arrive at the bride's home to open the marriage negotiations. A spokesperson from the man's party (usually though not always a male relative) asks the woman's representatives questions about the proposed liaison. After a verbal exchange, if the answers are all pleasing, it is decided that the marriage should go ahead. The engagement is arranged by both sides with both sides discussing such matters as the date of the wedding and the marriage settlement and expenses. Once the sum is fixed the day of the engagement is set. On that day the wedding expenses are sent to the bride's house, usually together with gifts, in what is known as the hantar berian (gift sending) ceremony.

Let us now examine briefly the meaning of the transfer of goods and cash at the time of marriage.

Marriage prestations as social institutions have been extensively written about in social anthropology and have been assigned various interpretations over the years, but as yet there is very little work which considers them from a woman's viewpoint, (Moore 1988:71). This male-centred view is reflected in the terminology used in the discussions of marriage prestations, for example the use of the terms "bridewealth", "brideprice" and the "exchange of women". The debate over the terms for marriage prestations which occurred in "Man" from 1929 to 1930 indicates that many anthropologists have long recognized the problems in terminology and try to avoid unwanted connotations. But the thinking which these words reflect appears so ingrained that anthropological studies still contain implications that women are exchangeable commodities (Singer 1973:81). Radcliffe-Brown (1950:43-54) for example has claimed that marriage payments compensate the women's family for disruptions of its solidarity and for the right to demand reimbursement if the bride is killed or injured. Leach (1961:120) states that marriage payments may be regarded as the sale or hire of a whole female or of her reproductive services. By his own admission he discusses marriage payments and the "exchange of women" in language reminiscent of a "stud farm", (1961:120).

Lévi-Strauss also places undue weight on the importance of males in his extensive analysis of the exchange of women. The language used therefore implies that women are exchangeable commodities rated only according to their economic value. More recent discussions on this subject have failed to provide a satisfactory alternative analysis. For this reason I prefer to use the Bajau term emas khawin (wedding gold or money) which avoids the connotations of the English terms "bridewealth" and "brideprice".⁴

In the case of the Bajau the groom's family make a series of prestations to the bride's family. These include clothes, shoes, ornaments, domestic items, water buffalo (kerbau) to be slaughtered for the wedding feast and cash intended to provide for the wedding expenses. The Koran states that the marriage settlement (mahr in Arabic) should go directly to the woman. "And give unto the women (whom you marry) free gift of their marriage portions" (Koran 4:4). The verse goes on to add, "but if they of their own accord remit unto you part thereof, then ye are welcome to absorb it (into your wealth)", (ibid :4). Although this verse gives the bride a clear legal right to the possession and disposition of the marriage settlement the actual recipient of it (whether the bride, her

father or wali) varies from one Islamic community to another. It is clear that in those communities, such as the Bajau, in which the woman receives at least part of the marriage settlement this represents an important right for her. Whatever is given in the way of clothes and jewellery is exclusively for the bride's use. The cash is intended to provide for the wedding expenses - food, the setting up of the pelamin (wedding dias), wedding decorations for the bride's house and the bridal bed - and in some cases as capital for the young couple to purchase household items.

One of the most elaborate and expensive weddings I witnessed in the kampong was that between Mirah, the youngest grand-daughter of a headman, and Abdullah, the eldest son of a civil servant. An emas khawin of M\$9000 was finally agreed upon by both parties and this was formally presented wrapped in a sheath of pink satin on a silver-plated tray. Everyone commented afterwards on the elegant way in which the money was displayed. As well as the cash sum, 5 metres of pink kain songket (cloth with woven gold threads) for the bride's wedding outfit, several lengths of blue kain songket for her malam berinai outfit, a gold wedding ring, necklace and matching bracelet, one pair of gold coloured shoes, one pair of black shoes, and a display of silk flowers were presented by the groom's party for Mirah. In addition it was arranged that Abdullah's family would buy two water buffalo (kerbau) to be slaughtered for the wedding feasts. In the following two months Mirah's family deliberated over how the M\$9000 should be spent. Her mother estimated that at least M\$3000 should be spent on the food and soft drinks for the feasts. M\$3,500 was to be spent on decorating the house. The new bridal bedchamber and the public room were to have a fresh coat of paint, materials for new curtains and plastic flower arrangements were to

be bought and planks of wood were purchased to repair the catwalk leading to the house. The house catwalk was badly in need of repair and it would have been extremely embarrassing for Mirah's family if any of the wedding guests had fallen into the dirty water below. As the focus of much attention on the wedding day itself it was important that the wedding dias for the bridal pair should be attractively decorated. Twenty metres of pink cloth were purchased to form the backdrop and make cushions and table cloths. Two wrought iron chairs were bought for the bride and groom to sit on. A new bed, dressing table, mirror and other accessories for the bridal bedchamber cost another M\$1,500. M\$1,000 was spent on the purchase of costume jewellery, the hire of a white Western-style wedding dress with a veil for the party after the wedding ceremony, clothes and shoes for the bride's mother and sisters, cosmetics and perfume. A further M\$60 was spent on printed wedding invitations. Other miscellaneous purchases brought the total expenditure to a staggering M\$10,000.

It is clear from the above case study that the bride did not receive any of the wedding cash herself as all of it went to pay for the wedding expenses. However the gold jewellery and the bridal furniture were hers to keep. Other brides receive much less. In contrast to the ostentatious wedding described above, Opiah and Sulong's wedding was a much simpler affair. Both came from susah fishing households and an emas khawin of M\$800 was agreed upon by both households.

As well as the M\$800 in cash, one water buffalo, one kain songket wedding outfit and a gold ring were presented to Opiah's family by the bridegroom's party. No new furniture was bought. Opiah's family owned a bed which was stored up in the beams of the house and brought down and

dusted off for any family weddings. Cloth and decorations for the dias were borrowed from Opiah's aunt whose daughter had been married the previous month. The M\$800 was spent on food for the feast and new outfits for the bride's family. A further M\$250 was borrowed from her aunt to pay for the additional expenses. It was hoped that the money borrowed could be repaid out of the gifts of cash from the wedding guests.

A common complaint made in the village today is that money plays a much too important role in the marriage process. Formerly the emas khawin was very small ranging from M\$20 to M\$50. The penetration of the market economy into the rural subsistence economy has led to economic considerations playing a much more significant part in the marriage negotiations. In the past when most marriages were arranged by the families concerned cross-cousin marriages were favoured and valued for their reinforcement of kinship ties between two related households, therefore the emas khawin requested was usually a token amount. While cross-cousin marriages are still viewed as desirable, parents are now more concerned with marrying their daughters to employed wage earners who can provide a sizeable emas khawin to pay for all the wedding expenses and subsequently contribute to the household income when he takes up residence in the bride's parental home.

Several factors determine the amount of emas khawin requested by the bride's family. Virginity, or its absence, plays an important role in the contractual negotiations for a marriage, the emas khawin for a virgin (anak dara) being much higher than for a non-virgin. The lowest amount I encountered during my fieldwork period was M\$300 as the bride was already noticeably pregnant. Divorced women and widows (janda) also receive a smaller sum.

Whether or not the woman is in paid employment is beginning to be another important determinant. Whilst the prestige and social standing of both the man and woman's family are both major factors the earning capacity of the woman herself is now becoming an important consideration. Parents with daughters in paid employment can demand a higher emas khawin. Women who have completed their secondary education and are employed in white-collar occupations command the highest amounts. Azizah, a teacher in her early twenties, received M\$10,000 and three water buffalo at the time of her marriage. This extremely high sum was seen as unnecessarily excessive by many of the other villagers. As marriage settlements continue to escalate alarmingly households containing many sons despair of raising the capital to pay for all their

weddings. It can clearly be seen that the authority of the older generation is linked to the extent to which the young are dependent on them for marriage money, as it would be extremely difficult for the majority of young men to raise the emas khawin themselves.

Hantar Berian Ceremony - sending the wedding expenses

Relatives of the groom congregate at his house. As this usually takes place on a week day I found that it is predominantly women who participate. They sit around chewing betel and attempting amidst much hilarity to compose a new pantun (rhyming quatrain) to perform at the bride's house. The engagement ring and all or part of the wedding expenses are wrapped up in a handkerchief or scarf. Depending on the affluence of the households involved other gifts are prepared and wrapped. Some of the gifts given are symbolic, legitimating the union: flowers and betel are often given as tokens of affection. The groom's representatives then set off in procession to the bride's house, carrying the gifts. Surprisingly this event is a rather low-key affair. Few bother to dress up in their finery and all the colour and decoration associated with the wedding procession which takes place later is absent. At the bride's house the event

is marked by a small feast (kenduri). The older women perform their newly-created pantun for the assembled guests. The presents are examined by the bride's female relatives and given the seal of approval. The women then count the money received for this is not only business but the legitimization of the engagement and marriage. Later if the woman decides to break off the engagement the money and gifts are returned. If however the man breaks off the engagement the woman is entitled to keep them.

I have taken one case from my field notes to illustrate the next stages of the marriage process. I have chosen Noor as my example as being a close neighbour and friend I was able to observe most closely the detailed preparations for her wedding.

2) MALAM BERINAI - Night Before the Wedding

The night before the wedding the house is overflowing with the bride's friends and relatives. It is a scene of barely controlled chaos. Female kin from the house cluster are expected to help with all the preparations. The women of Noor's cluster had been cooking frantically all day. There had been talk of the forthcoming wedding for weeks, and Noor's female relatives had been organizing everything for the last

month. Cakes had been prepared a week in advance and magazines scoured for new recipes to try. Plates, glasses and cooking equipment are borrowed. Everyone helps peeling onions, ginger and garlic, skinning and slicing cucumbers and grinding dried peppers, all the while chatting about previous functions, forthcoming events and daily happenings.

Noor was sitting numb and silent whilst the family women bustled around her.⁵ Her mother and Mak Andam (the woman who dresses and decorates the bride) ritually bathe her in perfumed water over which prayers had been chanted. Her grandmother told me as we watched that in her time women were subjected to a form of "virginity test" on the eve of their wedding. She explained that during the bride's bath some of the water was collected in a small bottle. Later a bomoh would shake the bottle and upon gazing at the contents pronounce the woman a virgin or not. "I'm not sure exactly what the bomoh looked for", she said, "but I think it depends on the amount of bubbles". Supriya Singh (1984b) in her account of her fieldwork experiences amongst an east coast Bajau group describes how even up to the present day, after the wedding has been consummated the groom ceremonially presents his mother with a blooded handkerchief as proof of his

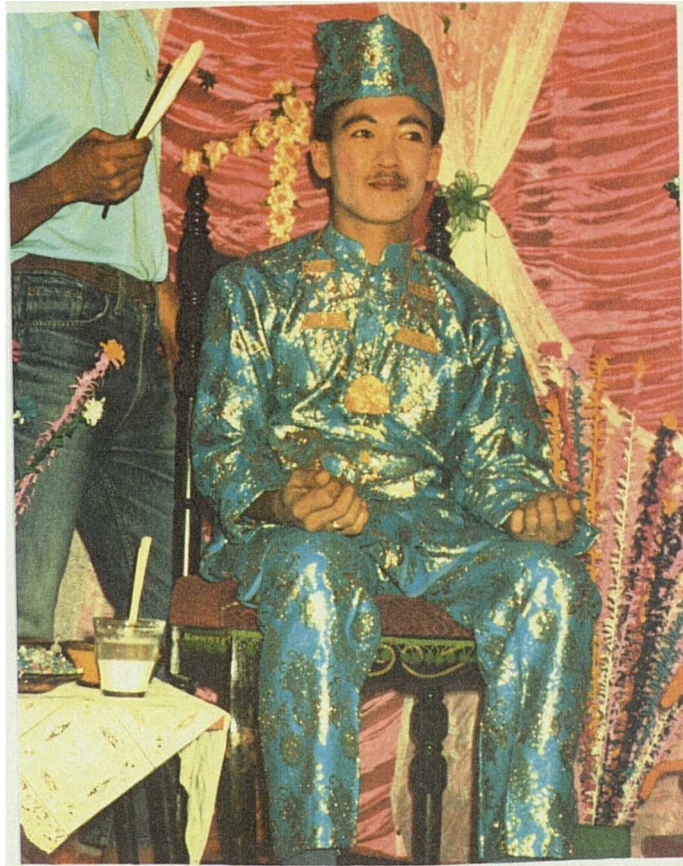
wife's pre-marital chastity. No such test is required of Bajau women in Kg Mengkabong.

Meanwhile some of the guests began to sing, accompanied by drums and tambourines. Everyone knows the wedding songs by heart and love a chance to sing them. The bride-to-be wearing a kain songket skirt, tunic and sash is led to the wedding dias (pelamin). One by one the village elders, predominantly male, approach the decorated platform, anoint her head with rice flour paste, place scented wood shavings in her upturned hands and throw rice gently over her. The fertility symbolism of this part of the ritual is obvious. The husband-to-be is undergoing a similar ceremony in his parental home.

It is now time for the berongsai dance to commence. In this the women have their special part to play. Dressed in kebaya (close fitting jackets over sarongs) they move slowly in a circle while the men in shirts and sarongs move around them in a wider circle. Dancing consists of a simple step combined with a series of sinuous arm movements. They sing impromptu pantun verses, one man singing the main verse and the rest joining in a chorus. Later all the men sing the main verse with the women answering them. They are not

accompanied by musical instruments, their feet make the music slapping and stamping on the bare planks. The singing and dancing are kept up until dawn. Many of the younger villagers do not like the berongsai and were uncomfortable when I tried to question them about it. "It's old-fashioned and noisy", they proclaimed with contempt. Consequently the tradition of performing the berongsai is becoming much less significant in the village as the younger generation refuse to learn the dance steps and the pantuns associated with the performance.⁶ They much prefer to play cassettes of modern rock music or to have a traditional band playing musical instruments.

Meanwhile Noor is covered in a paste to make her skin clear and smooth. Her feet and hands are stained a deep red with henna (inai). "Don't move or it will all crack", warns her mother. It is 3 am and the young women surrounding Noor begin to fall asleep despite the loud noise of the berongsai dancers outside. It would soon be dawn and the wedding day.



Photograph 5: Malam Berinai at the groom's house.



Photograph 6: The groom being prepared on the eve of his wedding. He is being anointed with rice paste by one of the village elders.

3) THE WEDDING DAY (Hari Perkhawinan)

From dawn the house had been a site of frenzied activity. In the kitchen women are still hard at work preparing huge cauldrons of rice and piles of plates and glasses are being cleaned for the expected guests. In a neighbour's house large pots of buffalo meat are being cooked. By 8.30am friends and relatives of the bride begin to arrive bearing gifts. Money is the most common gift, placed in a sealed envelope with the giver's name on it. One is expected to give at least M\$5, preferably M\$10. Other appropriate gifts include household goods such as trays and glasses. All gifts and givers are meticulously recorded by Noor's elder sister. They are entered in a small notebook for future reference as one is expected to give either the same or slightly more, if possible, to reciprocate at future festivities to appear gracious. The female guests come in self-consciously in their best baju kurong (loose-fitting long tunics over floor length skirts or sarongs) and gold jewellery, clutching their children. Outside under the shade of the verandah the men sit together, chatting lazily. The guests are offered food and drinks. I quickly came to the conclusion that to stay until the afternoon and watch the actual ceremony is not considered necessary. What is important is that you are seen to be there, no

matter how long you actually stay. It is therefore perfectly acceptable to turn up, take the refreshments offered and leave within the hour. This often happens as on some days there can be as many as four or five different functions taking place in the village and surrounding area.

Meanwhile in the decorated bridal chamber Noor sits with her unmarried female kin. She had already been ritually bathed in perfumed water by the Mak Andam. She had been unable to eat anything all morning despite her mother's attempts to fill her with rice, and claims that her head throbs. At around noon the Mak Andam begins her work. Noor is dressed in another kain songket outfit, her face is shaved of hair and then heavily made up with cosmetics. The Bajau in Kg Mengkabong no longer wear the traditional Bajau wedding outfit and distinctive headdress, having adopted the Malay wedding style during the last three decades.

Then just after 2pm the news came. Kassim, the groom, was arriving. Guests rush to the verandah or peer through the windows at the bridegroom's party arriving down the catwalk bearing gifts for the bride and her family. Noor's mother comes rushing out of the kitchen and quickly leads her daughter behind the curtain to her seat on the dias. The groom is then led in,

resplendent in his kain songket wedding outfit and dark sunglasses, flanked by his friends carrying tall sprays of artificial flowers and a suitcase containing his clothing and personal possessions. Kassim and his male kin then sit with the imam and Noor's father. The imam ascertains that the marriage settlement has been paid and that the groom understands his responsibilities towards his wife after which prayers are chanted. The imam formally asks Noor if she is willing to marry Kassim. At this time it is customary for the bride to remain silent, either giving her consent by slightly inclining her head or handing over some token.

Informants told me that they had never been to a wedding where the bride asserted her opposition at this point, but it should be kept in mind that the bride does have a legal right to object to the marriage at this juncture. It is unlikely however that she would wait so long to object. The bride's silence, in fact, is more plausibly interpreted as a manifestation of the modesty code. The shy virgin image is maintained by silence; it is not considered proper for a young woman to appear to be eager to enter into marriage.

Noor's father then requests that the imam solemnize the marriage, and the akhad nikah or marriage contract is signed. Before Kassim can take his place on the

pelamin (wedding dias) he must pay a kunci (literally "key") of M\$5 or M\$10 to the women holding the curtain concealing the bride. Once the curtain is removed he approaches the bride who is sitting with an open fan demurely covering her face. He then flicks his right thumb against his teeth and places it on her forehead. Informants claimed that this is to make her brave. If she is trembling his touch is said to make her fears vanish. The fan is removed and he takes his place on the pelamin. This part of the ceremony is known as the bersanding. The couple sit in state while the guest gather round and stare at them for a few minutes. Every bride I spoke with confessed that this was the worst part of the whole wedding ceremony and felt embarrassed (malu) by it. Many of them cry with fear. This is hardly surprising for young Bajau women are socialized to be modest and shy and are therefore unaccustomed to being the centre of attention. I attended one wedding in which the groom refused to participate in the bersanding ceremony as he felt it was unseemly for his new bride to be on public display. The bride's guests depart and it is now time for the feast, women and men eating separately, the men on the verandah and at one end of the public room and the women sitting in small groups at the other end of the



Photograph 7: The bersanding ceremony with the bridal couple sitting in state.



Photograph 8: The bride and groom on their wedding day being fanned by their attendants.

room and spilling into the kitchen area. Noor's female kin return to the kitchen and begin to dole out food and drink in large quantities. Curried vegetables, buffalo meat with rice and cakes are ferried through to the guests, along with coffee and sugary orange squash. Everyone knows that the first question their guests will be asked when they return home is, "What did they give you to eat?". The wedding feast can be viewed as a more important event to the bride's household than to the newly married couple. As Strange comments in relation to Malay wedding feasts in Trengganu,

"It is through the feast (and secondarily through the entertainment event if one is given) that prestige is gained. The parents are judged by their fellow villagers according to the number of people who attend; whether those kin of bride and groom who live far away make the effort to be present; the quantity and amount of food served..."

(Strange 1978:568)

Given the costs involved nowadays in staging a Bajau wedding it is not surprising that they are closely connected with the formulae of social status. Traditional Bajau society, for the most part, lacked defined social classes but now with the intervention of the capitalist economy and the emergence of class differences within the village, wedding rituals provide a main arena in which status and influence can be

reaffirmed or renegotiated. For the newly wealthy a certain elaboration is de rigueur.

So, in short, the marriage contract, akhad nikah, is the legal part of the ceremony. The wedding reception, bersanding, on the other hand, is the social rite of confirmation of the couple and is accompanied by a lavish feast. Through this the status of the couple is recognized socially and for the first time they are officially allowed to be together.

CONCLUSION

In the case of the Bajau, if we are to discuss marriage as an exchange of people, we have a reverse of the model of men exchanging women. In this system it is not women who can be thought of as being passed around from consanguineal group to consanguineal group. I have described a system in which the people who are being redistributed are men. Here the bridegroom is the one who is literally transferred to the household of the bride's family.⁷ The wedding ceremony, comprising of the akhad nikah and the bersanding, which takes place at the bride's home, with the bridegroom accompanied there ritually by his kinsmen and women can be interpreted as a symbolic prefiguration of the transfer

of males from one household to another, that is, from one sphere of female influence to another. Thus if we view marriage as an exchange process males can be said to play the part of goods exchanged during marriage, tightening already existing ties and creating new ones. The structurally significant people are female not male. Whilst the legal component of the marriage ceremony, the akhad nikah, is an all male affair, women are heavily involved in every other stage of the marriage process, from the choice of spouse, to the planning and preparations for the wedding and consequently for the success of the ceremony.

Footnotes:

1 Lévi-Strauss (1969) was of course writing about unilineal descent rather than cognatic kinship but I have used his work to illustrate the general point of the strong male bias in kinship studies.

2 The year before my arrival in the kampong a young woman killed herself (bunoh diri) by drinking battery acid when her parents forbade her to marry her boyfriend. It transpired that the young couple had decided on a suicide pact but at the last minute he had changed his mind.

3 It should be noted that there are traditional ways of circumventing these prescriptive marriage rules which usually entail the payment of a fine by the families involved.

4 Another reason for retaining the Bajau term is that the use of the terms bridewealth and brideprice tends to equate these payments with those common in societies with corporate unilineal descent groups which are significantly different from the prestations which are exchanged in cognatic societies. So far relatively

little research has been undertaken into the institution of marriage prestations in cognatic societies. Most of the literature is concerned with African unilineal descent groups.

5 This is prescribed behaviour for young Bajau brides. They are expected to show fear and must refrain from looking even remotely happy or excited about the forthcoming wedding for to do so would be considered very unseemly.

6 The words of the songs represent an archaic form of the Bajau language, quite different from contemporary Bajau speech. Whilst the occasional word is familiar to the younger generation many are incomprehensible. Only a few of the older villagers really understand the full meaning of the pantuns performed at the berongsai.

7 Massard (1988) in her study of Malays in Pahang attempts to link the processes of adoption and marriage. Through adoption women are exchanged between households whilst through marriage households can be said to be exchanging men. Thus she views them as complementary processes.

SECTION TWO

CHAPTER SEVEN

EXTRA-HOUSEHOLD RELATIONS: FEMALE NETWORKS AND COOPERATION

"It is clear that the nature of household organization and relations cannot be assumed, but must be empirically and historically investigated...it is not enough to revise our ideas about internal household relations; we must also revise our ideas about the nature of extra- or inter-household relations."
(Moore 1988:59)

As we have seen, the traditional analysis of kinship systems in anthropology largely ignored women, especially as independent social actors or initiators. The neglect of women's kinship links and their involvement in kin and non-kin networks outside the household is due to the general view that the content of the "domestic" domain is known, and to the conceptualization of the household as a bounded unit. The assumption is that women operate within the domestic sphere, while men utilize their links with other men in the "public/political" domain where the links between households are created and maintained. This view of the household and its links with the wider kinship system obscures many of the important activities and relationships which Bajau women are engaged in. Kinship factors are of great importance

here because they determine who women should co-operate with. Bajau women build up and maintain close contacts with other female members of their kinship group. In this chapter I will deal with the marshalling of various resources through kinship networks and in particular women's construction and servicing of these networks. As this chapter proceeds we will see these relationships in action and view the strategies women may employ in manipulating these relationships to their advantage.

Anthropologists have generally described networks as though they were series of linkages between individuals, and this description is not inaccurate.¹ But Sharma, in her work on rural and urban Indian communities, adds to this the idea of networks as household resources. She writes,

"Networks can be represented as a chain of connections between individuals, but they can also be considered as a household resource and servicing them is therefore to be considered as a form of work which women perform."

(1986:186)

Further, if we concentrate on the purposes to which networks are put, (as opposed to their structures and formal properties which I discussed in Chapter 4), it

can be seen that, to a certain degree, members of a household have a stake in each others networks.

In Kg Mengkabong the type of exchange most commonly observed in exchange networks is reciprocity.

Reciprocity

"Reciprocity, the receiving and giving of goods and services, is built into the human life cycle and the social order. Without it the nonproducing young could not live and mature to provide the next generation with its livelihood and the social order its continuity. There would be no cushioning of misfortune or infirmity, and the world would be without festivity, hospitality and benefice."

(Codere 1968:239)

Mauss cogently argued that what distinguishes the gift relationship from pure contract is its totality, the fact that it may "embrace a large number of institutions" and be sanctioned by norms which refer to many different kinds of obligations (such as kin ties, religious ideas, aesthetic or legal notions), (1970:76-77). Reciprocity is a form of exchange embedded in a long term social relationship; it is clearly not an impersonal one-time transaction like market exchange. It is therefore important to understand the entire fabric of social relations, especially kinship relations, in the village in order to gain insights

into the economics of reciprocity networks. As we shall see, reciprocity is conditioned chiefly by two factors, namely, social proximity (kinship) and residential proximity. These are the major factors influencing the intensity and stability of exchange.

Kinship is the most common social foundation of reciprocity networks in Kg Mengkabong. It is mobilized to reinforce and strengthen the structure of local exchange networks. The intensity and frequency of giving and receiving is not however uniform throughout the village. There are localized webs of high flow reciprocal exchange where several neighbouring households band together to form reciprocal networks. Kinship and residential propinquity are major factors influencing the intensity and stability of exchange. Within the village exchanges take place between cognates and affines, between individuals, but most commonly between households. On a day-to-day basis the most frequent exchanges are between households of a house cluster, and, as will become apparent, it is the women of these households who are the primary actors in these exchange networks. In Kg Mengkabong female-centred networks are common. Elsewhere it has been demonstrated that they often exist in rural areas with matrilocal or neolocal settlement patterns. Stivens

reported that women are also at the centre of what she terms the "informal kinship system" in Malay communities in Negri Sembilan.² She notes,

"In general women are the mediators in kinship, organizing kinship related matters like marriages and they cooperate extensively with other female kin in a wide range of women's tasks - childcare and other domestic labour."

(Stivens 1984:186)

The existence of such kin-based female-centred networks also shows parallels to the kinds of family networks formed by many low-income urban populations in developed societies. Such extended cooperation networks have been noted especially among Black Americans and working class families in London.³

It should also be noted that these networks are not static. There are changes in composition of such networks due to internal factors such as marriage of offspring, new household members, conflicts between relatives and internal disputes. There are times when kin may begrudge aid, and there are cases of relatives falling out over property, accusing others of cheating. When this happens the exchange network is likely to break down temporarily, or in more serious disputes, permanently. Thus the exchange of gifts and services

amongst households is related not only to kin obligations but also to inner feelings of "love" and "compassion". One is supposed to engage in these exchanges out of these mutual feelings as well as out of a sense of duty.

In Kg Mengkabong the gift relationship flourishes. The exchange of labour, fish, foodstuffs and other commodities remain a pervasive and striking feature of kampong life. Exchange, reciprocity and mutual help (gotong-royong) tend to reflect one of the fundamental value assumptions of Bajau society, that is, working together and cooperating with others is very much related to the general health and wellbeing of individuals and the community as a whole. This system of exchange networks is extremely complex and so to simplify my account I will concentrate on a few specific situations in which members of households tap their networks for resources such as labour and information. Exchanges occur primarily in connection with:

- 1) the distribution of fish
- 2) ritual occasions
- 3) childcare

The Exchange of Fish

In the 1930s the journalist Carl Taylor commented thus on the Bajau,

"In their daily life they practice a form of communism that makes beggary impossible...If a family must have more food, those lucky with their nets provide it."
(1931:535)

In a more recent study Sather describes the distribution of fish in amongst Bajau households, outlining the important role that women play,

"...gifts, described by the villagers as pamillah daing or "cooking fish", are presented by the fisherman's wife to the women of the neighbouring households, and, if the catch is large enough, to the couple's close kinswomen who live elsewhere in the community."
(1971:103-104)

A similar distribution of surplus fish occurs in Kg Mengkabong although it is considerably less prevalent than before, as fewer and fewer families are engaged in full-time fishing. Furthermore, now that fishermen sell their fish directly to a towkay rather than marketing the catch themselves they are more likely to sell all of their fish to make cash rather than giving it away to their relatives. Nevertheless, after a particularly successful catch the fisherman's wife will make a gift of fish to the kinswomen of her house cluster with the implicit assumption that in time this

gift will be reciprocated. Of course, in practice this exchange is not always balanced. The more successful fishermen tend to contribute more than others whilst those who are very old or sick and cannot fish regularly rely on these exchanges for much of their subsistence. The importance of this distributional exchange is related to the degree of uncertainty that characterizes fishing. Not every fishing trip is successful. This system of fish exchange thus minimizes the consequences of short term failure for individual households. I will take the example of my own house cluster in order to illustrate this fish exchange and distribution process.

The house cluster in which I lived was composed of five houses with a total of twenty-one adults and eleven children under the age of fifteen years. Four of these households, which I shall call A, B, C and D respectively, were actively involved in the fishing industry, that is, at least one household member was currently a member of a fishing crew. The fifth household, E, was comprised of an elderly widow and her two grandsons neither of whom was involved in any form of income-generating activity. In order to subsist this woman sold chicken eggs, marine products such as crabs which she collected and belacan, a strong

smelling shrimp paste, which she prepared. In addition she occasionally fished with a simple rod and line from her small dugout canoe. Unfortunately these activities did not always provide enough food for the household and she was often dependent on gifts of fish from other households in the cluster. This woman was related to household A through the senior woman of that household; they were sisters. She was a maternal cousin to women in both households B and D, and a maternal aunt to the women of household C. Each of these four households, A, B, C, and D took the responsibility of providing a small portion of fish to household E whenever they had a surplus. In addition they were involved in a system of fish exchange amongst themselves. For example, if household A had been lucky and brought in a sizeable catch the young daughters of that household would be sent to each of the other houses with a small parcel of fish. The fish were always presented very informally and accepted without any spoken acknowledgement of the gift. Each household knew that they could expect the others to reciprocate at some stage in the near future. As a direct result of these gifts of fish each household is involved in a network of exchanges which when taken together with the exchange systems of other households, have the combined result of tying the whole

community together in an interwoven series of exchanges and economic ties.

Ritual and Festive Occasions

It is during ritual and festive occasions that female kinship networks can be seen most clearly in action. For weddings, Hari Raya celebrations, haircutting ceremonies and doa selamat (thanksgiving prayer ceremonies), kinship networks are activated to ensure the smooth running of these events. The extent to which networks are activated depends on a number of factors including the reason for holding the ritual, its importance and the number of guests expected to attend. Doa selamat are perhaps the most frequently held rituals. These prayer ceremonies are held at various times, for example, after a birth, death or when a household member is intending to make the pilgrimage to Mecca as the following case study illustrates.

Rashid was preparing to make the pilgrimage to Mecca. He would be the very first member of his household to make this journey and so there was great excitement and anxiety in his home for several weeks beforehand. His family decided to hold a doa selamat to ensure his safe journey and return home. For several days before Rashid's wife, Mariam, and two daughters had been busy buying and preparing food for the occasion. Invitations to many of their relatives in other villages had already been sent. Mariam's three nieces and her sisters from the two adjacent houses were called in to help. Food preparation was going

on in each of the three houses almost around the clock. Many guests were expected to arrive from this and other kampongs. Buffalo meat was purchased, pots of rice and curried vegetables were prepared for the feast (kenduri). Plates and drinking glasses were borrowed from Mariam's female kin living in her house cluster along with cooking pots and utensils.

At 3.00pm the guests start to arrive. The men sit chatting and smoking cigarettes in a large circle in the public room whilst the women and small children cluster in the kitchen area. When the village imam arrives, incense is burned and the prayers begin, the women looking on from the kitchen doorway. Fifteen minutes later, when the prayers are over, the men are served with steaming plates of rice, buffalo meat and vegetables, followed by sweet coffee and cakes. Only after the men are finished eating do the women and children eat. At 5.00pm the guests begin to depart, each wishing Rashid a safe journey to Mecca.

Mariam and her female relatives begin clearing up and all items that have been borrowed are washed and returned to their respective owners. Each woman who has helped with the preparation over the past three days receives a share of the remaining buffalo meat and any surplus cakes. They know that next time they are in need of extra labour they can rely on Mariam and her daughters to return the favour.

Thus when the feast is over any left-over food is wrapped in banana leaves and distributed to the helpers and some of the guests by the women of the household. If the amount of food has been underestimated and only a small amount remains it is the women who make the decision on which households can be excluded.⁴ Thus whilst men take the most prominent or "public" roles on ceremonial occasions the success of such events lies in the hands of their womenfolk. It is the women who activate their kinship networks to organize and ensure the smooth running of all ritual occasions. Hildred

Geertz, studying the family in a central Javanese town during the early 1950s, found that Javanese women are also very much involved in ceremonial life. Much of the work necessary for celebrations such as weddings, circumcisions and births is performed by the kinswomen of the woman holding the ceremony. She notes,

"...festivities require women's work more than men's and consequently bring together the women of a family more often than the men. Further, women appear to be more eager to aid their female rather than male relatives...In general, too, women maintain closer ties with their kindred than men do."
(Geertz 1961:26)

The extent to which Bajau kinship networks are activated on ceremonial occasions depends to a great extent on the size and importance of the event. For a small thanksgiving feast with few guests invited only a few neighbouring kinswomen will be enlisted to help, but for a large wedding party women from the whole house cluster will be expected to participate in the extensive preparations. The essential role of women within the food exchange process and their participation in collective labour networks must not be ignored if we are to understand the exchange networks of the community as a whole.

Help with Childcare and Household Maintenance Tasks

There is a great deal of cooperation in household maintenance work between households in the same house cluster. For women in paid employment help with childcare is absolutely essential. Both men and women in the kampong seem to regard it as a woman's duty to tend to the household's maintenance, as well as childcare, hence it is seen as her responsibility to organize a substitute supply for her household maintenance labour if she decides to go out to work, or if she has to be away from the home for any other reason. As more and more young women are being drawn into the wage labour force, this need among women to build up and maintain networks with other women becomes even more crucial. In this situation, which includes leaving children in the care of another for considerable periods of time, the choice is almost always close matrikin.

"My mother died five years ago", explained Rohanna, who lives with her father, husband and their three children one of whom is of pre-school age. My husband and father are both members of the same fishing crew but they don't earn enough for us to survive so I have to work in town six mornings a week as a cook in a coffee shop. I have to be at work very early in the morning, 5.30am, to prepare breakfast. I leave at 1pm when another woman comes in to work. When I first got the job I asked my mother's sister who lives in the next house if she would look after my youngest child when I am at work. She has seven children of her own but only one is at home in the mornings. The others are all at school.

She is happy to look after my child and I know that he is safe and cared for. Sometimes I look after my aunt's children in the afternoon so that she can go to the market to do her shopping."

When children are underfoot it is easier to borrow from a neighbour than to make a trip to the town when something is needed. Small foodstuffs like garlic, chillies, sugar and cooking oil are frequently borrowed. Neighbouring women frequently visit each other, sometimes several times a day. It is common for a woman just to walk in and sit with her relatives, helping out with whatever household task is being performed, such as chopping vegetables or washing up. In the house cluster where I was living, women from the cluster often walked in through the kitchen entrance. These visits are unannounced; no formal greetings are exchanged. In general other visitors from more distant clusters would enter through the front entrance and would wait in the doorway to be greeted before entering.

Women also utilise their networks of female relatives to help them in the later stages of pregnancy, childbirth and recovery. During these times assistance is needed in performing domestic tasks such as cooking and cleaning, as well as supervision of other children.

During the last few weeks of her pregnancy Dah moved in with her maternal aunt's family. It was proving difficult for her to remain living in her own home as there were no other adults present during the day. Her divorced mother was a market trader and was therefore out of the house for most of the day. Her husband was away from the village, working as a labourer in Brunei. Dah was afraid that she may end up having the baby in the house with no one around to help her. Her aunt Jamillah, with whom she had always been close, therefore invited Dah to stay with her family. Jamillah's house was much closer to the land and so it would be easier for Dah to get to hospital when the time came. After the birth Dah would continue to live with Jamillah for a couple of months (traditionally the confinement period is 44 days) after which she would be able to return home.

As more and more young women are drawn into the wage labour market I anticipate that these kin-based female support networks will take on an increasingly more important role. Private nurseries and other childcare facilities are extremely limited in Sabah. The hire of a nanny (amah) is too costly for most households in the village, many of whom are living well below the official poverty line. Even if such facilities were available and affordable it is highly unlikely than any of the village women would want to use them. All of the mothers to whom I spoke were adamant that they would never leave their children in the care of a non-relative. Female kin thus provide an essential service as child carers in Bajau society and the social organization of the kampong entailing extended

households and kin-based house clusters facilitates this.

Other forms of Assistance

A number of other resources are also exchanged such as socially and economically valuable information. In the chapter on marriage we saw how female kin keep each other informed of potential spouses for their respective children. Information is also exchanged about job vacancies which may open up. Women who trade in the market are a particularly valuable source of information on potential work opportunities in town as well as disseminating other useful information and news to women who are for the most part confined to the home or kampong.⁵

Female kin can also help each other financially, if they are in a position to do so. Women in the village loan small sums of money amongst themselves. One middle-aged woman in my house cluster, Ayesha, a robust, cheerful and gregarious woman, operated as an informal pawnbroker for her female relatives.

Although she was not a rich woman, compared to others Ayesha and her household were relatively well-off. Her husband has a white-collar job in town which

meant that they could live quite comfortably. In addition, she had inherited several acres of land from her father's estate which she had recently sold for a substantial cash sum. When her female relatives had financial problems they would visit Ayesha and explain their difficulties to her. "What I do", Ayesha explains, "is give them a small amount of money. In exchange they give me a piece of gold jewellery like a bracelet or a necklace which I lock away in this little box here until they can find the money to pay me back. Let me give you an example. My cousin Rahima came to talk to me last month. Her husband went to Sarawak to look for work three months ago but he hasn't sent her any money yet. Her parents are much too old to earn money so now she is in trouble. She gave me one of her wedding bracelets in return for M\$150. She needed the money to buy school books for her youngest son. Later if her husband sends her some money she can pay me back and I'll return the bracelet. Some of the women take a long time to pay me back but I never complain or admonish them. That would be very bad. After all they are relatives."

When the weather is particularly bad and it is too dangerous for the fishermen to put to sea, the lives of the fishing households can become very difficult especially if the bad weather lasts for days or even weeks. Very few families have any form of money savings so it is at these times that the wife's wedding gold can be utilized to tide the household over a difficult patch. A gold necklace or bracelet can be pawned for M\$50 dollars or so. It can then be retrieved when the sea is calmer and the fishermen are able to bring in an income once more. It is always the women of the household who are involved on both sides of these financial transactions. When I enquired whether men ever utilized similar networks to borrow

money the answer was an emphatic "no". The explanation given was that men are much too proud to ask their relatives for a loan, and that women were the ones who dealt with the household's financial matters. "If I asked my brother for a loan of M\$100 dollars or so it would be a waste of time anyway," explained one fisherman. "He would have to go and ask his wife first. She keeps the money. It is better to let the women do these things. They are not malu (embarrassed) to ask their relatives for money."

Sather uncovered a similar system of exchange amongst the Bajau Laut on the east coast of Sabah. He notes,

"In addition to the sharing of fish for daily use, households and cluster members frequently lend and borrow property, including outboard engines and fishing gear. While each family accumulates its own savings, family members are obliged to aid their housemates in times of need with monetary gifts and other kinds of favours. Such transactions are a daily part of village social life."

(1985:182)

Unfortunately Sather fails to provide further details and does not examine exactly which household members are the principal actors in these exchange networks, so we are unable to determine whether it is women or men who are the main participants.

Conclusion

The discussion above demonstrates the ways in which cross-cutting commitments and loyalties to kinship networks are critical to the survival of the Bajau household unit. All sorts of major decisions, many of which are life-changing in their implications such as the choice of marriage partner or whether to seek paid work outside the kampong, are significantly influenced by relatives outside the nuclear family and especially by the woman's matrikin. Women's kin solidarity finds expression at a number of levels, but it is particularly apparent between members of house clusters. In neighbourhoods typically composed for the most part of kin one gets some sense of women's roles in community integration.⁶ It is clear from the above discussion that a woman's capacity to maintain good relations with local kin has important consequences for all the members of her household even though they may not explicitly recognize it. In Kg Mengkabong house clusters provide a focal centre in women's lives, but female sociability and friendship, wrapped up as they are in household-oriented industriousness, link women, and consequently households, all over the kampong. This suggests that female comity among the Bajau is more intensive, extensive and important than has been previously recognized. The mixed subsistence and

capitalist forms of economy found in Kg Mengkabong and the combined strategies individuals and households activate to meet their economic needs both encourage and depend on the continued existence of strong extra-household kinship ties. The type of residence pattern commonly chosen, that is, the house cluster of matri-kin, allows and promotes the continued existence of these wider kinship networks. Thus it appears that capitalist development, which entails more women entering the wage labour force and increasing reliance on the cash economy, has strengthened rather than diminished people's dependence on their extended kinship ties.

Footnotes:

1 For example, Barnes defined a social network as "a field of relationships between individuals", (1954;98-99).

2 Hildred Geertz also found female-centred networks in Java, Indonesia (1961), Tanner amongst the Minangkabau of Sumatra, Indonesia (1974) and Djamour in Singapore (1965).

3 Stacks (1974) in her work on low-income Black families in urban North America provides one of the most thorough discussions of what she terms "domestic networks". Earlier in 1962, Young and Wilmott produced their classic account of such extended networks of support among British working class families. Stivens found similar female-centred support networks in urban middle class Australia (1984).

4 Stoler (1977:86) reports that women in rural Java play similar roles in food distribution networks. She makes a brief examination of networks in the context of exchanges of food between households.

5 A slightly more detailed analysis of the role of kinship networks in the dissemination of information relating to paid work opportunities is provided in Section Three.

6 Reuter (1975:263-64) puts it in more narrow terms when she discusses a female-based "neighbourhood solidarity".

SECTION THREE

INTRODUCTION

KERJA MAKAN NASI AND KERJA MAKAN GAJI: WOMEN, WORK AND IDEOLOGY IN KG MENGKABONG

"Women perform two-thirds of the world's work but earn only one-tenth of the world's income. Their unpaid labour in the household if given an economic value would add an estimated one-third, or \$4,000 billion (U.S.), to the world annual economic product."

(Sivard 1985:5)

An understanding of the gender division of labour is crucial in any attempt to understand the position of women and gender relations as a whole. Feminist analyses of labour start from the premise that the gender division of labour is not a given, nor "natural", that it does not merely embody complementary roles for women and men. Rather, this proposition is turned on its head: only in a society where women and men constitute unequal genders is there any reason why gender should be an important organizing principle of the social division of labour, with the exception of the physical process of childbearing.

"For nothing in the fact that women bear children implies that they exclusively should care for them through their childhood; still less does it imply that women should also feed and care for adults, nurse the sick, undertake certain agricultural tasks or work in electronics factories."

(MacIntosh 1981:5)

This section examines changes in the gender division of labour as a result of the intervention of capital into the rural economy. I will focus on the mechanisms giving rise to the particular gender division of labour, how the stereotype of "women's work" has been elaborated and how such stereotypes have undergone changes over time. Analyzing the gender division of labour and the processes of change at work in the transition from a subsistence economy to a market economy based on wage labour raises many questions which I will attempt to answer:

- has the division of labour on gender lines been re-organized and strengthened as the cash economy has spread within Sabah? If so, how precisely does such a reorganization and strengthening take place?
- to what extent does capital work on existing gender divisions and to what extent are different gender relationships imposed or brought about as an integral part of the development of capitalist relations in Sabah?
- are women being increasingly relegated to the household sphere or alternatively are they being drawn into the wage labour market? What implications follow from women's entry into waged work? Does it give them greater personal autonomy and control, or do the social relations in which women are enmeshed preclude their control over the allocation of their wages?
- how are all these factors correlated with class and age differences, and with the different types of work which women are involved in?

To answer these types of questions there needs to be some awareness of changing relations over time,

therefore the analysis is not limited only to the economic participation of Bajau women in contemporary Sabah, but will include an examination of the gender division of labour from an historical perspective.

The particular scale of inquiry predominantly relates to gender relations as expressed at the level of the household, that is, I will endeavour to show how the penetration of capital has affected Bajau women as seen in the context of their relationships within the household.

Chapter 8 outlines the unacknowledged contributions rural women have made to the Sabah economy. Here I emphasize the need to recognize and redefine the many kinds of work Bajau women typically do in the home, the community, the market and in society in general. This chapter will show that often such efforts are not even recognized as "real" work. Chapter 9 is entitled "The Gender Division of Labour in Historical Perspective". In this chapter I examine the nature of the link between the capitalist development process and the gender division of labour to elucidate how the gender division of labour has changed over time. This chapter is concluded with an analysis of the contemporary

dynamics of the gender division of labour. The basic aims of this chapter will be to identify the main activities performed by women and men respectively. Chapter 10 illustrates that an examination of women's roles as unpaid household workers is crucial to understanding women's positions in modern Sabah and their roles in the labour market.

The next two chapters analyse Bajau women's income-earning activities. In Chapter 11 I consider the extent of village women's involvement in petty commodity production and commerce. Chapter 12 includes a detailed examination of Bajau women and men's waged work. It considers both women's and men's work profiles and the particular problems women face in obtaining waged work. And finally, Chapter 13 contains an analysis of household finance and budgeting patterns to determine whether these patterns are changing as the villagers are increasingly drawn into the capitalist economy. I investigate who controls and distributes the household's income and the implications of this for gender relations within the household.

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE SOCIAL INVISIBILITY OF WOMEN'S WORK IN SABAH'S RURAL PRODUCTION SYSTEMS

This chapter briefly examines the historical concealment and undervaluation of the contribution of rural women to production and the economy in Sabah. It is important to understand how the concept of women's social invisibility is formulated and reproduced, and how, as a result, the paradigm of women's supposed nature is sustained. It is hoped that the brief analysis which follows will help lead to a clearer understanding of how Malaysian society, like many others, manages to conceal the range and extent of rural women's economic participation.

The apparent invisibility of women's work is a feature of the gender division of labour in many societies. It is often reinforced by indigenous gender ideologies and compounded by the ethnocentric assumptions of foreign researchers. If work is conventionally understood as "paid work outside the home" then the value of women's subsistence and domestic labour goes unrecognized. This definition of work may persist even when it is

clearly contradicted by the realities of people's everyday experiences. It is when we come to consider rural areas in particular that we become aware of the fact that what goes on in households cannot be relegated simply to the sphere of "reproduction" as in conventional Marxist analyses and left unanalysed as non-work. It was because Marx himself, and the early Marxists, assumed that a division of labour into productive and reproductive, with women predominating in the latter, was "natural" and therefore outside the parameters of any social analysis, that categories of domestic work and subsistence production have largely been ignored, (Moore 1988:43). Later in this section an examination of Bajau women's roles in various types of productive activities will illustrate the problems of attempting to separate production from reproduction, and the profitlessness of making such a distinction.

Traditional demographic, economic and labour force surveys tend to provide crude and often inaccurate information on the economic work of women. In the process of "modernization", "gainful" employment as measured by industrial societies became the yardstick for defining and computing economic activity in Sabah. This creates many problems as international standards for classifying persons by labour force participation

and occupation are difficult to apply to developing countries, where workers are more likely than those in developed countries to be self-employed rather than wage-earners, to work seasonally rather than all year round, and to engage in a fluid or sporadic pattern of diverse and shifting economic activities (Dixon-Mueller 1985:91). The inadequacy of labour force data is due partly to the simple assumption that people are either in or out of the labour force. In deciding whether a person is to be classified as "economically active" or "inactive", we are forcing a dichotomy onto a spectrum of activities and a continuum of time inputs. As a result women in the subsistence sector and those engaged in income-generating activities based in the home are often excluded from official statistics or are counted as "unpaid family workers". A large section of the informal sector with its great variety of occupations is in the shadows as far as official statistics are concerned.

The 1980 population census of Sabah shows that 48% of Sabah's population is female and that around 32% of the female population aged 10 years and over were in the labour force in the same year. The majority of women were engaged in activities revolving around the

household. These activities do not appear in the national accounting system and therefore women's contributions to the state's socio-economic progress are often perceived to be somewhat less than significant. In this context women are regarded as playing a subordinate role in the economy compared to men.

Table 8.1 Rural Bumiputera Population aged 10 years and over by Labour Force Status, Sabah, 1980.		
LABOUR FORCE STATUS	% FEMALE	% MALE
Employed	36.4	62.2
Actively Unemployed	1.5	2.5
Inactively Unemployed	3.2	3.5
Total in Labour Force	41.1	74.2
Outside Labour Force	55.2	23.5
Unknown	3.7	2.3
TOTAL	100	100

SOURCE: 1980 Census of Sabah

Table 8.1 above shows that despite the almost equal number of rural bumiputera¹ women and men in Sabah, reported in the 1980 census, women's participation in the labour force was approximately half that of men.

Table 8.2 Rural Bumiputera population aged 10 years and over by employment status, Sabah 1980.

<u>Employment Status</u>	<u>Female</u>	<u>Male</u>	<u>Total</u>
Employer	1284	5716	7000
Employee	21750	85572	107322
Own Account Worker	24998	45634	70632
Unpaid family Worker	32531	27933	60464
Seeking First Job	1453	2898	4351
Total Workforce	82016	167753	249769
Outside Workforce/ Unknown	134302	69576	203878
TOTAL	216318	237329	453647

SOURCE: 1980 Census of Sabah

Data from the census further reveal (Table 8.2) that bumiputera rural women tended to be predominantly classified in the category "outside the labour force or unknown". This has important implications for conceptions of women's work - as women are again made to appear to be making less of a contribution to the economy of Sabah than men.

Women's income-earning activities in the "formal" sector are reflected fairly well by conventional statistics, however the identification and measurement of women's other income-earning activities and productive activities within the household continue to prove troublesome for conventional systems and are not included. The design of the Sabah census clearly does not allow for accurate categorisation and enumeration

of women's activities. The census asks respondents for their primary occupation only, that which is done on a daily, regular or frequent basis, yet for the villagers of Kg Mengkabong primary occupations are only a part of the total work picture. For instance, many of the women from susah households in the village have seasonal or occasional sources of income. Seasonally women transplant and harvest rice for wages, some women annually, others occasionally such as when a kinsperson needs help. During the transplanting and harvesting some women who normally do not do remunerative work are called upon for assistance by kin and work for a few weeks. They accept a few dollars for their help or acting within the reciprocity system participate in kinship-based networks that exchange goods and services.

In addition to the lacunae and distortions inherent in the design of the Sabah Census, other government organizations are also to blame for perpetuating the myth of women's underemployment. A study by Ko-Nelayan (Fisheries Development Corporation) published in 1982, implies that the wives of fishermen (usik) are economically inactive, that they sit around in the home all day doing nothing until their husbands return from their fishing trips. "Even though they are poor, their

women do not take up agriculture, but sit at home till midday and then come down to the beach to collect the day's catch", (1982:53). Statements such as these display an astounding ignorance of rural women's heavy workloads.

Women in Sabah have been participating actively in the economy through the centuries but conventional concepts and definitions of the labour force tend to relegate a substantial proportion of women to an amorphous group - "housewives". It is partly because male interviewers, as well as female and male respondents themselves, frequently consider many of the tasks which women do as "housework" regardless of their intrinsic nature, that tasks that for men are labelled economic activity may not be so for women. In Sabah, as elsewhere in the world, there is a reluctance on the part of both interviewers and respondents to admit that women are engaged in "work". In societies where the male ideal is linked to men's roles as providers, women and men generally recognize only women's supporting roles. During my interviews many women classified themselves as "seri rumah saja" or "housewife only" when they were involved in a wide range of activities; trading, small businesses and many other economically productive

activities. The problem, as Blacker so clearly explains, is,

"Unless enumerators are explicitly instructed to ask about the possible economic activity of women in the household in the same way as that of men, they may tend automatically to enter women as homemakers, particularly if the women are married..."

(1980:71-72)

Finally, much of the productive household maintenance labour performed solely by women is frequently not considered as economic activity. Thus women are known to work long hours, for example, gathering firewood and processing food - activities which certainly increase the household's economic well-being - but since these activities do not enter the marketplace or get included in national income accounts, they are not considered to be labour force activities.

The problems outlined above are largely due to the very limited definition of which activities are categorized as "work". The villagers of Kg Mengkabong themselves use a limited definition of what constitutes "real" work. They make a revealing distinction between two forms of work which they term kerja makan nasi and kerja makan gaji. Literally translated these two phrases mean "work to eat rice" and "work to eat wages" respectively. These expressions are commonly heard in

Kg Mengkabong as men and women discuss their own work situations and their preferences for various types of work. Kerja makan nasi refers to work such as subsistence fishing and rice cultivation. Within the village employment with regular pay in the "formal" sector is very much desired. The Bajau refer to such employment as kerja makan gaji, and only such jobs are truly considered work (kerja). This is a new phenomena as the Bajau from Kg Mengkabong have only relatively recently begun to engage in waged work outside the kampong as employment opportunities outside of fishing have proliferated. The villagers were not involved in agricultural plantation waged work during the colonial period and it is really only since independence that the number and types of wage-earning jobs in the State economy and filled by the Bajau have greatly expanded. As a result of this change, economic activities which give no regular income are no longer strictly regarded as work and people involved in these activities are quite often described as tidak kerja, or "not working", no matter how much labour they expend or how much income they bring to the household. For instance, Hamidah, a married woman in her thirties informed me that she did not work ("Aku tidak kerja") yet everyday I observed her caring for her four children, cooking, cleaning, preparing dried fish for sale at the local

market, baking cakes and snacks to sell around the village and tailoring in the evenings for a small income. Similar examples of such categorisation of work can be cited from other settings, for example Stoler (1977) in Java, McAllister (1987) in Negri Sembilan, Peninsular Malaysia and Deere and de Leal (1982) in Peru. A third categorization of work frequently utilized by the villagers is referred to as kerja kampung, "village work", which comprises work for wages within the village. It constitutes an intermediary category of work between subsistence production and waged work outside the village. The most common manifestation of this form of work is in the fishing industry as an increasing number of fishermen are engaged in work for wages whereby a boat and engine owner may employ members of a fishing crew in return for wages. These crew-labourers are predominantly younger married men. This fishing work is not constant (tidak tentu) as the vagaries of weather can lead to extended periods of enforced unemployment for these fishermen. If the boat does not put to sea they are not paid. In some cases these fishing labourers combine this work with occasional wage work outside the village. These three forms of work - kerja makan nasi, kerja kampung and kerja makan gaji - provide a basic picture of which activities

villagers are engaged in and of the villagers' understanding of which types of activities constitute productive labour.

For the purposes of this analysis I decided to include in the category of work (kerja) the following types of activities - waged employment, the exchange of labour services for payment in cash or kind, market and non-market subsistence production and unpaid family labour including household maintenance activities. This categorisation is broad enough to provide a basic picture of the wide range of productive activities performed by both female and male villagers.

There is obviously a need for more accurate and meaningful data on women's economically productive roles in both the household and the marketplace. This type of information can be obtained with the use of time utilization surveys which give a detailed account of what people actually do. They can help to illuminate the gender division of labour within the household, how childcare and other household maintenance tasks may conflict with various other types of economic activity and how the gender division of labour is determined.

Time Utilization Survey

I conducted a time allocation survey of ninety villagers, comprising forty women and forty men from susah households, and five women and five men from sederhana households, corresponding roughly to the socio-economic class structure of the village.² My sample includes only those who are "economically active" as I have previously defined it. It excludes young unemployed men who are not involved in any form of productive activity. Unlike their sisters who are burdened with numerous work tasks, many of these young men spend their time lounging around with friends, chatting and strumming guitars on the verandah and listening to the radio, making no contribution to the household's maintenance or finances much to the chagrin of their parents.³ Indeed these young men are often a financial burden to their households with their constant requests to their mothers for pocket money. There is often considerable tension and argument when such requests are denied.

Deciding upon the appropriate number and classification of categories to be used in the survey was far from easy as the complexities of data analysis with multiple activities can quickly become overwhelming. I

delineated nineteen activities and these were subsequently divided into four major categories. For the purposes of this piece of research I felt that precise estimates to the minute spent on each task were not necessary (especially given the propensity for measurement error) and therefore used units of fifteen minutes. At this point of analysis certain variables such as household size, gender and age composition and seasonal variation are not considered.⁴ These factors will be dealt with in subsequent chapters. Therefore whilst Tables 8.3-8.7 may present a somewhat simplified picture of Bajau time-use they do elaborate the core female-male comparison and the class dimension within the kampong.

Table 8.3 Average Daily Time Allocation of Fishing-Related Activities by Gender and Class

	<u>ACTIVITY</u>		
	<u>Fishing</u>	<u>Gathering</u>	<u>Fish Processing</u>
<u>SUSAH CLASS</u>			
<u>Women (40)</u>			
Number of persons Involved	7	6	17
Total Hours	20	6.5	35.25
Average Hours	2.85	1.08	2.07
<u>Total Hours Spent in Fishing Related Activities : 61.75</u>			
<u>Men (40)</u>			
Number of Persons Involved	31	1	1
Total Hours	230.5	3	0.5
Average Hours	7.43	3	0.5
<u>Total Hours Spent in Fishing Related Activities : 236</u>			
<u>SEDERHANA CLASS</u>			
<u>Women (5)</u>			
Number of Persons Involved	0	0	2
Total Hours	0	0	1.5
Average Hours	0	0	0.75
<u>Total Hours Spent in Fishing Related Activities : 1.5</u>			
<u>Men (5)</u>			
Number of Persons Involved	1	0	0
Total Hours	7	0	0
Average Hours	7	0	0
<u>Total Hours Spent in Fishing Related Activities : 7</u>			

Table 8.3 illustrates the extent to which women are involved in the fishing industry. The English term "fisherman" is obviously a misnomer in the Bajau context. The connotations of the word "fisherman" give the impression that women are not part of the fishing industry. Whilst it is true that few women are involved in fish capture⁵, this impression is not entirely correct. In Kg Mengkabong women catch shrimps with handnets, fish with a rod and line and harvest clams, mussels and crabs. The village women especially take centre stage when the catch is landed. To them go the tasks of sorting and cleaning the fish, as well as the processing - smoking, salting and drying. Among the fish products prepared for household consumption and for sale are shrimp paste and sauce. Due to the involvement of women in the fishing industry it is perhaps more accurate to use the Bajau term usik or Malay term nelayan both of which are gender neutral rather than the English translation "fisherman".

A substantial number of village men from poor households are involved in the fishing industry. It is anticipated that the number will fall in the coming years as fewer young men view fishing as an attractive occupation. A growing number of teenage boys are

refusing to join their fathers' boat crews, preferring to spend their time sitting around with their peers. Few men from the sederhana class are involved directly in the fishing industry. Those who are involved tend to be the owners of the boats, engines and other fishing equipment which provides them with a greater share in the day's catch and, as a result, a higher cash income.

Table 8.4 Average Daily Time Allocation of Agricultural Activities by Gender and Class

	ACTIVITY				
	<u>FC(waged)</u>	<u>FC(non)</u>	<u>Li</u>	<u>Poul</u>	<u>Food</u>
<u>SUSAH CLASS</u>					
<u>Women (40)</u>					
Number of Persons Involved	0	5	1	10	5
Total Hours	0	21	0.5	3.75	8.75
Average Hours	0	4.2	0.5	0.37	1.75
<u>Total Hours Spent on Agricultural Activities : 34</u>					
<u>Men (40)</u>					
Number of Persons involved	0	1	2	2	0
Total Hours	0	3	2.5	0.5	0
Average Hours	0	3	1.25	0.25	0
<u>Total Hours Spent on Agricultural Activities : 6</u>					
<u>SEDERHANA CLASS</u>					
<u>Women (5)</u>					
Number of Persons Involved	0	0	0	2	0
Total Hours	0	0	0	0.75	0
Average Hours	0	0	0	0.37	0
<u>Total Hours Spent on Agricultural Activities : 0.75</u>					
<u>Men (5)</u>					
Number of Persons Involved	0	0	0	0	0
Total Hours	0	0	0	0	0
Average Hours	0	0	0	0	0
<u>Total Hours Spent on Agricultural Activities : 0</u>					

KEY:	FC(wage)	Food Crop waged
	FC(non)	Food Crop non-waged
	Li	Livestock
	Poul	Poultry
	Food	Food Crop Processing

As we can see from Table 8.4 above few of the villagers are involved in agricultural production. Although a small number of villagers, both female and male own small plots of land (generally no more than a few acres) very few actually work their land. Historically the villagers of Mengkabong have always lived over the water and have never been land-dwellers. They have been concentrated in the fishing subsector and have only minimally been engaged in any form of agricultural production. The small landowners that I spoke with tended to leave their land fallow and viewed their property as a commodity to sell when substantial amounts of money were needed, for example, to pay for wedding expenses or a household member's pilgrimage to Mecca. Those who are engaged in agricultural production tend to be poor women who labour as unpaid family workers.

This pattern varies during the harvest period. During this time women from the susah households often spend up to seven hours in agriculture activities. Men from susah households also contribute their labour at this time often spending a few hours in the fields on returning from their fishing expeditions.

Table 8.5 Average Daily Time Allocation of Non-Agricultural Renumorative Activities by Gender and Class

	<u>ACTIVITY</u>				
	<u>Trade</u>	<u>FP</u>	<u>Ta</u>	<u>Boat</u>	<u>Wage</u>
<u>SUSAH CLASS</u>					
<u>Women (40)</u>					
Number of Persons Involved	14	9	2	0	11
Total Hours	91.25	26.25	10	0	74.25
Average Hours	6.5	2.9	5	0	6.75
<u>Total Hours Spent in Renumorative Activities : 201.75</u>					
<u>Men (40)</u>					
Number of Persons Involved	1	0	0	1	7
Total Hours	8	0	0	5	40
Average Hours	8	0	0	5	5.7
<u>Total Hours Spent in Renumorative Activities : 53</u>					
<u>SEDERHANA CLASS</u>					
<u>Women (5)</u>					
Number of Persons Involved	0	0	0	0	1
Total Hours	0	0	0	0	6.5
Average Hours	0	0	0	0	6.5
<u>Total Hours Spent in Renumorative Activities : 6.5</u>					
<u>Men (5)</u>					
Number of persons Involved	0	0	0	0	4
Total Hours	0	0	0	0	29
Average Hours	0	0	0	0	7.25
<u>Total Hours Spent in Renumorative Activities : 29</u>					

KEY:	Trade	Trade and Marketing Activities
	FP	Food Preparation for Sale
	T	Tailoring
	Boat	Boatbuilding
	Wage	Non-Agricultural Waged Work

Table 8.5 shows an unexpectedly high number of poor women engaged in wage labour. This figure can be accounted for by the recent demand for young female labour in Sabah. Whilst men from the village were the first to be drawn into the wage labour force, recently the labour market has begun to open up for women. As male unemployment is rising and the young men of the village are currently finding it very difficult to find employment, young single women are forced to take on poorly paid work in order to support their households. As for the men, it is clear that a much higher proportion of men from the sederhana class are engaged in wage labour than those from the susah class, the latter spending the majority of their working time in fishing activities.

Table 8.6 Average Daily Time Allocation in Household Maintenance Activities by Gender and Class

	<u>ACTIVITY</u>					
	<u>Fu</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>HB</u>	<u>Cl</u>	<u>CC</u>	<u>Other</u>
<u>SUSAH CLASS</u>						
<u>Women (40)</u>						
Number of Persons Involved	4	38	0	25	27	32
Total Hours	15	82	0	27.5	44.75	65.5
Average Hours	1.25	2.15	0	1.1	1.65	2
<u>Total Hours Spent in Household Maintenance Tasks : 234.75</u>						
<u>Men (40)</u>						
Number of Persons Involved	0	0	5	0	7	6
Total Hours	0	0	11.5	0	10.75	12
Average Hours	0	0	0.3	0	1.53	2
<u>Total Hours spent in Household Maintenance Tasks: 34</u>						
<u>SEDERHANA CLASS</u>						
<u>Women (5)</u>						
Number of Persons Involved	0	4	0	5	3	5
Total Hours	0	12.5	0	14.25	6.75	14.5
Average Hours	0	3.12	0	0.48	2.25	2.9
<u>Total Hours Spent in Household Maintenance Tasks : 48</u>						
<u>Men (5)</u>						
Number of Persons Involved	0	0	1	0	1	1
Total Hours	0	0	1	0	2	2
Average Hours	0	0	1	0	2	2
<u>Total Hours Spent in Household Maintenance Tasks : 5</u>						

KEY:	Fu	Fuel Collection
	F	Food preparation and Cooking
	HB	House building and repairs
	Cl	Cleaning
	CC	Childcare ⁶
	Other	Other household maintenance activities not covered by any of the above categories

In terms of household maintenance work, women from the susah class spend an average of six hours per day, compared to a meagre one hour for the men. This pattern is repeated in the sederhana class, women spending over nine hours in housework activities and men only one hour. Additionally it can be seen that women from the sederhana class spend longer in household maintenance work than those from the susah class. This pattern concurs with similar findings in Indonesia, where Hart (1980) revealed that,

"...there is a direct relationship between class status and the absolute and proportionate amount of time spent by women in housework."

(ibid:203)

Hart discovered that women from richer households spent more time in housework than those from poor households.

As pivotal figures in household maintenance activities rural women confirm their ideological roles as wives and mothers, spending a large proportion of their time in work activities which are not economically accountable and thus are largely unrecognized and devalued.

When the findings from Tables 8.3-8.6 are aggregated the average number of working hours for each class and gender can be calculated. The results are presented below in Table 8.7.

Table 8.7 Average Hours Spent Daily in Work Activities by Gender and Class			
<u>SUSAH</u>		<u>SEDERHANA</u>	
<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>Men</u>
13 Hours	8.25 Hours	11.25 Hours	8 Hours

NB: Results rounded up to nearest quarter hour.

Men from both classes have several hours more leisure time per day than women from both classes. Since they are not burdened with household maintenance work, men have more time to spend in relaxing activities such as socializing in the coffee shops, watching television or sitting chatting with friends. Young men play sports, listen to music or just linger along the roadside or by the catwalks. Women from both classes have significantly less leisure time. Their relaxation activities are mainly confined to watching television or chatting together after the evening meal has been cleared away.

The tables presented above show two general trends. Firstly, there are differences between the classes in the allocation of their time in various activities. Secondly, there is a significant gender differentiation within and among these two classes in their use of time in these activities. It is clear that the kampong women work significantly longer hours than the men in both socio-economic classes. Women from the susah class spend the longest hours per day in work, on average 13 hours. Women from the sederhana class spend 1.75 hours less, that is, an average of 11.25 hours per day in work activities. Women from the susah class spend longer in fishing-related tasks and income-generating activities, whilst sederhana women spend longer hours in household maintenance tasks. The difference in labour time between the susah and sederhana men is almost negligible; an average of 8.25 and 8 hours respectively. There are major differences however in the types of activities performed by men from different classes. Men from the sederhana class spend a large proportion of their time in waged work, whilst susah men are primarily engaged in fishing activities.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that Bajau women, like rural women in many parts of world, work extremely long hours on a wide variety of tasks, all of which are essential to the household's survival. Whilst organizations such as Ko-Nelayan take the view that women are dependents who sit at home for much of the day, this study stresses that far from being idle, women in the village are heavily involved in many areas of production. They work as mothers, household labourers, petty commodity producers, traders, and more recently as wage earners. Many are overworked in the sense that they work very long hours, are pressed by many duties and obligations and are responsible for much subsistence production, including all food preparation, household maintenance tasks and the care of children. These pressures on women's time are important restraints on raising women's levels of income and rural living standards in general. Men on the other hand have a less strenuous workload and significantly more leisure time than their womenfolk.

Despite the size of rural women's total workload the economic and social value of women's work have frequently been unacknowledged and under-recorded. The published statistics on women's labour force participation in Sabah are highly misleading, largely

as a consequence of the tendency to under-report women's activities. This occurs partly because of restrictive definitions of what constitutes a "productive" activity and cultural blindness to the realities of women's labour contributions. As several feminist researchers (for example Dixon-Mueller 1985) have indicated if surveys exclude a large proportion of women's activities then any measures intended to ameliorate seasonal or chronic poverty will likely meet with only limited success. It is only if we have accurate and meaningful data on all of women's productive activities that programmes can be usefully designed to raise the income and living standards of rural households.

Footnotes:

1 The term bumiputera (literally "sons of the soil" or "princes of the earth") is applied to members of the indigenous ethnic groups in Malaysia.

2 Whilst this may appear to a rather broad classification of class, it is the categorization that the villagers of Kg Mengkabong themselves use.

3 If these young men had been included in the sample the differentials between women's and men's average daily working hours would have increased substantially. The average work hours of men in both classes would have decreased significantly and there would have been a corresponding increase in men's leisure hours.

4 My survey was carried out in December when there is little opportunity for casual agricultural work.

5 Bajau women from the village do not join the men on fishing trips for they are believed to bring misfortune. This is a common belief throughout Malaysia, for example, Firth (1966:105) and Carsten (1989:124). It should be noted however that there are no restrictions on Bajau women coming into contact with fishing gear and travelling in fishing boats to visit other villages.

6 The category "childcare" for the purposes of this survey covers the breastfeeding of babies, feeding and care of children, including training and supervision. I found it especially difficult to obtain accurate data for this category as childcare is very often combined with other activities. Women supervise their children throughout the day as they go about their daily tasks. Here I have only included the time during which childcare was the sole or major activity being performed.

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER NINE

THE GENDER DIVISION OF LABOUR IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

A crucial question for feminist researchers of socio-economic development is the nature of the link between the capitalist development process and gender relations. How far does this process structure relations between women and men and what tendencies can be seen in this structuring? To answer these questions I will begin with a brief discussion of the theoretical debate within the feminist literature concerning the effects of capitalist development on gender relations. This is followed by an outline of the economic changes experienced by the villagers of Kg Mengkabong during this century and how these have affected the gender division of labour at the kampong level.

The Differential Effects of Capitalism on Women and Gender Relations

Most writers agree that colonialism and capitalism have restructured traditional economies in ways which have had a profound impact on women's economic activities, on the nature of the gender division of labour and on the kinds of social, economic and political options which have remained open to women. However there is, rather unsurprisingly, a considerable amount of debate

about the exact nature of the effects of these processes on women's lives, (Moore 1988:74). Scholars such as Boserup (1970) and Rogers (1980) have suggested that capitalist exploitation combined with Eurocentric ideas about the roles and activities proper to women led to the destruction of women's traditional rights in society, and undermined their economic autonomy. Other writers have pointed out that it may be wrong to imagine that the pre-colonial/pre-capitalist world was one where women had a significant degree of independence (Huntingdon 1975; Aforja 1981). However the penetration of capitalism into subsistence economies, through the growth in wage labour and the commercialization of the rural production system is generally acknowledged as having a deleterious effect on rural women. According to Tinker (1976) development has tended to put obstacles in women's way that frequently prevent them from maintaining what little economic independence they do have.

"...compared to men, women almost universally have lost as development has proceeded."
(1976:24)

Moore (1988) however warns us to be wary of simplistically portraying men as winners and women as the losers, as a simple picture of this kind may distort the complexity of the real nature of gender

relations, and also works to obscure two very important dimensions of analysis. The first concerns women's response to the processes of social transformation. If women are portrayed merely as losers and victims, then there is a danger that they might be represented as passive recipients of social change rather than as active participants. The second difficulty that Moore points out is that any simple characterization of women's disadvantaged position in developing economies is that it tends to reinforce the treatment of women as a homogeneous category. Consequently it is difficult to generalize about the consequences of capitalist transformations for women. As we have seen the women of Kg Mengkabong do not constitute a homogeneous category and the circumstances and conditions of their lives are different. Moreover, women respond to changing circumstances in diverse and often creative ways, some turning to their advantage what for others would be insurmountable problems. The issue of emerging social and economic differentiation between women in the kampong complicates the picture further. Yet, despite the tremendous range of individual variation in both conditions and responses, some overall trends are discernible.

The Changing Pattern of the Gender Division of Labour

The structural conditions of the Sabah economy during colonial times and the place of Bajau women's labour within the economy set the background for later developments which have determined the contemporary structure of women's labour force participation. It is therefore important to examine the features of women's economic activities during the colonial period. The account which follows is by necessity partly speculative; gleaned from written sources and older female and male villagers' memories. Any discussion of the gender division of labour at this period is highly problematic as very few writers address this issue. Moreover, descriptions of the gender division of labour can be ideological whether by scholars or villagers themselves, (Stivens 1984:12).

A very detailed account of the economic history of the kampong and the external factors that have impinged upon it is neither necessary nor plausible here. Instead, what I have attempted is a brief outline of the major features that have shaped the economic conditions of the kampong and the gender division of labour. The information presented here has been selected to elucidate two main areas of central importance for gender relations in the kampong, firstly

the massive transformations in the technologies of production and secondly, the expansion of the wage labour market. I have divided this brief sketch into three historical periods¹:

- 1) Under Chartered Company Rule, including the Japanese period (1942-1945), (1881-1946)
- 2) Under Colonial Rule (1946-1963)
- 3) Federation Of Malaysia (1963 onwards)

Each segment commences with an outline of the economic situation as experienced by the villagers during each historical period and is followed by an examination of the transformations in the gender division of labour as a result of economic transitions in rural Sabah.

1) Under Chartered Company Rule

What little information we have on the Bajau prior to the 20th century stresses their material poverty. In the 19th century there was little specialization in the Sabah economy and individual productivity was low. The basic economic unit was the peasant household engaged in subsistence production. Until the penetration of the capitalist economy all work was centred on the household and labour for household use and for market trade was shared by all household members. Adults and children, as soon as they were capable, provided goods for the household and for exchange. Women's work in

this productive unit was crucial. Not only did they labour directly, but they produced the children whose labour was absolutely essential to the success of the unit.

The subordination of economic activity to social ends is an axiom of subsistence cultures. Collective economic production, kin-based labour exchange networks and shared principles of distribution were notable characteristics of the traditional Bajau system. Although, as I have previously stated, the available data on Bajau gender relations during this period are largely inadequate, it would appear that the underlying principles which governed gender relations were egalitarian or, perhaps more correctly, complementary. Orosa (1923) mentions that,

"The main occupations of both men and women
among the Bajaos are fishing and diving."
(1923:43)

In contrast, from Nimmo's (1972) monograph it is clear that there was a well-defined division of labour between a Bajau husband and his wife. Some tasks were regarded as predominantly female or male occupations but there was nothing that structurally prevented overlap. No one task carried any special status. Nimmo (1972) provides a brief summary of the gender

division of labour among Sulu Bajau groups at this time.

"The husband is in charge of fishing, repairing the fishnets and other equipment; the wife is ...in charge of cooking, preparing cassava and gathering firewood from the beaches and edibles from the reef, and frequently assists in fishing. Both are actively involved in childcare".

(ibid:22-23)

Women in Kg Mengkabong, unlike the Bajau women on the east coast as described in the works of both Nimmo and Sather have only ever been minimally involved in the capture of fish. Nevertheless, a great deal, if not most, of the peripheral work related to the fishing industry was performed by women. After the day's catch had been landed it was the village women who were responsible for drying and processing the fish into various fish products. In this way they contributed substantially to the fisher household's income.

Both women and men carried the fish to market in the nearby town in heavy baskets balanced on their heads. This journey was described to me as a three-stop journey, as they would rest three times on the way, putting down their load to have a smoke. On arrival at the marketplace, the women took charge of marketing the fish. Evans observed in 1922 that,

"Bajau women...frequent all the lowland markets and prove themselves excellent saleswomen of fish, fruit, native-made cloth, betel-nut, lime..."
(1922:197)

Men and women also shared the task of producing salt for both sale and household consumption. Salt water was collected in large leaf containers and suspended over a fire in the kitchen until the salt crystallized. Together women and men tended the fire and continually topped up the salt water level in each container. I was told that it took twenty-four hours to produce enough salt to make the trip to market to trade with the Dusun rice-sellers worthwhile. This practice dwindled and finally ended when manufactured salt became available in the local shops.

Women and men were both responsible for the collection of fresh water before the advent of piped water to the village, approximately ten years ago. This entailed a boat trip to a freshwater well, situated 2km away from the kampong, followed by a tiring walk uphill to fetch the water and carry it back to the boat in heavy jars. For those involved in padi cultivation it was the men who usually carried out nursery tending, ploughing, harrowing and transporting. The women and children's duties included transplanting, winnowing, cleaning and

storing the padi. Weeding, manuring, threshing and harvesting were shared by both women and men. Women also ran various small enterprises such as net-making and basket weaving. Men's village businesses included boatbuilding and carpentry.

Women then, as now, were burdened with most of the household maintenance tasks, including food preparation and cooking. Despite Nimmo's previously quoted statement that, "Both are actively involved in childcare..." (1972:23), it is clear from informants' statements that women in Kg Mengkabong have always had primary responsibility for all childcare activities and that men have only ever played a very minimal role. Table 9.1 below outlines the gender division of labour in the kampong during the colonial period.

Table 9.1 Gender Division of Labour in Kg Mengkabong before the Colonial Period

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>PREDOMINANTLY MALE OR FEMALE</u>
Boatbuilding		X	male
Firewood Collection	X	X	both
Fishing	X*	X	male
Fish Processing	X	X	female
Fish Marketing	X	X	female
Agricultural Tasks	X	X	both
Household Maintenance Tasks	X	X	female
Housebuilding		X	male
Shopping	X	X	both
Animal Care	X	X	female
Water Collection	X	X	both
Salt Making	X	X	both
Childcare	X	X	female
Basket Weaving	X		female
Netmaking	X	X	both
Net Repairing		X	male
Cloth Weaving	X		female

* Many older women from susah households were, and still are, involved in fishing using a rod and line from small canoes, in addition to catching shrimps, crabs and other shellfish.

Thus there was a strong gender complementarity in productive tasks and the question of gender status within productive activities is not really relevant. Essentially, women and men had different responsibilities in production but these responsibilities did not mark men as the main providers for the household and women as dependents. Before the advent of merchant or industrial capitalism, all members of the household laboured together to produce those things (use values) necessary for their survival. In pre-capitalist Sabah marriage did not mean economic dependence for women or total economic responsibility for men. Both spouses were equally responsible for the economic maintenance of the household.

World War Two

Under Japanese occupation the economic life of the country collapsed. All manufactured imports from the West ceased and the Japanese were unable to fill the vacuum with their own goods. Coastal trade came to a standstill (Baker 1965:29), and the food situation became critical. Before the war the country had not grown sufficient rice to feed itself and communications with the rice-producing countries of Asia were now cut (ibid:29). During this period many of the villagers from Kg Mengkabong fled to the surrounding forests

where they erected temporary shelters. Malnutrition was rife because the Japanese requisitioned a large proportion of the district's rice as well as much of the Bajau's fish. One elderly woman told me, "Occasionally we managed to exchange some fish for a little rice from the Dusuns in town. We concealed it in a sarong wrapped around our heads. When the Japanese soldiers searched our baskets they found nothing." Many of the villagers were forced to forage in the forests for food and their meagre diets consisted of bananas and sago and other wild plants.

During this time the Japanese forcibly took away unmarried male villagers to work as labourers. It was a time of many rushed marriages in the kampong in order to protect the young. "Single women never left the house during the time of the Japanese", recounted Mia a woman in her 70s. "Our parents were afraid that the Japanese would capture and rape us. Apart from this there was a shortage of cloth and women were often confined to the house, ashamed (malu) to be seen in public wearing sacking."

The directors of the Chartered Company realized by the end of the war that their resources were inadequate for the immense task of the reconstruction of North Borneo

and so after negotiations an agreement was reached between the British Government and the Chartered Company for the transfer of the latter's territory to the Crown.

2) Under Colonial Rule

The early years of the Colony's first decade were preoccupied with the work of reconstruction, of restoring buildings, railways and roads. It was only in the latter half of the first decade under colonial administration that the economy of Sabah began to recover its pre-war level of economic development and from this base began to experience steady growth. A solid, but very limited, infrastructure had been created, primary commodity production grew as did the volume of trade (Sabah Foundation 1974:56). It is clear that the development which had taken place during this period was for a limited sector of the population, retaining the economic dualism of prosperity co-existing with subsistence production. There were few incursions into industrialization and even into the modernization of the agricultural sector.

The cooperative nature of work among household members began to change with the entry of the commercial economy. Whilst the Sabah economy encountered this new

economic system when British capital was brought into the state by the British North Borneo Company it was not until the later colonial period that this had a substantial direct effect on the villagers of Kg Mengkabong. The commercial production system greatly contrasted with subsistence production. The management of production along sophisticated commercial lines, using money as the medium of exchange, began to emphasize "private" involvement in production rather than a community-based cooperative work. There was a shift from an economy centred on household work to an economy based on work in the marketplace. In the process of colonialism and capital accumulation in Sabah the productive conditions of the pre-capitalist society were gradually transformed, creating the basis for a new type of society - the capitalist society - in which labour was a marketable commodity. The introduction of an economic system based on large capital investments in Sabah had two important consequences with respect to the division of labour. Firstly it marginalized the importance of subsistence production. With the intrusion of the cash economy, two sectors became discernible within the rural economy, namely subsistence and capitalist, with women predominating in the former. Through the household nexus, the subsistence sector supports the capitalist

sector. However subsistence activities, although essential to the household (and to the economy as a whole), do not contribute directly to commodity production or exchange and are therefore not considered "productive" from the standpoint of the capitalist economy. In a sense, the transition to capitalism marginalizes the subsistence sector, and its predominantly female labour force, from socially and economically valued production.²

Secondly, it gave rise to new forms of gender division of labour, and ultimately to the perception that women played a subordinate role in the economy. The process of colonialization clearly resulted in a division of labour which affected the relations between women and men. More and more people were unable to produce the use-values necessary to meet their changing needs. In order to survive they were forced to sell the only thing they owned - their labour power. At the same time that it became necessary for some household members to sell their labour power, it was also essential that certain things with use-value, such as the reproduction of labour, childrearing and the maintenance of the home, continued to be produced. Because of the existing division of labour between females and males, women continued to be primarily

responsible for producing these use-values and the men became primarily responsible for selling their labour power. Thus a spatial segregation emerged which sent women and men in different directions. One important result of this separation was that women began increasingly to specialize in managing the household for household members who worked for wages. As the locus of production changed from the home to the marketplace, it is clear that men were the first to participate in the new production system and consequently tended to be involved more directly with the monetized economy as compared to women. As a result of colonial intervention a western model of the appropriate respective roles and responsibilities of females and males was superimposed onto traditional Bajau society. These western gender stereotypes of "appropriate" work activities for women and women's assumed "frailty" were then used to prevent them from obtaining the new waged work. Only men were seen as able to fulfil colonial labour needs.³ With their greater participation in the cash economy men were in a position to avail themselves of a wider range of opportunities than women who were confined to the home.

Table 9.2 below provides a summary of the gender division of labour within the kampong at this time.

Table 9.2 Gender Division of Labour in Kg Mengkabong
During the Colonial Period

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE OR MALE</u>
Boatbuilding		X	male
Firewood Collection	X		female
Fishing	X	X	male
Fish Processing	X		female
Fish Marketing	X	X	female
Agricultural Tasks	X	X	female
Household Maintenance Tasks	X		female
Housebuilding		X	male
Shopping	X	X	both
Animal Care	X	X	female
Water Collection	X	X	both
Childcare	X		female
Netmaking	X	X	both
Net Repair		X	male
Wage Work		X	male

If we compare Table 9.2 with Table 9.1 we can see that there was a growing specialization in productive tasks during the colonial period with women and men working separately rather than together. Work tasks were increasingly being identified as either female or male activities and there were less gender-neutral or shared tasks. It is apparent that with the advent of colonialism and capitalism the labour process was split into two separate spheres: commodity production performed mainly by men and household maintenance tasks performed by women. With this separation of labour under capitalism women's and men's labour was no longer defined in the same way. Essentially women and their labour were defined out of the capitalist labour market. With the initial intrusion of the cash economy the role of women was gradually altered. As new expectations arose, history was rewritten and the pattern of the gender division of labour had changed. It was now seen as "natural" in the kampong that men should fulfil their household responsibilities by taking on the role as main provider, earning money in the labour market and women fulfil theirs by managing the household.

3) The Federation of Malaysia

When Sabah became a state in the Federation of Malaysia the strategy for economic development changed. More vigorous programmes were initiated to continue the expansion of infrastructure, commodity production and trade. But, more importantly, new programmes were implemented in an attempt to increase the productivity and living standards of the sectors of the population that had previously been ignored, notably the agricultural sector, through an intensive programme of agricultural modernization, roads, rural electrification and piped water. Being a dominant sector in which the incidence of poverty was high development programmes were aimed at increasing the income of fishing households through increasing productivity levels, creating and expanding employment opportunities as well as a programme of "modernization".⁴ It was generally felt that the poverty and underdevelopment of the fisheries sector were largely due to the fact that technological progress and hence development benefits had somewhat eluded fisher households. As such, conscious efforts were made to change the situation. In Kg Mengkabong the fishing economy has undergone rapid changes as a result of increasing mechanization and commercialization. There is evidence that the gender

division of labour is changing at least partly because of the technological changes in the nature of fishing and in the rural economy in general.⁵

Changes in Fishing Technology

The introduction of manufactured twine to make nets brought about the first major technological change in the Bajau fishing community. Nets became cheaper with the introduction of nylon and other synthetic materials which has greatly lengthened their life. Catch rates improved as a direct consequence. Previously nets had been made of natural fibres from jungle vines and had a life of less than one year. The new nets were stronger and required less repair and maintenance than the traditional nets. Previously the manufacture and repair of fishing nets was a local activity, forming a set of ancillary crafts which yielded a small income to village women and men. As the maintenance and operation of fishing equipment altered a number of villagers lost this important source of income.

Parallelling this technological advance was the mechanization of fishing boats. Until the late 1950s and early 1960s the main type of boat used was the dugout. These were laboriously hewn from tree trunks and construction could take up to six months or more.

These small boats were either rowed or sailed putting a geographical limit to the fishing grounds they could practicably reach. Since the introduction of cheap sawn timber the construction time for boat building has been drastically reduced to around four or six weeks. From the early 1960s the Bajau began to use outboard motors financed by Government loans, fishing towkays (middlemen or women)⁶ or from income from paid work.⁷ As one would expect this brought considerable change in the traditional fishing economy. Firstly, mechanization confers a new freedom from the backbreaking physical labour of rowing. Secondly, with the use of engines, fishing crews can now venture further out to sea in search of fish, can fish in deeper waters and catch other species of fish. Thirdly, it permits the faster carriage of the catch in better condition to the markets. And finally, the traditional organization of fishing has been influenced by the processes of adaptation not only to the market economy but also to the environment. Usik had to take into consideration such elements as weather, sea conditions, winds and so forth before putting out to sea. The uncertainties of these factors contributed a great deal to the traditional beliefs practiced by the usik in connection with the sea to ensure the safety of fishing crews. Now with better powered boats and other

modern equipment usik need no longer leave their fate entirely to nature whenever they go out on a fishing trip. Their putting out to sea is now less influenced by the vagaries of weather and sea conditions. As a result the ritual and beliefs connected with the sea are slowly being eroded.⁸

The procedure for the disposal of the catch has also been substantially altered. Traditionally the catch was divided according to a set formula; each usik received one share and the boat owner and net owner (often the same person) were accorded an extra share each. Equal distribution was assured by the watchful women who followed the count. Each individual household was then responsible for the marketing of their share. Whilst in the past kampong women controlled the sale of fish in the local markets, nowadays the majority of fishing crews sell the catch directly to a towkay.

With increased mechanization in the fishing sub-sector, the economic structure, organization and the social relations of production began to change in the kampong. Fraser (1966) records similar changes in the rural fishing community he studied in South Thailand. Here technical innovation in the fishing industry such as

the substitution of outboard motors in place of oars and sails and the use of nylon rather than cotton nets for fishing have directly affected the allocation of roles and statuses in the community. In Kg Mengkabong the economy which had initially been based predominantly on subsistence production was replaced by an industrial fishing economy with all its capitalistic characteristics which needed large capital outlay and more sophisticated technology. The cost of buying and equipping a boat with a motor and new nets has led to a dramatic increase in the cost and a different pattern of financing. Many small-scale fishermen in the village have found that they have to establish close relationships or align themselves with the capitalist group, the towkay ikan, especially when they need help in terms of marketing their catch or finance. The towkay who normally act as middlemen are generally looked upon as a source of financial or technical help. These towkays are mainly composed of "outsiders" (orang lain), predominantly Chinese from the local town of Tuaran. Whilst there are several Bajau towkays operating within the village most of the usik I spoke with preferred to deal with the Chinese fish dealers. One usik spoke for many of his colleagues when he said, "It is much better to deal with an outsider. It's

embarrassing to argue over prices or to ask for credit from fellow Bajau."

Firth neatly summarized some of the functions of the towkay in Peninsular Malaysia.

"He advances money or more often goods such as rice and cloth to the fishermen during the slack season against the security of their coming catches. He lends money for the purchase of boats and nets, and may even supply such equipment without overt charge. In return he contracts with the fishermen to take their fish at an agreed price of his own setting, usually below the free market rate."
(1946:21)

In Kg Mengkabong the towkay performs similar functions. He or she may provide a boat engine for a particularly skilful usik or lend them a sum of money, interest-free, in order to purchase one. In return for this type of favour the usik is obliged to sell his catch to that towkay. It is apparent however that despite this reciprocal relationship between the towkay and fisherman, the former stands to gain economically at the expense of the latter, (Abdul Hamid Abdullah et al. 1987:38).

The Contemporary Gender Division of Labour

Despite the improvements in fishing equipment and techniques there are signs within the village that

dependence on fishing is gradually declining. Fishing is largely an activity undertaken by older men and there is little participation from teenage boys. Growing aspirations and the desire among young male villagers for more stable and continuous types of employment are important factors motivating the decline of interest in fishing activities. Through education and the mass media the young are being exposed to new ideas and alternative lifestyles with the result that their attitudes towards various types of work are significantly altered. White-collar jobs are highly desired though few have the necessary qualifications to obtain such employment.⁹ Preference for employment outside the fishing industry has contributed greatly towards a transformation in the economic relations existing in the kampong. This socio-economic transformation involves changing modes of production and patterns of employment as well as the utilization of new technology and the decline in importance of certain traditional economic activities within the village. These are all signs that the Bajau community in Kg Mengkabong is experiencing a process of transition which can be directly linked to the changing needs of the Sabah economy.

Technological changes in the fishing economy have slowly led to the displacement of women's work thus depriving them of a traditional source of income. As the incorporation of their society into the global economy pitted traditional crafts against cheaply made, mass-produced commodities, women's income from cottage industries diminished.¹⁰ Their net-making skills are no longer needed as manufactured nylon nets are universally employed. A greater proportion of the fish caught is sold directly to the towkay with the result that women's traditional role in fish marketing has been drastically reduced. Nowadays it is only older or divorced women from poorer households who can be seen selling small quantities of fish from stalls in the local markets. The role of these women is discussed fully in Chapter 11.

Table 9.3 outlines a few of the main activities that villagers are currently involved in. A much more detailed analysis of the contemporary gender division of labour is provided in the three chapters which follow.

Table 9.3 The Contemporary Gender Division of Labour
in Kg Mengkabong

<u>ACTIVITY</u>	<u>FEMALE</u>	<u>MALE</u>	<u>PREDOMINANTLY FEMALE OR MALE</u>
Boatbuilding		X	male
Firewood Collection	X		female
Fishing	X	X	male
Fish Processing	X		female
Fish Marketing	X	X	both
Agricultural Tasks	X	X	female
Household Maintenance Tasks	X		female
Housebuilding		X	male
Shopping	X	X	both
Animal Care	X	X	female
Childcare	X		female
Wage Work	X	X	both

One important recent change in the gender division of labour is the increasing number of young women who are now entering the wage labour market. During the early colonial period, as we have seen, there was a demand for male labour by the colonial administration, but in the last decade or so changes in the labour market have lead to a growing number of occupations open to women. These crucial developments are discussed fully in Chapter 12.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have attempted to outline the historical complexities which have created the gender division of labour in the village, arguing that there is a direct link between economic changes and women's roles in Kg Mengkabong, although it must be stressed that gender relations are not derived from the economy alone. The pattern of the gender division of labour has undergone various changes over the decades, primarily as a result of the intrusion of the capitalist economy. The stereotype of what is considered appropriate work for women has been elaborated and changed over time particularly in response to the intervention of capital. Before the colonial period work activities were predominantly of a cooperative nature, female and male household members

sharing a great many tasks. This pattern changed largely due to the process of capitalist development. Essentially the work distribution within households became more marked with the intrusion of the cash economy.

It is clear that the effects of the capitalist development process has been uneven as evidenced by the growing economic disparities between households in the village. Rural Sabah is only partially integrated into the world capitalist system; the subsistence mode of production coexists with commercial capitalism. Some households are more involved in one productive system than the other. Moreover within the kampong most households straddle the two sectors, allocating some members to subsistence production and others to market production, with female members predominating in the former. This resulted in growing inequalities within households between female and male members, as more village men became involved in socially esteemed production with its attendant rewards. Increasing participation by male villagers in wage employment in particular contributed to the emergence of a clearer, if not more rigid, division of work according to gender. Women were increasingly restricted to work activities centred on the household, whilst men went

out of the village to sell their labour power. The position of women deteriorated when male wage earners began to be regarded as more economically important as a result of changes in the local economy.

In the last decade or so the pattern of the gender division of labour is showing clear signs of changing again. A small, but significant, number of young literate women are entering the wage labour force for the first time in response to the changing needs of the economy. The importance of this trend for gender relations within the kampong, at the level of the household, is analyzed in full in Chapters 12 and 13.

Footnotes:

1 There is no information available on this subject prior to Chartered Company Rule.

2 Further examples of the marginalization of women's work through the process of capitalist development can be found throughout the Third World, (for example Boserup 1970; Macintosh 1978).

3 It should be borne in mind that for the Bajau their religion reinforced this division. Muslim suspicion of European (for them Christian) intentions delayed their taking up opportunities brought forward by colonial activity.

4 According to a study by Ko-Nelayan the incidence of poverty among fishing households is, at 49.3%, 4% higher than the figure for fishing households in Malaysia as a whole (1982:32). Within Sabah they identified the Tuaran district as one of the poorest areas where the usik were amongst the poorest of their group in the state.

5 Evidence can be found in both the works of Sather (1984; 1986) and Nimmo (1972) that the gender division of labour among east coast Bajau groups is changing for similar reasons.

6 Whilst female towkays do exist in Sabah, all of those operating in Kg Mengkabong are male.

7 Few Bajau households from the village have received government financial assistance to buy fishing equipment most relying on their own money or financial assistance from towkays. Villagers claim that the first loans they received were in 1964. Government bodies such as Ko-Nelayan are now reluctant to grant the villagers loans due to their poor repayment record. Carsten (1989) comments that fishermen in the village she studied in Langkawi prefer to take interest free loans from Chinese towkays rather than government loans with scheduled repayments with interest.

8 I was terribly disappointed when I attended the launching of a new fishing boat having anticipated a whole series of important rituals to take place. Aside from consultation with a bomoh to determine an auspicious date for the launch no other rites were performed. The boat was unceremoniously heaved off the platform into the water below.

9 This has undoubtedly contributed greatly towards male unemployment within the village. Many young men refuse to join their household's fishing crews seeing the work as menial and too physically demanding. Lacking academic qualifications they are unable to obtain waged white-collar employment and so aimlessly hang around the kampong. In most cases these young men do not join a fishing crew or seek menial labouring work until their mid to late 20s when they wish to marry. Without some form of income it is extremely difficult for a man to find himself a wife.

10 A brief discussion of the decline in women's cottage industries such as textile weaving and matmaking can be found in Chapter 11.

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER TEN

WOMEN IN THE HOUSEHOLD ECONOMY: MANAGING MULTIPLE ROLES

An understanding of women's roles as unpaid household workers is crucial to understanding women's position in modern Sabah and their role in the labour market. However, until recently housework was not considered a topic of serious academic concern. Fortunately feminist researchers are now examining empirically what housewives actually do and are developing theories concerning the relationship of housework to the social structure and the economy in general.¹ At a theoretical level, there have been important developments not only in the discussion of household maintenance work in pre-capitalist formations (Meillassoux 1981) but also in the discussion of the role of household maintenance work in relation to capitalist modes of production. The debate is still going on, but it is now widely recognized that household maintenance work plays a vital role in the maintenance and reproduction of the labour force and must be taken into consideration when analyzing the total picture of production. In this chapter I will

cover the issues of unpaid household maintenance work and demonstrate the heavy burdens these activities represent for kampong women of all socio-economic classes.

Housework as productive work

Over the last fifteen years or so an important theoretical debate has been waged on the relationship between "production" and "reproduction". This debate has been inconclusive and consumed a great deal of intellectual energy, so here I will give just a brief outline of the main arguments which surfaced. Edholm, Harris and Young (1978) were among the first to make an important distinction between three different usages of the term "reproduction". "Biological" reproduction comprises childbirth and lactation; "physical" reproduction involves the daily regeneration of the wage labour force through cooking, cleaning and washing, and so on; and "social" reproduction, an all-embracing category, refers to the maintenance of ideological conditions which reproduce class relations, and gender relations, and uphold the social and economic status quo. In most societies all three categories of activities tend to fall on the shoulders of women. So, although the only compelling connection

between sex and reproductive activity is in the sphere of biological reproduction, it is a fact that women are quite uniformly allocated those tasks which are directly connected to the maintenance of the labour force such as cooking, cleaning, childcare, care of the sick and aged etc. A battle then broke out over whether such labour was to be classed as productive or unproductive within Marxist terms. The "domestic labour debate" which took place in the pages of the New Left Review and elsewhere in the early 1970's was an attempt by feminists to make the history of the gender division of labour impinge on Marxist labour theory. The central subject in this debate was women's domestic labour in the home. They analyzed the problem by inquiring what functions women's domestic labour performs under capitalism. For Marx productive labour was labour which generated surplus value. The distinction did not depend on the type of work, but on the social relations within which it occurred. Thus the unpaid household maintenance work of the housewife engaged in cleaning in the home and the work of a cleaner employed by an agency may be indistinguishable in terms of the labour process, but the first would not come into the category of "productive labour" whilst the second would. As Malos observes,

"Although Marx was always careful to make clear that the distinction was a technical one which did not describe the usefulness of the work that fell into either category, those who followed him...have spoken as if "productive" was the same as useful or important to capitalism."

(Malos 1980:25)

Some writers have argued that as domestic labour produced no commodity or surplus value, it could not be productive, and therefore must be unproductive. Wally Seccombe (1974) maintains that while housework is productive in the sense of transferring and creating value, it is not productive in the specific context of capitalist production because it is not conducted in direct relation with capital and it does not produce surplus value. Others have argued that on the contrary domestic labour does produce a commodity, one which is moreover absolutely central to capitalism: labour power itself, (Benston 1969). They dispute the notion that childcare and household maintenance activities should be viewed as unproductive and categorized as reproductive activities. Merely because these tasks are unwaged in virtually all societies it does not follow that these activities are unproductive.² It has been pointed out by many feminist researchers that the distinction between production and reproduction often

seems to be somewhat artificial in terms of women's concrete burden. As Kandyoti points out,

"It is easy to recognize, for instance, that the process of reproduction includes a large number of productive tasks geared to the household's own consumption, such as animal care, agricultural work, petty trade, alongside food preparation, carrying water, collecting firewood, etc."

(1985:17)

Mies (1982) also finds little analytical value in distinguishing between subsistence production and reproduction, especially in the realm of use-value production. In her view we may more properly talk about a continuum of activities geared to the transformation of nature into human life and which may be broadly defined as subsistence work. It is only under capitalism that production and reproduction become separated and are redefined; the former to denote the production of exchange values only and the latter corresponds to social reproduction and the reproduction of the labour force. Therefore "domestic" work in the village context in particular is not analytically easy to separate out. "It is part of the structure of subsistence production, not a privatized, ideological domain.", (Stivens 1985:31). For example, in Kg Mengkabong a fisherman's wife processes the day's catch, the greater proportion of which is intended for

sale whilst a small portion is retained for household consumption. Again, if a woman prepares cakes to sell at market, the surplus is fed to her family. In conventional terms is this productive labour or reproductive labour? Drawing boundaries around work activities so as to give them the correct theoretical label is far from easy, (Moore 1988:53). It becomes clear that it is neither valid, nor necessary to draw an arbitrary divide between "productive" and "reproductive" labour.³ This separation is not only artificial it is analytically constraining. For these reasons and to avoid any confusion I use the term "reproduction" exclusively to refer to biological processes, that is, childbirth and lactation. I prefer to use the term "production" for all household maintenance activities for housework is productive work in every sense. As Oakley notes,

"Industrial capitalism as an economic system requires somebody to buy the food, cook the meals, wash the clothes, clean the home and bear and bring up children. Without this back-up of domestic labour the economy could not function, or, at least, enormous and profit handicapping resources would have to be devoted to catering for these personal and reproductive needs. Women as housewives who meet these needs are thus the backbone of the economy, and their contribution,...,is certainly "productive"; only Marxist purists need concern themselves with any epistemological uncertainty on this point."
(Oakley 1981:167-8)

Kerja Rumah: Bajau Women's Housework Activities

Women in Kg Mengkabong have to cope with a wide range of activities centring on the household. They perform a chain of routine activities including washing, cleaning, preparation of food, cooking, gathering and chopping firewood and caring for infants, all of which are referred to as kerja rumah (housework). A complete and detailed discussion of all of women's household maintenance tasks would be extremely lengthy, therefore I have selected a few of the most important activities to discuss: food preparation, firewood collection and laundry.

Buying, storing and preparing food for the household is an exclusively female activity. The time spent in cooking is vital to a household's subsistence - without cooking the staple foods are almost all inedible. The staple diet of villagers is not very varied; there is fish and rice at every meal. If they have not eaten rice at least twice a day a Bajau feels that he or she has not really eaten. Meat and vegetables are not a regular feature of poor villagers' diets, though richer households may consume buffalo meat once a week. This monotonous diet is supplemented with glutinous rice cakes and other snacks. Most of the foodstuffs consumed are fresh and home made; canned and

prepackaged foods are rarely purchased because they are prohibitively expensive.

A Bajau man feels he has the right to expect his wife to prepare all of his meals. If his wife is annoyed with him for any reason she may show her grievance by refusing to cook for him so that when he returns home from work he finds that everyone else has eaten and there is nothing left out for him. Such an action threatens to repudiate the relationship and if continued could potentially lead to divorce, for cooking food is an important symbol of the wife's position. Providing food signifies, for women, their total care of her husband and children. Not to provide cooked food means that a woman is failing both as a wife and as a woman.

Women's relationship with food is complicated. They are the providers and the nurturers for others, but may themselves not get enough to eat.

"Their connection with sustenance starts when their body nourishes the unborn child inside them; it continues as their body bears milk for the baby at the breast and it ends with them being expected to provide food for everyone else, nearly all of the time."
(Wells and Sim 1987:29)

Putting food on the table is a daily struggle for many Bajau women. They may enjoy preparing food for special feast occasions when groups of kinswomen share the work and there is a great deal of laughing and chatting, but acquiring and preparing food on a daily basis is a drudgery. Women may spend up to four or five hours a day preparing and cooking food for their households' consumption.

A regularly recurring activity of considerable importance to most households is the collection of firewood. Every household in the village utilizes wood-burning stoves for cooking. Weekly women set out in small dugouts to the mangrove swamps to cut firewood (kayu bakau). Nowadays they have to venture further in their search for wood as the mangrove swamps surrounding the village have been depleted over the years. An entire afternoon may be taken up with collecting and a further day to chop it up and remove the bark. It is a monotonous, tiring task, but one which is essential to the household.

Laundry is another strenuous time-consuming activity for village women. For several hours each morning, before the sun is punishingly hot, they crouch down on

the verandah to wash the clothes. Most houses have access to standpipes but supplies can be erratic causing considerable disruption to household routines. Doing laundry is the least liked of all household maintenance activities. The women acknowledged that it was hard work during our almost daily battles over my laundry. They constantly snatched my clothes from me saying, "It's very hard work. Your hands are too soft and your skin too thin. You'll hurt yourself." My laundering technique came in for much criticism for, of course, I washed my clothes all wrong. The kampong women soak each garment in large basins after which they scrub with soap and rinse. This process is then repeated to ensure that everything is scrupulously clean. As the average household consists of thirteen members (most of whom change clothes at least twice daily, small children sometimes more) doing the laundry can take up a considerable portion of each morning for many women.

All of the activities described above are manual services that go into the general support and maintenance of the household. Along with these, women are responsible for meeting the affective needs of the family, providing family members with understanding,

support and so forth. Women, in their capacity of wives, mothers and carers of dependent kin, take on a range of activities which cushion their households from the underprovision of inexpensive preventative healthcare. Women not only tend the sick and aged, but also play a major role in keeping illness at bay in the first place, through their struggle to maintain minimum levels of hygiene. Overcrowding and the forced proximity of various domestic functions such as cooking, eating, sleeping and caring for the sick means that the risk of cross infection is extremely high, (Chant 1984).

In short the women function as manual workers, informal teachers, nurses and "housewives" with the numerous attendant tasks that this entails. In these tasks men's input is, at best, peripheral.

Kerja Rumah as "women's work"

Oakley (1990:77) outlines the characteristic features of the housewife role in modern industrialized society :

1) its exclusive allocation to women, rather than to adults of both sexes,

- 2) its association with economic dependence, that is, with the dependent role of women in marriage,
- 3) its status as non-work or its opposition to "real" economically productive work,
- 4) its primacy to women, that is, its priority over other roles.

I would suggest that these characteristics also define the housewife role in Bajau society. All Bajau women do housework. Indeed housework is frequently referred to as kerja perempuan, literally "women's work". It is thus scarcely separable from the female role and forms part of a division of labour which is little questioned. All women interviewed regarded women as by nature fitted for housework. Husbands and sons were not regarded as being either capable or willing to do much in the house, and many of the women found the idea of them doing so rather amusing. A few also said that men had not been trained by their mothers to perform these tasks, they have always had it done for them. "How can you change them now?" was a typical statement. This attitude is reflected in the observable division of labour. In Chapter 8 we saw that men's contribution to household maintenance work was almost negligible (usually no more than 30 minutes per day, if that). An unpublished socio-economic study of the village by the

Ko-Nelayan presents rather different results. Of the 344 usik they interviewed a staggering 285 (almost 82%) claimed that they were engaged in housework during the slack fishing periods.⁴ Significantly Ko-Nelayan did not interview the fishermen's wives. When I mentioned the results of this survey to a group of village women they treated them with hoots of derision. "What nonsense!", was the general consensus. Occasionally a husband can be seen entertaining or supervising children for a short while to enable his wife to get on with cooking, etc. without interruption, a useful but not a concrete contribution. A man cannot be a housewife (ahli rumah is the most common term used but occasionally seri rumah is used which literally means "queen of the home")⁵: it runs counter to the social customs of Bajau society. The allocation of the housewife role to the woman in marriage is clearly socially structured.

There are of course a few rare exceptions to this. Two brothers in their late teens are forced to perform household maintenance tasks. They live with their grandmother as their parents' home is overflowing with younger children. Their grandmother, a widow, leaves early for the market every morning to sell fresh and dried fish. Udin and Kassim are, as a result,

responsible for washing their own clothes, sweeping the house and occasionally cooking their own meals. It is very apparent that they are far from happy with this arrangement. "I can't wait to get married and have a wife to do this", grumbled Udin one morning at the water tap. "It's not good for a man to do women's work".

The responsibility for housework is definitely seen as a female one but the woman who organizes the material servicing of the household is not usually doing it alone. It is generally done with the other women of the household. They form a team of people among whom household tasks and responsibilities can be allocated.

Rokiah is always the first to rise in the mornings, woken by the sounds of the cocks crowing at around 5.00am. Then she wakes her mother and the two quietly creep into the kitchen to light the cooking fire. From then until late into the night Rokiah and her mother work ceaselessly. Together they wash and sweep, cook and bring in firewood. When her younger sister returns from school in the afternoon she helps with the chores and supervises the youngest children. "I do most of the cooking", explains Rokiah, "My mother isn't as good at it as me. We always do the laundry together though as it is much better to have company. We can chat whilst we work."

The services of young children are particularly important in the poorest of households. It is clear

even from casual observation that the gender division of labour manifests itself from a very young age. For male children there is very little overall participation in housework. Boys occasionally fetch small items from the village shops, but mothers are particularly dependent on their daughters. Most women of all classes consider the training of their daughters in domestic skills to be an important part of a mother's duties. From the age of about six years young girls begin their economically useful lives and are expected to help their mothers around the house. At this age their tasks mainly involve the supervision of younger siblings. As girls mature physically additional responsibilities are given to them. At the age of twelve they are required to help with all the household chores, including food preparation, washing and cleaning. By the age of fifteen many young women assume the responsibility for almost all household maintenance work, particularly if their mothers are involved in work activities outside the home. Unmarried daughters past school age are clearly expected to do most.

Jamillah, 16 years old, dropped out of school last year after failing her examinations. Her father is a member of a fishing crew, her mother and grandmother are fish traders at the local market. As the eldest surviving daughter Jamillah is responsible for most of the household

maintenance tasks. She rises at 5.30am, lights the cooking fire, makes coffee and heats up the remains of yesterday's rice dish for the family's breakfast. She then prepares a meal for her father to take with him on his fishing expedition. After her father has eaten she rouses the rest of the household members and gets her younger siblings washed, fed and ready for school. She then washes the dishes and cooking pots and does the laundry for the entire household of ten. Only after the laundry has been hung out to dry does she have time to bathe. By now it is around 10.30am and time to tidy the house and sweep the floors. At 11am she prepares and cooks the midday meal which usually comprises of rice and fish. After lunch the crockery is washed. Between 1 and 3pm Jamillah bakes cakes, occasionally with the help of her cousin who lives in a neighbouring house. This is often a pleasant time for Jamillah, chatting and exchanging news. She plays with her younger siblings and then takes a short nap. At 3.00pm Jamillah and her cousin rise again in order to roast and grind coffee beans. This task is performed on a weekly basis. She then sweeps the floors again and tidies up after the younger children. At 5.30pm she prepares the evening meal which is served at around 7.00pm when her father returns from his fishing trip. He and her elder brother eat first, then Jamillah her mother, grandmother and the other children eat, after which Jamillah washes up. When the washing up is complete she bathes the younger children. With her mother she brings in the laundry, does any mending and puts the clothes away. By this time it is 8.30pm. Jamillah spends the rest of the evening chatting with friends or relaxing in front of a neighbour's television. At around 10.00pm she sleeps. "I have to sleep early or I can't get up in the morning to make my father's breakfast", she explains.

Age and class differences exempt some groups of women from the more arduous activities. Elderly women from sederhana households often adopt a supervisory role, delegating and overseeing the work of younger female

household members. They may take on a few of the lighter tasks such as peeling vegetables and other food preparation tasks. Grandmothers can often be seen assuming childcare responsibilities particularly if their daughters work outside the home. In contrast, poor elderly women do not have the luxury of slowing down in later life particularly if they are heads of their household. As well as being involved in numerous income-generating activities, many of them take responsibility for household maintenance tasks.

Women's Perceptions and Evaluations of Kerja Rumah

In her classic study of British women and household tasks, Ann Oakley discovered that there was little difference between working class and middle class women as far as the experience of household tasks was concerned, however interesting differences emerged in the ways in which they evaluated these tasks. Working class women were more likely to hold what Oakley terms a "traditional" view of household tasks, as something to be done for its own sake as part of women's self-conceptions. Middle class women, however, tended to take an "instrumental" view of household tasks as something which must be done as quickly as possible so that time can be made for more intrinsically satisfying

activities, (Oakley 1976:94). I was therefore interested to explore whether Oakley's analysis could be extended to Bajau society, to discover whether the same distinction could be made between susah and sederhana women.⁶ The situation in Kg Mengkabong is somewhat different however. Common to almost all of the women interviewed was the "traditional" attitude that household tasks are scarcely separable from the female role and efficiency as a seri rumah (housewife) is regarded as an important measure of success as a woman. But beyond this common orientation there were wide differences as to how women experience household tasks, relating to the material conditions of the households concerned.

One important variable affecting the way in which a woman experiences her household work is the amount of space available in which to do it, (Sharma 1986:64).

Noy lives in a large four roomed house which is almost fully furnished. The size of the house entails a great deal of work, and the furniture adds extra cleaning chores. Noy's family possess a substantial number of ornamental objects, from fancy new clocks to brass jars and betel boxes. These are all displayed in glass fronted cupboards in the public room. Dusting and polishing of these items is a time-consuming task. The size of the house means that household member's various indoor activities need not interfere with each other very much. If her father is conducting a kampong meeting in the

public room, Noy can move to one of the other rooms to mend clothes or whatever task she is doing. At the other end of the scale, Mah, a widow, heads one of the poorest households in the kampong. The household consists of ten individuals, spanning three generations, and all live in a one room house with separate kitchen hut. Whilst she may have less to clean, a great deal of organization is needed if there is not to be interference between her work and any other activity going on in the house. For instance, when it rains the washing must be hung inside to dry, taking up a large amount of the living space. As the house is virtually unfurnished Mah spends a great deal of time neatly stacking the household's belongings on wooden shelves. As the family's possessions and clothing are on full view to any visitors she would feel terribly ashamed if they were not tidily stored.

The example above illustrates how housework can be demanding even in a small home. The size of the house may alter the way tasks are performed but not necessarily the amount of energy expended in housework activities.

Class differences within the village clearly affect women's relations to housework in other ways. Wealthier households can often afford to buy kitchen appliances and labour saving devices. Whilst many susah households roast and grind coffee beans themselves, a backbreaking process which can take two women several hours each week, their wealthier neighbours can save considerable time and effort using electric coffee-grinders. Better-off households can

afford to purchase ready-chopped firewood from other poorer villagers thus saving hours of arduous work. Yet, despite owning labour-saving devices sederhana women spend longer in household maintenance activities than women from susah households, (9.6 hours and 5.8 hours respectively). Women from poorer households often have less time to spend on housework. They are forced to spend their time in income-generating activities to support their households financially.

If there was any general complaint about housework expressed by women of all classes it was simply that there was too much of it and that it was difficult to get through it in the time available without some lowering of standards. Of course, as is clear from the previous discussion, the women were not all equally burdened. Some had to tackle the demands of a large household single-handed, while others had to cater for only a small family with the help of other women in the household. Some worked long hours at a paid job, others were involved in household tasks all day. But, irrespective of these differences, all but a few of the women felt themselves to be everlastingly busy. Houses range in size from those of the wealthy with several rooms, to single room shacks, but all require some

labour expenditure. The amounts of housework can vary depending on household size and the number of women involved, but the majority of women have some childcare responsibilities and this can be the most onerous of all. Mothers of young children face a continuous round of cooking, feeding, washing, cleaning and "emotional" work. Young children are constantly supervised to ensure that they do not venture out of the house. Every villager can relate a story about some child who fell in the water and drowned whilst its mother's back was turned.

As we saw in Chapter 8 a woman's housework contribution is not computed in the country's GNP. Furthermore, women who perform household maintenance work are viewed as economically dependent on their husbands and defined in the Sabah census as "economically inactive". The housewife herself does not produce commodities of direct value to the economy. Her primary economic function is vicarious: by servicing others she enables them to engage in productive economic activity. Therefore the economic value of the role of housekeeper should not be underestimated. Without a wife or some other female relative to provide the services of housekeeping, a man would be forced either to divert

considerable time and energy to housework chores himself or hire someone else to do them for him. In Kuala Lumpur at the Asian Seminar on Women and Employment in 1976, an attempt was made to calculate the total market value of a housewife's services in her various capacities as cleaner, cook, laundress, nursemaid; that is, the amount a widower or divorced man with children may have to spend to have the same standard of service provided by his former wife. It was estimated that in 1976 his monthly expenditure would work out at around M\$400.⁷ This exercise of adding up the hourly rates of various jobs to see what housework is "worth" is purely academic, but it does help dispel the myth, common in conventional economics, of a wife's dependency on her husband. It is taken for granted that the housewife's contribution is part of her duty to her husband and household. Yet by freeing her husband from household chores she makes it possible for her husband to focus on his work. We can see that the real dependency here is two-way. The time and effort invested by Bajau women in housekeeping is substantial. She must keep the house clean, see to the laundry and deal with the time-consuming tasks of preparing and cooking family meals. Indeed, much of a woman's day may centre around household chores.

The social trivialization of housework (and of women) is in part responsible for the tendency to underestimate or ignore the amount of time spent doing it, but other features of the housewife role also conspire to conceal it.⁸ Housework differs from most other work in that it is self-defined and its outlines blurred by its integration in a whole complex of household, family-based roles which define the situation of women. Housework, by definition, is an activity performed within the home. The home is the workplace, and its boundaries are also the boundaries of family life. There are no public rules dictating what the housewife should do, and how and when she should do it. Beyond basic specifications - the provision of meals, the laundering of clothes, the cleaning of the house - the housewife, in theory at least, defines the job as she likes. Although housework has no definite duration, indirectly it has an inbuilt timing mechanism, for example a mother has to be up in time to prepare breakfast, wash the clothes when the sun is up, and prepare food for the family when they return from school/work. The Swedish feminist Rita Liljestrom concludes that women's time is organic and keyed to the duration it takes to get something (or many things) done, as opposed to men's time which is largely one-dimensional, that is, men

tend to perform one activity at a time. Bajau women are accustomed to performing multiple tasks simultaneously. Their time is indistinct, that is, it adapts to the needs and context around it.

The Changing Nature of Housework

"...to assume that domestic technology liberates housewives is to ignore all that is known about the social impact of technology on work."

(Oakley 1981:171)

Since housework is considered natural, it is easy to make the mistake of seeing it as a constant throughout history, as an unchanging set of necessities which do not need to be subjected to historical analysis, (Harris and Young 1981). In Europe, before the establishment of capitalism, housework had the character of manufacture rather than service. The majority of homes were not places where much housework in the modern sense of cleaning, dusting and polishing, could be done. Rooms did not have individual uses and were plainly and sparsely furnished as places of work - in the undifferentiated sense of production for use and for exchange. As the level of material possessions rises and definitions of women's work change, a transformation is brought about in women's relationship

to their work. Production for household use is converted into consumption for household use. More energy and work hours are needed in home-maintenance activities, such as washing curtains, dusting and polishing furniture and so on.

Similarly in Bajau society there are signs that women's household labour is becoming intensified with "modernization". Where one might have expected a reduction in the amount of housework that a woman had to do (with a drop in the average number of children and the increased availability of labour-saving devices) there has been an increased burden. A Multinational Time Budget Project was conducted in 1964-65 in fifteen locations spread over twelve countries. The social scientists who analysed the results found, somewhat to their surprise, that vast differences among survey sites in the availability of labour-saving household amenities had little impact on time spent in housekeeping tasks. From my study it appears in the Bajau case that as housework becomes less onerous for wealthier women, these women opt for a higher quality of household services, for example, more elaborate meals, washing clothes more often. Women's magazines and the mass media help foster a desire for a house that is nicely decorated, ornamented with the

wife's handiwork. Mothers' desires to clothe infants in frilly dresses, bonnets and socks has led to additional laundry chores. Education means new forms of labour for women such as getting children ready for school, walking them there and, in some cases, the loss of child labour. New standards of cleanliness and hygiene are now pervading Bajau homes and Bajau culture now ordains high standards of housekeeping.

As Betty Friedan so aptly noted in "The Feminine Mystique" (1963:43) technology cannot in itself mitigate against the psychological law that "housewifery expands to fill the time available". The women from sederhana households who can afford the time and labour-saving kitchen appliances spend longer in household maintenance activities than those from susah households. Women have not been "liberated" from the domestic drudgery of the past by the introduction of household appliances. In fact the work has merely changed in character with new standards and expectations.

Model of the "ideal housewife"

Within the kampong women judge each others standards of housewifery. If it is felt that a woman is a slovenly housekeeper she will quickly become the target of

malicious village gossip. A village woman who rises late in the morning to do her laundry after her neighbours have completed theirs is considered lazy (malas). Budgeting skills are another criteria used to judge a woman's housekeeping, that is, being able to feed and clothe one's family within one's means. Women's budgeting skills, as we shall see in Chapter 13, are vital to their households maintenance and well-being. Being a "good wife" also involves the storing, processing and cooking of food and the very survival of the household depends on a woman's efficient performance of these tasks. Women are also expected to develop skills in performing tasks such as sewing, cooking, and homemaking. Young women look eagerly through women's magazines for new ideas in cooking and homecraft. The elaborate notions of houswifery expressed by middle and upper class urban women are filtering down, pressurizing poor women into more and more exacting ideas of what competence as a housewife should mean.

In the social image of a woman the roles of wife and mother are not distinct from the role of the housewife. Reflections of this image in advertising, and in the media generally, portray women as some kind of mean of these three roles combined. A particularly clear

presentation of this image appears in women's magazines, which show women how to dress, eat, housekeep and so forth. Women's expected role in Malaysian society is to strive for perfection in all three roles.

As Stivens points out, nationally the ideology of "housewife" is being used increasingly to justify a body of rhetoric about "women's place being in the home", which she describes as a "curious ideological appeal to 'tradition' in a country where women's work has hardly ever been in the home" (1985:31).⁹ In the Fifth Malaysia Plan women were seen as the key to improving the lot of low-income households. Rural women were blamed for not being hard working and for their presumed lack of response to "modern practices" and "new opportunities" for improving the health and the wealth of their families. A government programme KEMAS ("tidy up") instructed village women in home economics. Official discourse defined women's roles in modern Malaysia - as housewives who could inculcate "progressive" values in their children. Government public information broadcasts on radio and television advise women on how to be "good housewives." Islamic television programmes promote an image of the "ideal

wife" who puts her husband and children before anything else. In this way, it is evident that the Malaysian government is increasingly promoting the "housewife" as the proper role for women. Women and the family have thus entered into the social construction of national politics.

CONCLUSION

In common with women all over the world, Bajau women do substantial amounts of unpaid work within the home, and this is concealed by the fact that it is assumed to be part of their "natural" function. The work women do in the home as housewives is different from that done in the paid economy. Although all the same services could be bought outside the home, within the home they are provided out of "love" and "duty" rather than for a wage. Household maintenance activities are heavy and onerous for Bajau women and are seldom shared by men.

If women's household maintenance work is properly measured it can be seen that they are spending up to nine or ten hours a day in essential activities relating to the household's subsistence, especially in the provision of food. Women are often expected to keep up this kind of pace for almost an entire lifetime, with particularly in the poorest of households,

little relief in old-age. They do this despite often inadequate nutrition and with the severe physical demands of frequent pregnancies, childbirth and lactation.

It is clear that policy makers must acknowledge and take into account the nature and content of women's household maintenance tasks and the amount of time spent performing them if projects designed to raise rural living standards are to succeed.

Footnotes:

¹ In the 1940s Rosemary Firth (1966) was one of the first to demonstrate an academic interest in exploring housework in her study of "Housekeeping among Malay Peasants". Then in 1969 Ann Oakley decided to make housework the subject of her PhD. She went on to write two books: "Housewife" (1976) on the historical development of the housewife, and "The Sociology of Housework" (1974) which examines the social significance of housework in British society.

² Just to complicate matters further the debate has been brought full circle, then closed, by those who have argued that domestic labour is neither productive nor unproductive because these terms operate within a body of theory in which they are applicable only to waged work (Vogel 1983). Domestic labour is seen to be outside its terms.

³ The tendency to separate reproduction from other productive relations and thus to conceive of both sets of relations as distinct domains has been criticised by writers from various disciplines. The feminist critique in social anthropology makes it clear that the productive and reproductive roles of women cannot be

separated out and analyzed in isolation from each other (for example, Vogel 1983; Moore 1988).

4 It should be noted that the category of "housework" in Ko-Nelayan's survey does not encompass housebuilding and repairs or income-generating activities within the home.

5 Strange (1985:201) points out that another possible translation of ahli rumah is "home expert".

6 Sharma (1986), influenced by Oakley's work, conducted a similar analysis amongst working class and middle class women in India. It was after reading Sharma's study that I decided to attempt a similar analysis of Bajau women's attitudes to housework.

7 It was calculated that he would need M\$180 to pay for the services of domestic help, M\$60 to pay for a part-time nurse whenever he or his children fall ill and M\$60 for the services of a public relations officer whenever he wants to entertain. This leads to a total of M\$400 per month. In addition, if the children are small the man would have to employ a nanny. His expenditure would therefore increase by another M\$100 to a total of M\$500 a month (NACIWID 1976). Ironically, the average male monthly earnings in Malaysia at this time were around M\$350.

8 It is interesting that McAllister (1987: 240) in her study of Negeri Sembilan village women claims that kerja rumah is considered valuable and important work. She puts this down to the adat perpatih system under which women occupy an important position in kampong life.

9 A similar process of "housewifisation" has been reported by feminist researchers in a wide range of countries, for example Townsend (1993) in Latin America, Jacobs (1984) in Zimbabwe and Ulluwishewa (1989) in Sri Lanka.

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER ELEVEN

BAJAU WOMEN IN TRADE AND PETTY COMMODITY PRODUCTION

With limited or no education and few formal employment opportunities, poor women in developing countries often turn to self-employment as a means of supporting themselves and their families. This chapter considers some of the ways in which kampong women can earn an income within the home and some of the opportunities which are open to women in the local market. Bajau women who work outside the home are heavily concentrated in the informal sector, both as self-employed business operators and employees. The overwhelming majority of women's businesses have only one worker - the business owner herself - and tend to be concentrated in certain activities, most noticeably commerce, services and petty commodity production. It is important to recognize that such employment cannot in any sense be considered marginal, since it tends to account for such a significant proportion of total employment within the village.¹ Without income from the informal sector a large proportion of village households would fall even further below the poverty line.

THE INFORMAL SECTOR

The term "informal sector" has been used to cover a wide range of income-generating activities. The complexity of the informal sector of the economy makes it difficult to arrive at a generally acceptable definition. The varied criteria used to describe the informal sector in different studies are reflected in the many different names proposed for this area of economic activity, such as "hidden economy", "subsistence sector" and "traditional mode of production", which do not cover the same ground. A United Nations survey of women and development acknowledges the difficulty.

"The precise meaning of the term "informal sector" remains elusive and its very ambiguities make it difficult to develop a generally acceptable definition that would be a prerequisite to adequate quantification. Although the term is widely used in the context of development and has been discussed extensively, no standard internationally agreed upon definition has been arrived at."
(United Nations 1989:230-1)

INSTRAW (International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women) has suggested that the term "informal sector" could cover persons working on their own account who have no regular paid employees, although they may be helped on a full-time or part-time basis by members of their families. Participants in

the informal sector have low job skills and very few prospects for advancement in their existing employment. Their work is characterized by low and uncertain incomes as compared to those working in the formal sector, and little or no job security. Applying these criteria, the informal sector would include small-scale farmers and fishermen, street traders, pedlars, stallholders, makers of traditional manufactured goods and persons providing services such as shoe-cleaning. Paid domestic servants and waitresses are also considered to be part of the informal sector although they are not own-account workers in the strictest sense of the term. I would also include in the informal sector incorporated enterprises with a small number of paid employees. In this chapter I examine the nature of female involvement in the informal sector by looking at their work as own-account workers and entrepreneurs. In the next chapter I move on to a discussion of women's waged work in both the informal and formal sectors of the Sabah economy.

The women of Kg Mengkabong have long been involved in a series of income-generating activities which are distinguishable from contractual wage labour. They are found in large numbers in petty trade, commerce and services. Bajau women from Kg Mengkabong are involved

in trading in processed foods, cigarette and betel (sireh), the making and selling of snacks, and also deal in fresh, dried and cooked fish as well as other marine products. Whilst women's presence in these sectors dates back to pre-colonial times, it is now often a response to the economic pressure and the lack of access to other forms of employment which motivates women to engage in these occupations. Let us turn now to the trading occupations and cottage industries of village women by individual specialization to ascertain the situation, lifestyle, aspirations and self-image of women in these occupations. I will begin by examining the retail trade within the kampong, then women's roles in the market as fish sellers and prepared-food traders, and finally look at women's involvement in village-based traditional craft production and services.

TRADING

Southeast Asian women have long been associated with commercial activities, (Boserup 1970). In Southeast Asia women account for 40 to 50% of the total workforce in market and service occupations.² According to Boserup, these occupations represent a kind of intermediary stage in the development between agricultural and modern industrial society. The market

trading and entrepreneurial activities of women have also been extensively documented by Alice Dewey in "Peasant Marketing in Java" (1962) and in Christine Szanton's "A Right to Survive: Subsistence Marketing in a Lowland Philippine Town" (1972). Rosemary Firth (1966), in her examination of the household management in a rural fishing community in Kelantan, describes in considerable detail how widows and divorced women are the snack sellers in the village. She explains,

"The eating of snacks is an integral part of Malay social life, and the trade in them is almost exclusively in the hands of women. It is an important factor in the comparative economic independence of the Malay village women for whom this form of trade provides a simple, easily available means of livelihood, either by itself or combined with other odd jobs."

(1966:32)

Trading, whether as an individual entrepreneur or as a worker in a family business, is one of the most accessible entries into the cash economy for Bajau villagers. It requires little formal training beyond basic numeracy and its specific skills can be learned by observation and consultation with people already in the business. Hence it is not surprising that many women in Kg Mengkabong are engaged in some form of commerce.

Although it is relatively easy to become a trader, the women traders of the village demonstrate a wide range of possibilities determined largely by the resources they are able to bring to the undertaking. To be a "trader" may mean anything from owning a small provisions store to selling hairpins and cigarette lighters on street corners. Clearly financial resources make a great deal of difference.

Retail Establishments

Shopkeeping and petty trade have always attracted the villagers. Many of them have tried their hand at running a village shop at one time or another.

Villagers can relate that Haji Abdul used to have a shop here and Din's mother a shop there, and so on. Rosemary Firth describes a similar pattern in Kelantan. She writes,

"...the Malay shopkeepers are apt to be a floating population. A very little capital collected, an inclination that way, or the failure of resources, may decide a man, or more likely a woman, to open a shop, which may only be run for a short time, until indebtedness forces him to give up the business or to move elsewhere."

(1966:135)

These shops stock mainly non-perishables which are in constant daily use; spices, oil, matches, sugar, salt,

biscuits, cigarettes, snacks and soft drinks. Basically they sell provisions that people have forgotten to buy in town. Cloth, household goods and kitchen equipment are bought in the local town shops which are predominantly Chinese-owned. Fruit, vegetables and meat are purchased at the Tuaran market. The village shopkeepers purchase most of their stock from the larger stores in Tuaran at below retail price. These goods are then resold in the village at a higher price. There are seven small retail stores in the village, which are mainly run by female members of the household, and a few by married couples. These shops are located either in a sectioned-off part of the house, or a shed attached to the house. All shops are furnished very basically with rough wooden shelves around the walls to stack the goods. Cash registers are not used; a drawer or a tin hanging from the roof beams serves as a cash box.

Due to the close proximity of the home and workplace women can combine running the shop and childcare responsibilities. Whilst the shop is free from customers a female shopkeeper can get on with her housework duties and attend to her childrens' needs. There is little gender-specific division of labour in the businesses run by married couples, but housework

and childcare remain exclusively women's responsibilities despite the intermingling of personal and business life caused by the long hours and the family's residence in the shop.

Fatima and her husband Ismail, both in their thirties, own and run one of the kampong shops. This is a new enterprise for them as formerly Ismail was a member of a fishing crew. After borrowing money from their relatives they constructed a very basic building to house their store. He takes responsibility for buying the stock from the town, while they jointly staff the shop which is open extremely long hours from 6.30am until 9.00 or 10.00pm. Unusually their shop is quite separate from their home which is several metres away on a neighbouring catwalk. This means that when Fatima is in charge of the shop she has to bring her two pre-school children with her. Between customers she can be seen feeding and bathing her young daughters. As the shop is not secure (there are no doors or sealed windows) every night they have to transport all of the stock back to their house or alternatively they bring bedding and sleep on the premises.

This is an area where village women can participate effectively since they have knowledge of customer preferences and budgeting skills required to make a success of running a general village store.

Obviously a certain amount of capital is required to establish a village store; M\$500 would be a generous estimate of the capital involved, excluding the premises. Credit for customers is a great problem. Villagers have been known to get angry if they are

refused credit for they are often related to the shopkeeper and feel that he or she is obliged to help them with small gifts or loans of goods. Not to extend credit to a fellow villager is considered mean and to insist on repayment is not well regarded, especially if the borrower is a relative. As a result village shopkeepers are always involved in elaborate networks of credit, and whilst some of them may have relatively high amounts of working capital (as compared to market traders), they report having small amounts of liquid capital. Interest is not charged on credits. These small scale shopkeepers cannot afford to allow their meagre capital to be tied up in debts. If they do the business is sure to fail. "We went bankrupt after five months", explained one woman. "We had a small store over there at the back of the kitchen but people didn't want to pay and the children kept helping themselves to snacks so we had to give up. It was fate (jodoh). The will of Allah."³

Fish Market traders.

Much of the economic and social life of rural Sabah is centred upon local markets and their traders. Most rural inhabitants buy their clothing, fresh foods and tobacco from market traders. Two types of market can

be distinguished in Sabah: the daily market (pasar) and the larger periodic market (tamu). Tamus are held weekly or in some areas fortnightly. The first accounts of Sabah tamus were written by the Europeans in the 19th century. From these accounts it can be seen that the tamus were already an established institution on the west coast of Sabah in the 1880's. They flourished in zones of contact between sea-faring coastal peoples and the agriculturalists from further inland. Joy Burrough in her study of periodic markets in Sabah notes,

"The west coast of Borneo was particularly well endowed with the prerequisites required to stimulate active internal trading. These include: an interface between two contrasting environments (coastal plains and forested mountains); the availability of products that would stimulate trade; groups of people who might be expected to develop highland-lowland trade; and most importantly, a long history of offshore international trading which focussed on certain ports."

(1975:23)

The Bajaus could offer a variety of fresh fish, salted dried fish (ikan kering), grilled fish (ikan perangan), shellfish, crabs (ketam), shrimp paste (belacan), salt, and powdered sea-shells to be mixed and chewed with betel nut, whilst in return the Kadazans brought with them rice, tobacco, rattan and fruits as well as hats and rope. Therefore people from coastal kampongs met

to barter with people from inland kampongs. The British administrators in the late 19th century were quick to realize the value of these periodic markets and manipulated the system to promote peaceful trading, (Burrough 1975:27). The District Officer of Tuaran, Oscar Cook describes how a flagpole was erected on the Tuaran tamu ground and trading could not commence until the flag was unfurled,

"Every now and then an eye is lifted to the flag, still unfurled at the top of the post; every now and then a policeman warns some over-anxious purchaser that the tamu is not yet open."

(Cook 1924:123)

Tamus were beginning to change under Chartered Company Rule. Cash transactions began to replace the traditional bartering system. Before World War I, silver Straits Settlement dollars were being circulated at the larger tamus, especially by Chinese traders who came from the major trading posts and the towns, (Burrough 1973).

At first glance the layout of the present day marketplace seems chaotic and disorganized, but it is subdivided into main sections depending on the type of goods sold; there is a meat market, a fruit and vegetable market, a clothing market and a fish market.

There is also a grassy area where live ducks and squawking chickens are sold, their legs tied with string to immobilize them. The fish market is a concreted area covered by corrugated sheets supported on wooden posts. The produce is displayed on either raised concrete or wooden platforms.

Vendors start arriving at Tuaran tamu at around 6.00am on Sunday mornings (early to ensure they find a good site to display their wares) and by 8.00am the market is packed. Vendors cover the market forecourt and the pavements of the nearby streets with piles of produce. The tamu attracts all manner of traders such as the quasi-medical commercial travellers selling herbal remedies and gathering crowds with their tales of wonder cures for everything from sterility to cancer, in two sizes of bottle. The Kadazan predominate at the Tuaran tamu selling seasonal fruits and vegetables, rice, poultry, tobacco and dried leaves for rolling cigarettes. The Bajaus form the second largest group of traders. The Bajau women arrive early, heavily laden with baskets of prawns and eels, still alive and wriggling: a great variety of fish, dried and fresh, from the large ikan tenggiri to the tiny ikan bilis. They also sell shellfish and large live black crabs sold in bundles of four. Some Bajau women are also

involved in the making and selling of snacks, cakes, cigarettes and betel. None of the Bajau from Kg Mengkabong are involved in the commercial growing of fruit and vegetables, though several of them claim to have grown and sold these in the past. One reason often cited for abandoning this enterprise was that the quantity of stock that was stolen during the night made it an unprofitable enterprise.⁴

Market women typically have no formal education, although in some cases they have up to six years of primary schooling. They generally support their children and other family members, and often they are divorced or widowed. Others are the wives of usik. The demands of childbearing and childcare are reflected in the age demographics of market sellers. They tend to be middle-aged and elderly, whereas men of all ages can be found trading in the marketplace. It should be noted that the advanced age of many of the market women is due to late entry and not to greater longevity in market careers.

These female market traders obtain their fish supplies from a number of sources. A few fish themselves with a rod and line and a significant number are involved in gathering marine products. On their return from the

sea three categories of people await the usik: the towkays in their fish trucks who buy the bulk of the catch, the usiks' wives who take their husband's share of the surplus fish home whilst their husbands deal with the towkays, and lastly a group of widowed or divorced women. This third group do not have menfolk to bring home fish for them and are forced to buy a few kati (one kati=0.06 kilograms) of fish for their household's consumption and to sell at market to earn some cash. These women are skilled hagglers and bargain with the usik to obtain the lowest price for the fish.

Zaliah, a widow in her 50s can be found waiting by the jetty most days in the late afternoon perched on a large plastic basin. She regularly buys a few kati of fish from the same boat - that of her sister's husband - which she then takes to market the following morning. "My children provide for me as best they can", she explained, "but we are very poor. I like to have a little money of my own to buy things like tobacco and sireh."

For fish sellers the working day begins soon after they rise at 4.00 or 5.00am to be at their stalls with their produce by 7.00am. Some rent stalls for 50 sen per day which a market official comes round to collect. The fish sellers are adept at disappearing when they see him coming to avoid paying the fees. Others spread their wares on straw matting on the edge of the street.

These vendors are subject to removal if they are found to be blocking foot traffic. These women may earn M\$15 some days but on other days they may end up in arrears. They are entrepreneurs of considerable ingenuity and know-how regardless of whether they are literate or not. Shops in buildings in the market areas tend to be owned by men, while vendors in the street are predominantly women.

Over time a relationship builds up between buyer and trader through the extension of credit or by giving a little extra fish over the usual amount for the agreed price. The buyer maintains her side of the relationship by regularly patronizing that trader's stall. Some fish sellers follow the practice of giving poorer women a price reduction and asking a little more from those who can afford to pay for it. This is an unspoken agreement which is characterized by bargaining. Relatives and friends also expect a lower price. Non-Bajau shoppers, and especially foreign tourists, will automatically be asked for a higher price. Access to customers, then, is critical to a woman's capacity to earn a regular cash income through her participation in the market as a trader. Fixed operations from a shop or stall in a neighbourhood or

marketplace further facilitates maintenance of customer relationships.

The fish sellers tend to be assertive women and this finds its public expression in expansive personal behaviour. They are voluble and open, calling out to potential customers and gossiping with them. At ease in a public place, they feel free to laugh loudly and banter with the customers. Whilst the activities of young women are curtailed, women past childbearing age enjoy more freedom and fewer restrictions. There is a noticeable lessening of social constraints on the behaviour of older Bajau women and they are allowed greater latitude in social interaction, especially with men. The raucous behaviour of these old market women would be unthinkable for a young Bajau woman. It would be deemed unseemly for a young girl to be part of the lively market scene.⁵

Despite her constant complaints of ill-health and how badly her grown children treat her, Meng is a popular trader in the fish market. She always knows the latest gossip and is a consummate actress. She delights in telling mildly ribald stories and occasionally lapses into obscenity. Being such an extrovert, she attracts regular customers who come to be entertained by her as they inspect and buy her wares.

The market is a social as well as economic centre. It is the place to hear the local gossip. When the market is "resting" in the heat of midday people have time to chat about affairs in their respective villages. Female buyers and sellers exchange news of their children, households and the like, as well as financial matters. Old men discuss village politics and events, whilst young men stroll around eyeing the young girls. It should be stressed however that attendance at the market is first of all an economic activity notwithstanding the social importance of the marketplace throughout Sabah.

Other female villagers eagerly await the return of the fish sellers after their day's trading. They are an important source of news from neighbouring villages and further afield and often stop for a few minutes in friends' and neighbours' houses along the catwalk on their way home to relate the day's happenings such as who is getting married, having a baby or whose husband was seen in a coffee shop with another woman, and so forth. For women who rarely leave the village these market women keep them in touch with what is going on outside the boundaries of the village.

A recent change in the marketplace is worrying some of the fish sellers. The market facilities are being upgraded with the aim of providing better conditions for both traders and customers. A large two-level concrete building has been erected in the centre of the marketplace. One floor is intended for the use of fish and meat sellers, the other for fruit and vegetables. At the time of my departure the new market building was not yet open but the fish traders expressed the fear that the money to finance the new building would be subsidized by the traders in increased market fees. They were also worried that their regular customers would not be able to locate them easily and may patronize another stall. Due to these fears many of them were determined to continue trading in the old fish market for as long as possible.

Food Vending

The provision of food and drinks to the public is a significant business in the village, and one which employs more women than men. Cooked food in particular constitutes an important sector of Bajau petty enterprise. The Bajau have, to a certain extent, a guaranteed market since Muslims generally refuse to buy Chinese or Kadazan prepared foods for fear of contamination by pork. Many Chinese and Kadazan also

buy Bajau snacks occasionally further widening the market. Despite the low household incomes of the majority of Bajau households snacks are often bought and consumed. Dewey (1962) in her study of rural Java expressed surprise that the Javanese spend as much money as they do on snacks considering their low standard of living but concludes that,

"...the pleasure of varying their rather dull diet and gossiping sociably over a cup of coffee is great in comparison to the cost."
(1962:163)

Food enterprises vary in size from restaurants to tiny stalls run by a single woman to door-to-door sales from baskets. Like petty trading small-scale food and drink preparation requires few specialized skills; all Bajau women learn to cook as part of their upbringing. Hence this is viewed as a "natural" trade for a woman who finds herself needing a cash income but who possesses few marketable skills. Food vending thus serves as a mechanism by which village women with a minimum of equipment and capital can make snacks which can then be peddled. Rosemary Firth makes a similar point when she describes in some detail how widows, divorced women or wives with little special skills, equipment or investment are the snack sellers in the fishing villages of Kelantan, (1966:162-165). In the food

trade women tend to operate independently from their husbands. They manage the financing themselves, while the food processing and sale is carried out with the help of their children.

Within the village there is a canteen (kantin) which sells noodles (mee) and coffee. It is a simple wooden structure containing a few tables and chairs, and is staffed by young women who function as unpaid family workers. This restaurant keeps irregular hours and it is difficult to know in advance whether or not it will open on any particular day. The owner, Indah, explained, "Before three of my daughters served in the canteen, now one of them has gone into town to work in a shop and two are left to run the place on their own. I can't afford to pay someone to work for me so now we just open when we can. Sometimes we open just for the mornings, other days for the afternoons." Indah buys the necessary ingredients to make the noodle dishes during the day and begins preparing them in the late afternoon, enlisting the help of her daughters. Even her youngest children of five and six years are put to work doing minor tasks such as cleaning banana leaves and watching over the stove. She stops cooking at dusk to attend to the household's evening meal and then continues until 10.00 or 11.00pm.

Food for sale usually comprises of snacks - both sweet and savoury. Black bean cakes (kueh kacang), banana cakes (kueh pisang) and a variety of rice cakes are the most commonly produced as they do not require any special equipment or expensive ingredients. These can be peddled at the market and along the catwalks of the village. Thus all but the most destitute are provided with a possible occupation which requires only the minimum of capital to establish.

The majority of cake vendors are middle-aged or elderly women, many of whom are heads of their households. Unlike shop owners, market vendors do not live in their workplaces. They often rely on older children to do the household chores and take care of the younger ones at home.

Dah, a divorcee in her thirties, sells prepared snacks at the local market. "My husband fails to pay any maintenance so I am forced to try and earn money to send my children to school", she explains. Every Sunday she rents a stall at the Tuaran tamu and occasionally journeys to the nearby village of Tamparuli for the Wednesday tamu there. She spends an average of M\$12 to buy ingredients, 50 sen trading fee and M\$1 for her fare. She sells bags of doughnuts or rice cakes for M\$1 each. "On a good day I can make M\$30, sometimes M\$40", she claims. This money constitutes an essential component of her household's weekly budget.

Many of these women are part-time or occasional traders. Those who have other occupations can, and often do, take part in trading activities. For instance,

Rapida, a married woman in her forties, is not a regular market trader but when her household is going through a particular shortage of money she bakes cakes to sell at the local market. "If my husband is ill and cannot fish or the catches are small we cannot eat. We have to find money somewhere else. At these times my daughters and I make some cakes. We make traditional Bajau cakes - everyone likes them but they take longer to make than Malay-style cakes. We make three kinds of cakes; any more is not profitable because you have to buy lots of extra ingredients. On an ordinary market day I make around M\$15 and on a tamu day I can make M\$35".

Other women engage in occasional trading to buy shoes, clothing and treats for their children, when cash is needed to pay electricity bills or to pay for visits to the doctor.⁶

The smallest scale of food vending is usually done by women who do not have stands but peddle snacks around the village. They need only enough money to buy the raw foodstuffs. The preparation is simple and can be done by the vendor herself within the home. These women start baking cakes in the evenings to sell early the next morning. At around 6.00am young children, often no more than six years old, are sent out with

baskets of cakes to sell. They run up and down the catwalks of the village shouting, "Keuh, kueh!" These cakes sell for 10 sen each and are often bought by the villagers for breakfast. The women involved in this type of selling tend to be the poorest of all traders with the least capital and profits.

The Economics of Women's Trade

Up to this point very little has been said concerning the financial aspects of women's trade activities. The income earned by women in petty trading varies considerably. The nature of the activities in which they are engaged is a key factor in determining a woman's income, and there is a great deal of variation in the capital invested, and in the location and scale of businesses. Income in the trade sector is therefore vague and depends on other factors such as connections, luck and weather. Whereas it is relatively easy to elicit information concerning the patterns and nature of trade, it is more difficult to get precise information on the financial aspects of women's enterprises.⁷ Most traders were willing to give prices at which they bought supplies and the prices for which they sold goods, and their transportation costs but many had difficulty estimating the rate of turnover of goods for a month. They were asked about their

daily and monthly net income. As the men have monopolized the large-scale marketing of fish through towkays, female fish traders are vending on a very small scale which is reflected in the meagre incomes they are able to generate. Over 90% of the active women fish traders in the kampong earn an income of less than M\$60 a week. This is a meagre income but is indispensable for the budgeting of most households concerned. A few women have an income of around M\$75, and one woman claims she earns approximately M\$90 per week as she goes to market every day and does not return until all of her stock has been sold.

Ipoh a widow, who claims to be in her 50's but appears considerably older, is a regular fish seller at Tuaran market. She constantly complains of her poverty, "Since my husband died I have no money. My daughter and her husband keep their own money and give me very little." Ipoh fishes with a rod and line to catch fish to sell. She also takes her son-in-law's surplus fish to market. "I go early in the morning with my basket of fish and stay until 4.00pm. If I haven't sold everything I have to stay until 6.00pm when the market closes. After I've paid my return fare of M\$1, rent of the stall in the fish market for 50 sen, I'm often left with only M\$6 to M\$10 per day profit. So I come home weary with almost nothing. By the time I've bought some coffee beans, tobacco and a few provisions the money is finished."

It is even more difficult to calculate the income of women in the food vending trade as the days spent in this activity can vary widely from week to week. These women tend to have liquid capital because they sell their goods quickly and try not to buy or sell on credit. On an ordinary market day the average net takings are around M\$10, whilst on a tamu day M\$20-35 is the norm.

It should be pointed out that it is seldom possible for women to separate their trading capital from other monies they possess. They must spend any cash they have as they need it and their capital remains intact or diminishes depending on the financial responsibilities and commitments they have at any given time. Furthermore, because trade is primarily a means by which these women can secure the cash to meet financial responsibilities incumbent upon them, it is not often that they can substantially increase their trading capital or their net incomes. For example, if a woman trader's average living expenses amount to M\$50 per week, and she has a net income of M\$60 per week, she cannot usually expect to add the extra M\$10 to her trading capital. More often children's school needs, healthcare, obligations to kinspeople and other responsibilities require the expenditure of the extra

cash and more besides. Very few women traders in the village are able to put aside any money in the form of savings. The subject of women's earned income and budgeting are discussed fully in Chapter 13 of this section.

BAJAU WOMEN IN PETTY COMMODITY PRODUCTION AND VILLAGE SERVICES

Tailoring

Dressmaking is another traditional female skill which lends itself to transformation into an income-generating activity, on a part-time basis. Women who own sewing machines are particularly busy at certain times of the year, especially at Hari Raya when whole families require new outfits for the celebrations. But even at these times dressmakers in the village do not earn sufficient amounts to live on. They receive approximately M\$8-15 per garment which is very little considering that it can take a full day's cutting and sewing to finish one simple piece.

In the past decade or so, as young women have begun to abandon traditional dress for daily wear, and as ready made Western style clothes have become cheap and plentiful, dressmaking has become a declining cottage

industry. This is compounded by the fact that many women prefer to have clothes made by the Chinese dressmakers in town. Although it is more expensive to have garments sewn here (usually around double the price charged by village seamstresses) it is regarded as rather prestigious to wear clothes that have been made in town. Furthermore, the young women complain that the village seamstresses cannot copy the latest styles from fashion magazines whilst the town dressmaking shops can.

The embroidering of cloth for special occasions, particularly for weddings, was traditionally a specialised skill of Bajau women. They sewed intricate designs onto bridal cushions and wall hangings for the pelamin and decorated the bridal couple's clothing. Rather unsurprisingly stylized fish motifs were especially popular. This traditional income-generating cottage industry has disappeared from the village in the last few decades. In the 1970s women started to adopt Malay-style wedding outfits, dismissing the traditional Bajau style as old fashioned. "We prefer modern styles now. The Malay style is much better", explained one young bride.

Handicrafts

Traditionally Bajau women were skilled basket weavers. Young girls learned the craft through observation, imitation and knowledge imparted informally from mother to daughter within the home. A number of the baskets produced were utilized by the household themselves whilst others were sold at market. Nowadays handicraft production and other cottage industries of the kampong have almost completely disappeared. None but the very old possess the knowledge of how to prepare the leaves and dyes for making handicrafts and few young women are prepared to learn. To counteract this the Tuaran branch of PEWASA (Sabah Women's Organization) attempted to set up a handicraft project in the village in 1990.⁸ A team of trainers were to teach the village women traditional handicrafts such as baskets, woven mats, batik headscarves and beaded shawls. A centre was set up and women were free to use the facilities on a voluntary basis whenever they had spare time. A small percentage of the proceeds from the sale of handicrafts would be paid to the craftswoman, the rest would be channelled to the branch and central committee fund of PEWASA. PEWASA has successfully implemented such programmes in almost all areas of the Tuaran District: their only failure was Kg Mengkabong. When the village women were approached only a handful showed any

interest in the project and no one turned up for training. This stands in stark contrast to another village that was approached, Kg Simpangan (with a total population of six hundred persons) where one hundred women became involved.

One of the PEWASA committee members that I interviewed informally puts this failure down to deeply entrenched traditional attitudes of Bajau villagers in Mengkabong. "These women are very backward" she said, "They don't want to leave the home." The reasons that village women gave were very different. Many of the women I questioned claimed that they had never even heard of an organization called PEWASA. Those that had could find little value in participating in such a project, viewing it as a waste of their valuable time. "Who wants to sit around making baskets!" one young woman exclaimed. "That's for the old". By the time I've finished cooking and cleaning and looking after my children I'm tired. I don't want to spend time going to a craft centre. And for what? If we don't sell the baskets or mats we have wasted our time, and if we do they take most of the profits and we are left with maybe a few dollars if we are lucky. What is the use of that?" The women also resented the fact that the PEWASA members tended to be elite women who knew

little of the realities of impoverished rural life. They were viewed as patronising and proud (sombong). "She comes to my house and tells me what I should do", said Dah, "but if I went near her house she would chase me away. Why should we listen to these people? They can't even speak Bajau!".

At the state level, the Sabah Government has recently embarked on a programme aimed at reviving interest in the production of local handicrafts to overcome the current popularity of foreign handicrafts flooding the local tourist market. The Sabah Handicraft Development Unit of the Industrial Development Ministry have set up centres to train both men and women to improve the quality of locally produced handicrafts. The participants pay for the use of the equipment and materials whilst keeping the proceeds from the sale of their finished products. However it is doubtful whether handicraft production is a viable income-generating activity for the villagers of Kg Mengkabong. The income received from such work is very low especially in relation to the considerable investment in both time and energy necessary to produce the goods. This is further compounded by the fact that on the whole women (and men) from Kg Mengkabong are largely uninterested in this type of activity. What is needed

then is some other income-generating scheme which is designed with reference to the needs and interests of the villagers themselves.

Magico-Medical Practitioners

Other money-making speciality roles for women include midwifery and traditional healing. Throughout Southeast Asia women have played important roles as traditional healers and have continued to do so despite the extension of western medical and health services and an increasing number of formally trained nurses and midwives (Laderman 1981). Midwives (bidan) in Kg Mengkabong are without exception female. Traditionally they would supervise the pregnancy, attend to women's prenatal needs and perform the lenggang perut (rocking the stomach) ceremony during the 7th or 8th month of a first pregnancy to ensure that the pregnancy and birth would go well. Special rites were required to ensure a safe delivery and ward off any evil influences. Special herbal brews were concocted to ease labour pains. After the birth the bidan would supervise the mother's confinement and preside over the circumcision (or more accurately, genital mutilation) of forty-four day old baby girls.⁹ In return for her services the bidan would receive a few dollars and perhaps a couple of sarongs. Whilst these rituals and services are

still performed other traditional practices of the village bidan are rarely performed now as most births take place in the government hospital rather than in the home. Bidans do however offer post-natal services to village women, particularly abdominal massage which is considered necessary to return the body's internal organs to normal after the traumas of birth. The village bidan's role thus encompasses those of obstetrician, nurse and ritual practitioner (Laderman 1981:145). Government appointed midwives do not include this ritual element in their service. Bajau women often prefer the village midwives, who share their beliefs, dialect and lifestyle to a government midwife who is invariably an "outsider". Thus whilst the bidan's role in the actual birth process may have been circumscribed by western medical practices, village women still require her services for other important aspects of pregnancy healthcare.

Bomohs (traditional healers or ritual specialists) who can be either female or male, mediate between the natural and supernatural worlds. Each bomoh tends to specialize in a particular form of healing. My neighbour in the kampong was well known as an excellent masseuse (tukang urut) and was much in demand by the village women for abdominal massage and to treat the

stomach ailments of their children. As well as being able to cure illnesses bomohs can see into the future, find lost objects or reveal the identity of a person who has in some way harmed another. One elderly villager was considered to be especially proficient at removing curses, whilst his sister possessed skills as a herbalist (bomoh akar-kayu), and was also consulted for black magic purposes, for instance, to bring affliction to someone.

Neither of these occupations, bidan or bomoh, is financially rewarding and very rarely do they constitute the sole or even primary source of income for women or men. Payment for their services depends on the type of illness and its severity or the type of charm requested. Most often these occupations provide a few extra dollars which can be added to the household's budget.

Before concluding this chapter I will turn to an assessment of petty commodity production and trading activities in terms of the benefits and disadvantages which accrue to the women involved.

THE ADVANTAGES

On the whole this type of work is usually situated within or near the home and tends to be closely associated with the routine household activities of women such as the preparation of food and drinks. The household location of much informal economic activity is a major reason why women have greater access to income-generating opportunities here as opposed to waged employment. Being tied to the home as wives and mothers renders women far less flexible and mobile than men, hence they are more likely to need to tailor their household maintenance and reproductive labour load to a household-based activity. In the kampong where marketing is predominantly a female activity flexibility of hours and childminding by other female household members allows women to combine their income-generating activities with their household maintenance work. The local marketplace also provides the women with networks which act as a focus for the spreading of local news. So although these occupations are not highly ranked employment the women are aware of the advantages vis-a-vis paid employment in the formal sector. Women can work with their children, or if the children are too young to give a helping hand, they can keep an eye on their offspring while working. Food residue from the food trade is consumed by the

household and this goes some way in reducing the household expenditure. The village women's involvement in these activities has important consequences for the economy as a whole since the household income is increased, and its expenditure is reduced. These social dynamics are often missed by macro-level studies. Unless these informal activities are examined women's vital contribution to the household economy, can never be fully appreciated.

THE DRAWBACKS

While the aforementioned characteristics of this type of employment could be construed as being advantageous to women, it is unlikely that their involvement in this kind of work is always governed by choice. In some cases the women interviewed would have preferred to enter the wage labour market but were unable to do so, as being illiterate or semi-literate they lack the education, skills and training. It is clear that such activities rarely lead to capital accumulation or any sort of personal enrichment; their incomes bear little relationship to the long hours they work or to market prices of goods and services. In most cases it is just enough to provide the basic daily necessities, as well as to meet occasional medical expenses. There is no question of saving, investment or an improvement in

living standards. In Kg Mengkabong it is women from the poorest households who are involved in market trading and often comment that it provided them with just the minimum amount of cash necessary for survival. Furthermore, the selling of foodstuffs involves a high risk factor. There is no guarantee that all the cooked food will be sold. Bad weather, for example, can spoil the day's sale. The food trade is labour intensive and time-consuming whilst profit margins are narrow.

Within the marketing sector there appears to be a further manifestation of the gender division of labour - with women not only being confined to selling certain goods, particularly those which are associated with their traditional domestic skills, but also with least status. Men control the large-scale marketing of fish, whereas women are responsible for marketing any surplus in the local marketplace. As we saw there is a small group of elderly widowed women who buy a small amount of fish from the fishermen which they then take to the market to sell - these women make the least profit of all.

This particular conjunction of productive and reproductive relations has permitted women to generate supplementary income for the household without altering

the gender division of labour or the nature of gender relations. If anything women's informal work activities serve to reinforce existing gender relations. It is interesting to note that whilst women's small businesses tend to be heavily concentrated in traditional services, within the kampong, men's business enterprises tend to offer "modern" services, the most common being the operation of a pick-up service between the kampong and the local town. Few men, excepting two rather elderly boatbuilders and a number of bomohs, are involved in offering traditional services, as most men are either involved in the fishing industry or try to obtain waged positions outside the kampong. Whilst women are not directly involved in the transportation enterprises of the men in that all of the drivers are male, the women commonly handle their husband's finances and in several cases used their savings to buy the vehicle for their husbands to start up their businesses.

CONCLUSION

For poor women informal businesses are often an attempt by those who have been excluded from formal sector jobs to create the means for their own survival. Thus, women have found ways to extend their household work into economic niches that provide some income, however

small. The resulting overlap of work and household spheres is typical of both the informal sector and poverty in developing countries. The blurring of the household and market elements in women's daily activities has implications for women's use of money and income. The daily demands on poor women to feed and care for family members create strong pressures to dip into business stocks and revenues, rather than keeping them separate and re-investing in the business.

The self-employed, both female and male, are pressed to eke out a meagre livelihood, and many of them live well below the official poverty line. Their incomes bear no relationship to the hours they work, to market prices of goods and services. They have no direct links with organized industry, modern technology or facilities. Being illiterate, (as we have seen the women who constitute a large portion of the self-employed are predominantly rural, poor, illiterate or semi-literate), they cannot keep pace with new skills and technologies. The vast majority of the self-employed have neither security or money. Most of these activities do not yield sufficient income to raise women out of poverty. This is not because the women lack initiative. What they lack is the capital, technical and managerial know-how, access to credit and

markets necessary to expand or make even marginal improvements in productivity and income.

One of the key issues here is the difficulty women have in obtaining credit to expand their businesses. Many studies show a correlation in the informal sector between the amount of capital available per worker and the worker's earnings, (United Nations 1989:223), but most women in the informal sector do not have sufficient income to save up for investment. Whereas village men, with their greater access to jobs in the formal sector, have more opportunity to accumulate enough savings to invest in a small business, women rarely have this option. To overcome this problem a few kampong women have created their own source of cash through borrowing from informal sources such as friends and relatives. These amounts are of course too insubstantial to make any real difference to women's business activities. What is needed is a positive response from state institutions and policy makers. In a number of developing countries innovative mechanisms have been developed to liberalize and facilitate access to credit by poor women (for example in Bangladesh, India and the Philippines). Although these programmes are still in their early stages they have generated important lessons for wider replication. For instance

in Bangladesh several non-governmental organizations, most notably the Grameen Bank, have reached thousands of poor women, and are successfully operating small loan programmes to alleviate the problem of access to capital. In Malaysia a similar poverty alleviation scheme has been initiated in rural Selangor. Small loans were given by Amanah Ikhtiar Malaysia (AIM) to poor men and women. Interestingly it was discovered that the women were better at making the most of these loans than the men. In fact the women were able to generate double the net monthly household income compared with the men. It is possible that a similar small loan scheme would be effective in increasing the household income of certain villagers in Kg Mengkabong. Special measures could be taken to ensure that actual and potential female entrepreneurs have access to credit facilities and that training courses for these women take into account their present workloads and needs.

Footnotes:

¹ Official estimates for employment in this sector tend to err on the low side because of the presence of unpaid family labour (most often female labour) that may not be counted.

² Bazaar and service occupations, according to Boserup (1970:178), include own-account workers and family aids in industry and trade, and all personnel in transport, domestic and other service occupations. According to Boserup these occupations represent an intermediary

stage in the development between agricultural and modern industrial society.

3 Swift (1965:24) also notes a similar fatalism in Malay economic attitudes: "The Malay is prone, after receiving a setback, to give up striving, and say that he has no luck, it is the will of God".

4 I did discover one village woman in her 30's, Milah, who bought various seasonal fruits from wholesalers and sold it at the local market. She also made a weekly trip into the capital, Kota Kinabalu, to sell fruit outside the luxurious tourist hotels, moving from one to another as the doormen chased her away. Milah usually found these trips profitable as she was able to charge the tourists relatively high prices and made a reasonable profit after paying her bus fares. Occasionally one of her youngest children would accompany her, strapped to her side in a sarong. "The tourists always give more money when I take the baby", she explained with a grin.

5 It should be noted that elderly women do not automatically undergo a dramatic character change as they age, (it is unlikely that a shy, retiring young woman will suddenly become an assertive and aggressive grandmother), but old age does give women much more freedom to express their opinions.

6 Whilst there is a free health centre in Tuaran villagers often visit private doctors on the premise that the more expensive treatment is the better it must be.

7 I should point out that not a single woman whom I interviewed or engaged in conversation refused to discuss the financial aspects of her trading activities.

8 In June 1990 the Associated Country Women of the World (ACWW) and the National Association of Women's Institutes jointly organized a leadership and skills development training workshop in Kuala Lumpur. As a result of this workshop ACWW approved a grant of M\$20,000 for PEWASA to enable a handicraft project for women to be established.

9 The Bajau practice "sunna" circumcision for females. This involves the cutting of the prepuce or clitoral hood and as such need not necessarily impair a woman's

sex life. The term "sunna" imbues it with an authenticity under Islamic orthodoxy and no doubt encourages its practice by Muslims although in no part of the Koran is it advocated. This cruel operation is performed on baby girls (44 days old) in Kg Mengkabong in non-sterile conditions using an unsterile knife and without any anaesthetic. Justifications given by the Bajau for the genital mutilation of females are numerous. They include custom, religion and cleanliness. Female genital mutilation is deeply embedded in custom and tradition . It is shrouded in secrecy and often confused with religious ideology. Furthermore, the World Health Organisation now consider female circumcision to be against the principle of human rights.

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER TWELVE

KERJA MAKAN GAJI: VILLAGE WOMEN'S INVOLVEMENT IN PAID EMPLOYMENT

After examining unpaid household work and self-employment in the preceding two chapters, I move on in this chapter to a discussion of female wage labour employment. Sabah is not an area where the participation rate for women in paid employment is high. The women I discuss in this chapter therefore do not represent the norm. Nevertheless, whilst at the moment they constitute the minority, it is highly likely that more and more rural women will begin to undertake waged employment outside the home in the near future. For this reason it is important to explore the following relevant questions:

- 1) In which employment sectors are these women predominantly based and which types of waged employment are they engaged in?
- 2) How do the productive activities of women change in response to economic growth and changes in the overall economic structure of Sabah?
- 3) Which factors determine women's entry into the waged labour force?

- 4) To what extent is there a redistribution of other work within the home as a response to women's waged employment outside the kampong?
- 5) What value is placed upon women's waged work by men and by the women themselves?

In this chapter I attempt to address these crucial questions. Questions pertaining to women's income and its meaning to the household as a whole is discussed in the next chapter. I begin this chapter by providing a brief overview of women's waged work in Malaysia.

Women and Waged Employment in Malaysia - An Overview

There is a growing body of literature on women's wage labour in Peninsular Malaysia, but as yet very little material relating to East Malaysia, reflecting the general neglect of research on women and gender in the region. Much of the discussion of women's employment in Malaysia has taken place against a background of concern that Third World women may not be benefiting from the development process to the same extent as men. In many developing countries, including Malaysia, it is clear that men's opportunities for waged employment, employment training and promotion have increased more rapidly than those of women.

Changes in the economic structure of Malaysia and development efforts have resulted in profound changes in the wage labour market. From 1960 to 1970 the Malaysian economy recorded an annual growth rate of over 5%. The manufacturing sector was the main thrust of the diversification of the economy during this period, being one of the fastest growing sectors of the economy. In correspondence employment in the manufacturing sector also grew dramatically from 135,382 in 1957 to 584,341 in 1976. One of the major driving forces behind the emergence of the modern manufacturing sector in Peninsular Malaysia from the 1970s onwards has been the relocation of industries, especially those characterized by high labour requirements and low capital outputs, from the developed to the developing countries. Prior to 1970 most manufacturing industries in Malaysia were capital-intensive, import-substitution industries and the majority of the workers were male. After 1970 with changes in national development policies, especially as regards industrial development, most manufacturing industries established have been labour-intensive, export-orientated enterprises. Since 1970 the Malaysian Government has embarked on an expensive and ambitious programme to invite foreign investors to establish these export-oriented industries in Malaysia.

Besides many general incentives (such as the establishment of free trade zones) the Malaysian government has also ensured an industrial environment conducive to foreign investors.¹ In these urban free trade zones female employment has been outstandingly high. During the 1970s there was a steady influx of young kampong women into the urban areas. They collected in the urban free trade zones, working in labour-intensive subsidiaries of transnational corporations. This female labour migration is still continuing for although it is government policy to redistribute industries to the rural areas and small towns, most industries are currently located in the urban areas. The government's industrialization strategy has produced an increasingly female industrial workforce, largely due to the manufacturing demands of cheap labour. Thus the emergence of export oriented manufacturing has contributed significantly to providing non-traditional jobs for women in Peninsular Malaysia.² The quality of this employment however has been the target of severe criticism.³ Much of the employment has been proven to be transitory, ill-paid and at the lower end of the occupational spectrum.

In contrast to Peninsular Malaysia, Sabah has experienced a relatively low level of industrialization

and as a result there are comparatively fewer opportunities for manufacturing employment for women or men. Vacancies that arise are filled by those with some education. The only other form of manual work where there is a demand for female labour is domestic service. However to be a house servant (amah) is regarded as a somewhat degrading option and is very badly paid. Unfortunately it is often the only work women without school certificates can obtain. As will become clear during the course of this chapter, women in Sabah are to be found predominantly at the bottom of the wage labour hierarchy in poorly paid occupations.

Labour Force Participation Rates

To understand the nature and extent of women's dependence on waged employment it is useful to examine first what is happening to the growth of the female labour force since the increased participation of women in the labour force is generally regarded as a sign of progress for both the society concerned and its female members. Despite the distortions and lacunae identified in Chapter 8 of this section, information relating to the composition and structure of the labour force as compiled in the census provide useful insights into the roles and positions of women in paid employment. Census figures show that the rate of

participation of women in the labour force has been increasing rapidly, although it is still far behind that of men. Table 12.1 below compares the labour force participation rates of females and males in Sabah in 1970 and 1980.

Table 12.1 Labour Force Participation Rates of Females and Males, Sabah 1970 and 1980.		
	<u>1970</u>	<u>1980</u>
FEMALE	33%	37.5%
MALE	65%	73.3%

SOURCE: 1970 figures calculated using Data from 1970 Census of Population General Report.
1980 figures calculated using data from 1980 Census of Population General Report.

It can be seen that the labour force participation rate for females has risen from 33% in 1970 to 37.5% in 1980, amounting to a substantial increase of 4.5%. The corresponding figures of males are 65% and 73.3% respectively, an increase of 8.3%.

In Kg Mengkabong the employment trend reflects this national pattern with a growing number of women entering waged employment. Those involved tend to be young, educated women. Older illiterate women are largely excluded from the waged labour force except for the most menial occupations. Within the village the

increase in the numbers of women entering paid employment can be attributed largely to five main factors, namely:

- 1) more education and training
- 2) later marriages
- 3) society increasingly accepting and receiving women as wage workers.
- 4) an increase in the work opportunities available to rural women and men in general as a result of the expansion of the rural wage labour market due to economic growth and development.
- 5) accelerating pauperization of rural households due to the rising costs of living, forcing more women to seek waged employment

Having established that women from the village are increasingly involving themselves in the wage labour market, it is important now to identify which sectors these women are principally involved in.

Types of Employment Engaged in by Village Women

Here I compare the waged positions village women occupy with those of men, to determine whether there is an occupational gender division operating within the waged economy. The last few decades have seen an increase in the number of males working outside the village mainly

in the industrial and transport categories of employment, which parallels the growth of the local economy. It is interesting to note that men have not been favoured by the development of small-scale manufacturing industry in the Tuaran area as might have been expected, as the lighter jobs have gone to women. The exception to this is in the small-scale furniture manufacturing industry where men employ their traditional skills as woodcarvers and boatbuilders in the making of rattan furniture.

An increasing number of young men have left the village in order to serve in the armed forces, periodically remitting money to their families. Soldiering is seen by many young men as an attractive alternative to joining their father's fishing crew as it entails a more reliable source of cash income as well as the opportunity to travel throughout Malaysia and occasionally overseas. Young men who lack the necessary qualifications for entry into the armed forces often seek work as security personnel, either as armed guards in local banks or watchmen for private companies. Whilst security work is considered tedious it is seen as a respectable form of employment by the villagers.

Malim, a young man in his mid 20s is employed as a night watchman for a factory in Tuaran. He left school after failing his Form 3 examinations and spent the next six years doing very little. When he needed a little money he would join his father's fishing crew for a week or two. At the age of 22 he wanted to marry and knew that he would be expected to start looking for a job. Through his mother's brother he managed to obtain his present post. "It's quite a boring job", he admitted, "but sometimes I manage to sneak a few hours sleep while on duty. The pay is not so good but the work is very easy."

Waged occupations of males in the village include: farm labourer, shopkeeper, restaurant proprietor, shop assistant, factory worker, carpenter, government driver, bus driver, bus conductor, nightwatch person, security guard, clerk, schoolteacher, engineer, government labourer, armed forces personnel, factory supervisor, bank teller and civil servant. Women in the village are engaged in the following waged occupations: restaurant kitchen hand, waitress, cook, amah (domestic servant), factory worker, clerk, schoolteacher, shop assistant and nurse.

The participation of women in non-agricultural, non-domestic types of employment has been more limited, as is apparent from the short list of women's waged occupations outlined above. One of the primary reasons is the customary restrictions on women's mobility outside the home and village which makes it difficult for them to acquire a good education in the first

place, and having acquired that education, to enjoy sufficient freedom of movement to find employment that will utilize their skills. From the list of female waged occupations above we can see that village women tend to be employed in what may be viewed as traditionally "female" occupations. This can be taken as evidence of occupational segregation, that is, certain occupations are closed to women, while others are socially defined as "women's jobs". In short, certain types of work are defined as appropriate or inappropriate for women. In general women perform tasks which can be seen as extensions of their domestic roles and many tasks reserved for women in the wage labour market are very often analogous to women's responsibilities in the household. They continue to work in jobs such as waitressing, teaching and in other service sector occupations. Women are thus limited by the effects of pervasive gender segregation within the paid labour force and as a result women's entry into the labour force itself, although a start, cannot in itself be considered a sign of growing gender equality.

I will now examine greater detail the waged work categories in which the kampong women are involved to determine the nature and conditions of their employment situations.

Female Waged Work Profiles

Those village women who are involved in non-agricultural work tend to be found in service occupations and to some extent in factory production work. It is in the tertiary sector (that is, in services and trade) that the share of village female employment has risen rapidly in recent years. My survey indicates that women are concentrated in low-income activities within the informal sector, as waitresses, shop assistants and amahs.

The high proportion of women engaged in paid employment in the services sector can be attributed to the fact that women have relatively easy access to some service occupations, especially those requiring no special skills and to the existence of certain service occupations that are traditionally conceived of as women's work. A lack of education and training however prevents many of the village women from holding service occupations that require some formal skills. For instance, those without a very proficient command of the English language are excluded from obtaining work in the growing tourist industry. Competition for work is increasingly stiff in the international hotels and in other tourism-related establishments.

Factory Workers

In Sabah, the relative share of industry in total employment is still quite small because of the limited industrial base. Nevertheless a small number of kampong women are engaged in the light manufacturing industries.

Sulah is 25 years old and single. She completed six years of primary education after which, being the eldest daughter in her household, she was forced to leave school in order to care for her younger siblings. Eight years later when another sister assumed the childcare responsibilities Sulah went to work in the local clothing factory where she has been for the last five years. Her working hours are from 8am until 5pm, six days of the week. On joining the factory workforce Sulah earned M\$7 per day which then rose to M\$9 per day after one year. She hands over most of her weekly earnings to her mother to contribute to the household budget. Sulah, her elder brother and one younger sister are the main providers for the household of ten. "I like working in the factory as the atmosphere is relaxed," she explains. " We are allowed to chat with each other. As well as one hour for lunch we can take a 15 minute break in the morning and another one in the afternoon".

Sulah's younger sister Tujoh also works at the clothing factory;

Tujoh is 19 years old and also single. In contrast to Sulah, Tujoh was able to continue her education until Form 5 as she did not have to bear the responsibility for caring for her younger siblings. Tujoh has been employed at the factory for nine months, ironing the newly sewn school uniforms for which she earns M\$7 per day. In marked contrast to her sister, Tujoh is not so happy in her work. "I just can't bear the heat and steam from the iron all day. Sometimes I think I'm going to faint with the heat. I'm hoping to be moved to the sewing section soon.

The work is much more pleasant, and you earn more money", she added.

Factory work whilst poorly paid and with few promotion prospects is highly sought after by the young village women. The factory workforce is predominantly young, female and single and there is a great sense of community amongst the workers most of whom come from Kg Mengkabong and the neighbouring villages. Vacancies do not have to be advertised as word quickly spreads when a worker is leaving (usually due to marriage or pregnancy) and other villagers quickly apply for the vacant post. As a result of the desirability of this type of employment, vacancies increasingly tend to be filled by those with the highest educational qualifications so those with limited education are now unable to find factory work.

Waitressing

There is a certain stigma attached to waitressing in the town coffee shops (kedai kopi). "You must be brave (berani) to work in a coffee shop" was a statement I often heard. In this context "brave" has the connotations of "brazen", which is of course contrary to the Bajau cultural ideal of female modesty and shyness. It is considered morally questionable for single women in particular to work in coffee shops as

these establishments are patronized predominantly by men.⁴

A number of the waitresses I interviewed, although they worked outside the home out of economic necessity, also did so because they found full-time housework an unsatisfactory and unfulfilling occupation. Having spent years in education surrounded by their peers, many young women find being confined to the home on finishing school and unable to visit their friends stifling and unsatisfying. They very much enjoy the lively social interaction that waitressing entails.

Suriah is a single 17 year old woman who dropped out of school after failing the Form 3 examinations. After three years working in the home performing household maintenance work, her father, a fisherman, found Suriah a job in a coffee shop in Tuaran. She begins work at 7 am preparing food and serving customers until 4 or 5 pm, six days each week. For this work she receives a meagre monthly wage of M\$80. Despite the long hours and pitiful wages Suriah claims she enjoys her work. A bright, talkative woman she was desperately unhappy being confined to the home after leaving school and missed the company of her friends terribly.

Shop Assistant

Work in the local town shops is also a sought after form of employment. This type of work is not so easy to find as the majority of shops are family-owned and tend to rely on the labour of unpaid family members.

Occasionally however there is work to be found in the shops in Tuaran town.

Azizah an 18 year old woman passed her Form 3 examinations but failed in Form 5. After working in the home supervising her younger siblings Azizah was offered a post in a Chinese-owned provisions store in town. She obtained this job through the recommendation of her cousin Rahimah, who was already employed there. The shop proprietor agreed to pay Azizah the sum of M\$150 per month, and so she was understandably shocked when after the first month she received only M\$100. The shop owner explained that he would give her the extra M\$50 a month later when she had learned the trade. One year later Azizah still earns only M\$100 every month. Evidently she has not yet "learnt the trade". "It is useless to complain", she said, "If I do I'll lose my job. He would find someone else straight away. I was lucky to get a job and my family relies on my wages."

Azizah's father has two wives and countless children, so Azizah's income is absolutely essential for her household's survival, particularly since her father frequently fails to give a share of his wages to her mother. This case is illustrative of the situation many kampong women find themselves in the wage labour market. Working conditions are frequently exploitative and wages are often appallingly low, but they cannot afford to risk losing their jobs by complaining. Their households often rely on their monthly wages, however meagre the sum, for their very survival.

From the above discussion it is clear that the Bajau kampong women who are engaged in paid labour, married or single, work at jobs rather than have careers. Most of the village women, and men, are concentrated in the lower echelons of the wage labour market, that is, in unskilled or semi-skilled jobs and in menial occupations, women as shop assistants and factory workers, and men as labourers and security guards. But although male villagers are also exploited under the same economic structures, women workers are doubly exploited because of their gender. The government has failed to address women's employment problems, especially in relation to providing childcare facilities and equal pay for women. Women also perform a double shift; they work in the home before and after they perform their paid labour. Evidence of the importance of women's contributions to household income suggests that women who are the sole earners or whose income is essential to the survival of the family often work in the lowest paid jobs. I will return to this subject in the next chapter.

White-Collar Workers

Capitalist market relations and an increase in female secondary education have led to greater village stratification and a category of "new women" is

emerging. Most of these are the first generation of women in their households to exercise a profession or hold a white-collar position. But whilst there is an increasing number of educated women from the village entering white-collar occupations they nevertheless work as typists, clerks and office juniors; very few make it to the top as managers and professionals. This is also the case for male villagers but comparatively more educated men than women hold managerial posts. Official statistics also reveal that the participation of women throughout Sabah at the managerial and administrative levels is very low as can be seen from Table 12.2 below.

Table 12.2 Percentage Distribution of Population aged 10 Years and Over by Occupation and Gender, Sabah 1980

Occupation	Number (%)		Total
	Female	Male	
Professional, Technical and Related workers	5,912 (33.2)	11,901 (66.8)	17,813
Administrative, Management workers	154 (5.1)	2,885 (94.9)	3,039
Clerical and Related workers	8,442 (38.9)	13,283 (61.1)	21,725
Sales workers	6,551 (35.5)	11,967 (64.5)	18,458
Agricultural, Animal Husbandry and Forestry	53,470 (33.8)	104,677 (66.2)	158,137
Production and Related workers	4,739 (8.4)	51,719 (91.6)	56,458
Activities Inadequately Described	835 (20.6)	7,128 (79.4)	8,981
Activities Unknown	19,810 (47.7)	21,862 (52.3)	41,492
Looking for First Job	1,979 (33.7)	3,896 (66.3)	5,876
Outside Labour Force	181,532 (68.6)	83,532 (31.4)	264,792
TOTAL	289,622 (47.2)	323,924 (52.8)	613,546

SOURCE: Adapted from Bulletin of Statistics, Sabah, 1983.

Official statistics on the occupational distribution of female workers in Sabah indicate that women in

administrative and managerial positions represent a tiny 0.05% of the total female workforce. Almost 95% of those in administrative or managerial positions are male. In Kg Mengkabong there are no women currently holding managerial positions. It is only recently that village women have begun to complete their secondary education and so these young women due to their age and lack of work experience are employed in junior positions in white-collar occupations.

Any discussion of the female participation in the labour force, or even their contribution to growth and development, cannot be isolated from the issues of poverty and unemployment. High unemployment rates and poverty are widespread in Sabah, and overall economic growth does not assure that these conditions will change. It is to the issue of unemployment that I now turn.

Unemployment And Insufficient Employment Opportunities

Lack of adequate statistical data does not permit an accurate evaluation of the extent of unemployment in Sabah, especially among women. Official statistics exclude a large number of women who lead a precarious existence in spite of engaging in multiple activities, including subsistence production and work in the

informal sector. Most of them are neither fully employed nor fully unemployed. Therefore in Kg Mengkabong it is difficult to categorize women into the two distinct categories of "employed" or "unemployed" as all are involved in a whole range of productive activities both inside and outside the home. Nevertheless there are a growing number of women who are actively seeking waged employment outside the kampong and it is important to understand the complexity of their situation in order to provide a meaningful response to their employment needs.

During the period 1970 to 1980 the overall unemployment rate⁵ (females and males combined) for Sabah increased from 2.1% to 8.4%. In absolute terms the total number of unemployed rose from 4565 in 1970 to 31,064 in 1980. In line with this overall increase in unemployment the situation for women also worsened. The unemployment rate among females increased dramatically from 3.2% in 1970 to 10.95 in 1980 (the corresponding figures for males were 1.6% and 7% respectively).⁶ Both men and women share the consequences of limited demand for labour but compared to males the unemployment rate among females has consistently been higher. Furthermore, the unemployment rate for females in Sabah has also increased at a higher rate than for females in

other parts of Malaysia. Table 12.3 below illustrates these regional differences in female unemployment rates.

Table 12.3 Percentage Distribution of Females Unemployed Aged 10 Years and Over by Region, Malaysia 1970 and 1980

<u>REGION</u>	<u>YEAR</u>	
	1970	1980
Malaysia	6.7	9.9
Peninsular Malaysia	7.5	10.1
Sabah	3.2	10.9
Sarawak	3.6	7.9

SOURCE: 1970 figures calculated using Data from 1970 Census of Population General Report.
1980 figures calculated using data from 1980 Census of Population General Report.

After 1980 the unemployment rate among females deteriorated further mainly due to the slow down in the economic growth of the country as a result of world recession. Due to the slower growth rate of the economy during the period of the Fifth Malaysia Plan, there has been a corresponding slowing down in the rate of employment growth. In the Fifth Malaysia Plan's prospects for Sabah it was apparent that the labour force was continuing to grow, expanding faster than the creation of new jobs projected for the region. As a

result the unemployment rate was expected to have reached 11.4% by 1990.⁷

The problem of current and future rates of female unemployment assumes an added dimension when the age distribution of the unemployed in Sabah is considered. Unemployment among females is heavily concentrated in the younger age-groups. In terms of unemployment by age group the data reveal that in general the unemployment rate declines with an increase in age for both males and females.⁸ Approximately 70% of the unemployed in Sabah are first time job seekers, mainly those in the 15-19 and 20-24 age cohorts, with women predominating in both age groups. This is confirmed in the Mid-Term Review of the Fifth Malaysia Plan;

"Female unemployment rate continued to be higher than that of males, with the unemployment rate greater among females with education, in particular secondary education."

(1985:140)

It is clear that although the participation of women in employment has increased in recent years the fact remains that women represent a disproportionately high share of the unemployed in Sabah. Although a number of new opportunities for female employment have been generated by economic development, the number of

opportunities is still much smaller than the number of women who seek waged work. Accelerating pauperization due to the rising costs of living is driving many poor rural women into wage labour and a further diversification of occupation, but the rural labour market is not yet ready for them. Growing unemployment in the rural areas is partly due to the lack of employment opportunities for women in the rural sector since most of the industries are located in the urban areas, as well as to the modernization of farm practices. Bearing in mind that the incidence of poverty is higher in rural areas, the growing unemployment in these areas could have far-reaching consequences for the government's poverty eradication programme. More employment opportunities need to be created in the rural areas to check and reduce the number of unemployed women and men. A positive step in this direction could be a greater dispersal of labour intensive industries in the rural areas and the development of cottage industries.

Bearing in mind that the unemployment rate among women is higher than men, and the fact that they constituted only 37.5% of the labour force in 1980, there is an urgent need to equip them with the necessary skills and training that they require with a view to increasing

their participation in the labour market. Whilst the government is currently promoting the employment of women at the level of discourse, its population policy is promulgating a quite contrary message. The Mid-Term Review of the Fourth Malaysia Plan (1984) called for the setting up of a population target of 70 million (the current population is around 18 million) to be reached by the year 2020. To achieve this incredibly ambitious goal a family size of at least five children is recommended. Heyzer explains the rationale behind this policy;

"The rationale for the new population policy is based on the argument that heavy industrialization is the next phase of development in order for Malaysia to become a newly-industrializing country (NIC) along the model of South Korea. Heavy industries, in turn, require a large domestic market and this can be done by increasing the size of the population."

(1988:20)

In order to reach the targeted population size, the state has placed a heavy emphasis on women's reproductive and childcare roles. This coupled with rising male unemployment has led to some male leaders suggesting that women should "return to the home". For instance, in 1981 the then secretary-general of ABIM (The Muslim Youth Movement of Malaysia) was quoted as stating;

"We believe that unemployment today is due partly to this philosophy of female liberation."

(in Naipaul 1981:232).

There is widespread support for the belief that women should stay at home with their children; there is a cultural mandate for women to put the family first. Thus confusing messages are being sent to Malaysian women. On one hand they are encouraged to participate in the wage labour market, but on the other hand, there is mounting pressure on them to place their reproductive role over paid work. Despite this contradiction the effects of inflation and the rising costs of living have led more and more women from Kg Mengkabong having no choice but to seek employment outside the home in order to try and meet the financial needs of their households. When I asked young women why they were not involved in waged labour the most often heard response was that they were finding it very difficult to find work.⁹ Indeed, rather unsurprisingly, financial need was the main reason women gave for seeking waged employment. Many of them admitted that if there was no financial need they felt they would stop working outside the home. Yet, even when paid work is available there are a great many

obstacles which women have to overcome, and it is to these that I now turn.

Major Determinants of Bajau Women's Participation in the Waged Labour Force

A variety of interrelated factors are at play determining whether or not village women are able to engage in waged employment. Although it is rather arbitrary to separate out and classify these different influences, broadly speaking the determinants can be grouped for analytic purposes into two main categories. The first set of factors relates to culture and ideology as they influence the normative roles in Bajau society. These will also include the actions and attitudes of employers with regards to recruitment practices. A second set of factors relates to the nature of women's roles within the home and to the range of practical and social constraints operating at the level of the household which make it difficult for women to enter into the wage labour market on the same basis as men.

1) The Role of Culture and Ideology in Influencing Women's Labour Force Participation

I have already discussed culture, ideology and gender roles in several chapters, so only a brief

consideration will be made here of there influence on female labour force participation. It is clear that cultural stereotypes about gender and about the appropriate behaviour of women, interact with family and kinship structures in various ways which influence the ultimate effects of factors such as the level of economic development, the structure of the economy and educational opportunity, (Moore 1988). The effects of gender ideologies and their material consequences are very difficult to assess, but one interesting point is that, whatever the ideology about gender and work, women are in a unique position because of the way in which childbearing and motherhood are associated with women's roles in society and with their social status and self-esteem,(ibid:1988). While marriage and parenthood are important indicators of male social worth and self-esteem in Bajau society, such activities are never preferred as an alternative career as they may be for women. As Ursula Sharma has pointed out, men's work is only ever evaluated in terms of comparison with other waged occupations; women's work, on the other hand, is evaluated and approved with reference to motherhood and household maintenance work. (Sharma 1986). In Bajau society earning money does not seem to be perceived as an essential part of the female role - it is not recognized as an intrinsic part of the

"feminine" role in the way that Bajau society seems to view employment as part of the "masculine" role.

When the focus of adult female roles is childcare and housework, women's paid employment is usually regarded by men, and indeed by the women themselves, as peripheral and/or undesirable. The social and cultural importance attached to normative gender roles in Bajau society is such that women are sometimes prevented from engaging in waged work, or at least channelled into jobs which may be undertaken in conjunction with their household responsibilities. It is also clear that it is usually the case that the content of women's waged work is closely related to their household and childbearing roles, for example domestic servant, waitress, nurse. Cultural stereotypes of gender role are incorporated into the production process itself, influencing employers' attitudes towards the kinds of jobs which are practically, morally and ideologically "appropriate" for female workers. This frequently results in a marked hierarchy of employment along gender lines. There is discrimination in the types of jobs available to women and in the wages they receive. In the legislative framework there are no laws which guarantee equal opportunities in employment and gender

discrimination is often quite blatant in recruitment advertising. As yet, gender discrimination in the work place is not perceived as a priority issue in Malaysia.

Islam does not forbid women to work for a living.

Mehrun Siraj makes this point clear,

"Muslim women have held jobs outside the home since the time of the Prophet, the best examples being that of Khadija, the Prophet's first wife, who was a trader and business woman, and Fatima, his daughter, who spun wool for a wage so that her earnings could supplement the income of her husband Ali."
(1986:163)

Therefore there is nothing in the Koran and Hadith that expressly prohibits the employment of women. In Malaysia Muslim women have always worked; however a woman's right to work is subject to certain basic Islamic principles and the nature and conditions of work should not conflict with these. Restrictions on young single women's mobility clearly limit their opportunities for employment. The prejudice against women moving about freely in public mitigates against their seeking work outside the village even when they are qualified. A man has the advantage of being more mobile, and can without damage to his reputation or that of his household, move about alone in search of work. A young man who cannot find work in his own locality is able to go to stay with relatives in some

other district in the hope of finding work there. And, importantly, a man may hear about available work simply through hanging around in public places, such as coffee shops, quite unacceptable behaviour for a young woman.

Transportation is another major problem for women wage earners as it is often viewed as unacceptable for a woman to travel alone before dawn and after dark. One local small-scale clothing factory provides transportation for its female workers from the kampong and this helps to legitimize factory work as a safe, dignified employment option for young women. Indeed work in this particular factory is highly sought after by local women.

2) Women's Household Roles and Entry into the Labour Force

Various aspects of women's lives at the level of the household contribute to influencing whether or not they enter into the labour force, and if they do, the kinds of employment they look for. There is continuous change in women's economic lives. Women's labour force participation rates vary at different stages of their life cycles, according to changes in their marital status, in the number of pre-school children they have at home and in their socio-economic status. This is

often mediated by the type of household structure and by the availability of alternative workers for household maintenance chores. Female waged employment is intrinsically tied into systems of interpersonal relations as women are enmeshed in a complex system of kinship ties and social relations. Key issues under discussion here will include age and position within the family unit, educational levels and the degree of male control.

(i) Age and Marital Status

These are often critical determinants of women's labour force participation. It appears to be predominantly young, single women who are possibly freer to engage in wage labour than those who have to take care of the housework and childcare. Education, discussed later, is a key factor here. As will become clear, older women are unlikely to have received any formal education and are thus excluded from many occupations. At the other end of the spectrum, older, widowed and divorced women also show slightly higher rates of labour participation outside the home, though most are self-employed and involved in small-scale marketing. The situation in the kampong mirrors the general trend for Sabah as a whole. In Kg Mengkabong, as in Sabah in general, it is the younger, newly educated women who

possess the necessary formal qualifications to obtain kerja makan gaji.

(ii) Housework

Bajau women take responsibility for nurturing children and managing their households even when they take on full time waged employment. The requirements of paid employment are often at odds with a woman's competing responsibilities to her family. Unless there is another female household member available to take responsibility for the household maintenance tasks it is impossible for a women to go out to work. Even when both husband and wife are working full-time outside the home it is considered her duty to take care of the servicing of the household. Thus women must bear a "double burden" working long hours outside the home, the equally long hours in childcare, food preparation, cooking, washing and cleaning. Therefore the burdens of housework are not lightened by women's paid work and it remains the responsibility of women.

(iii) Skills and Education

In all but the most menial forms of employment educational achievement is increasingly important in order to obtain work in general and likely to remain so as long as there are more competitors for employment

than there are jobs. It is important to have an understanding of the Malaysian education system before discussing how women from poor households are disadvantaged in terms of educational opportunities.

Although the language of instruction is now Bahasa Malaysia, the contemporary government school system in Sabah, and throughout the rest of Malaysia, is still based primarily on a British model of education in which progress throughout the system is determined by a series of examinations that decide whether a student will continue his or her education. Students who complete their six years of primary education can continue into secondary education. Secondary education consists of a lower level, Forms 1 to 3, and an upper level Forms 4 and 5. The SRP (Sijil Rendah Pelajaran/Lower Certificate of Education) is taken in Form 3 whilst the SPM examination (Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia/Malaysian Certificate of Education) is taken in Form 5. Failure at either level usually means that a student is denied further public education, though students can resit the examinations as private candidates during the annual examination period. On successful completion of the SMP a student can continue to Form 6 and pursue the STP (Sijil Tinggi

Perskolakan/Higher School Certificate) which is generally a prerequisite for university education.

Between 1970 and 1980 there was a substantial expansion in educational opportunities in Malaysia. In Sabah the 1980 population census showed that illiteracy rates had declined by 50% since 1970, (Daily Express 28/10/90) Table 12.4 below however shows that Sabah still has a higher rate of illiteracy than Peninsular Malaysia.

Table 12.4 Peninsular Malaysia/Sabah: Female-Male Literacy Rates by Rural-Urban Divide, 1980

<u>URBAN AREA</u>			
	Number of Literate Persons		Female:Male Literacy Ratio
	Female	Male	
Peninsular Malaysia	1207440	1398308	46 : 54
Sabah	45540	59594	43 : 57
<u>RURAL AREA</u>			
	Female	Male	Ratio
Peninsular Malaysia	1645710	2029104	33 : 67
Sabah	115291	180900	39 : 61

Sources : Data extracted by IDS (Sabah) from Bosi, W., "Women and Education" presented at the Women in Development Seminar, June, 1989.

The older generation has contributed much to Sabah's high rate of illiteracy. In 1980 around 60% of the total illiterate population in the State were above 30

years of age. This can be attributed to the lack of basic educational opportunities while they were of schooling age. Before independence schools were limited and were mainly confined to the town areas. The 1970 population census shows that only 28% of the population above 30 years of age went to school. An examination of the figures in Table 12.5 below shows how markedly the level of school attendance has changed for different generations and suggests that primary education has now become almost universal in Sabah. The change has been most remarkable for women. From the 1970s onwards there has been very little disparity between the proportion of females and males who have received some education. This contrasts starkly with the situation for the older generations; for example in 1951 only 30% of the total primary school population was female, whereas the corresponding figure in 1987 was 48%.

Table 12.5 Number of Pupils in Primary and Secondary Schools by Gender, Sabah (1951-1985)

<u>PRIMARY SCHOOLS</u>					
<u>Year</u>	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	
1951	14517	70	6221	30	20738
1960	29494	63	17463	37	46957
1970	62567	57	48040	43	110607
1975	68999	55	56593	45	125592
1980	75250	53	66042	47	141292
1985	97254	52	88611	48	185865
1987	105663	52	97780	48	203443

<u>SECONDARY SCHOOLS</u>					
<u>Year</u>	<u>Male</u>		<u>Female</u>		<u>Total</u>
	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>%</u>	
1951	456	70	194	30	650
1960	2646	70	1160	30	3806
1970	18531	61	12072	39	30603
1975	26461	58	19412	42	45873
1980	34551	55	28534	45	63085
1985	46376	53	40478	47	86854
1987	52665	53	46850	47	99515

SOURCE: Internal Data Bank, IDS, Sabah. Original sources were the Annual Bulletin of Statistics, Sabah, 1971, 1974, 1979, 1984, 1986 and 1987.

In Kg Mengkabong formal education for both sexes was lacking or restricted to the primary level until the

late 1960s and early 1970s. Most villagers of both sexes over the age of forty have received no formal education. Once educational facilities were available to the villagers men made greater and more rapid gains than women. The situation was - and still is - due primarily to the reluctance of many parents to allow females post-primary education. The value of primary education for females is widely acknowledged in the village but there is far less agreement on the need or desirability for education beyond the primary level. Frequently parents take the view expressed by Mah about her small daughter, "Let's see how clever she is first. If she's bright we might let her study up to Form 5". A young girl who can prove herself by exceptional academic performance may be able to persuade her parents to let her continue in education, but less academic girls stand a poorer chance. Nowadays the logic is not that it is wrong to educate women, but that it is just not worth it since they are unlikely to be seeking employment after all (surely a self-fulfilling assumption).

Another factor mitigates against girls from poorer households gaining useful qualifications is the amount of housework which they are often expected to do. Many of them spend several hours before school and a great

deal of time after school helping their mothers perform household chores. They are therefore hampered by household work which prevents them from spending time on homework assignments. In addition young girls from poorer households are often unable to continue on to secondary education as they are needed at home to care for younger siblings. The eldest daughter in a family is most likely to be denied education for this reason.

There is a further gender inequality when we consider the retaking of examinations after failure. The difficult examinations during the third and fifth years of secondary education must be passed if a student is to continue. Although I did not collect systematic data on this it was clear that in the kampong males who fail the third year examinations are much more likely to take them again (in some cases several times until they eventually pass). Females are significantly more likely to drop out of schooling after the first failure. Young girls are conditioned to have less expectations of academic success. A women's primary goal is marriage and children; whether she passes school examinations or not she will marry and become a mother. Malinah, described in the following case study, harbours bitter and resentful feelings towards

her parents for preventing her continuing her education.

Malinah, a bright, intelligent 20 year old who was denied secondary education by her parents, had to watch as her younger brother repeatedly failed his examinations. After his initial failure his parents paid his exam registration fee a further two times before conceding that he was unlikely to pass. Malinah who had done well at primary level had secretly desired to become a teacher. "Look at my brother", she confided, "He is stupid (bodoh). He doesn't want to learn. I do but was never given the opportunity", she quietly added.

Some parents interviewed took the education of their children seriously, even those who had received no education themselves. They wanted education for their children as a means of obtaining the good things in life (well-paid jobs, good marriage partners the respect of others). Some hoped that their children would enter the professions, which clearly demand a high level of education. No one interviewed mentioned personal development and self-fulfilment as the reason for encouraging their children's studies. They were looking ahead to the tangible material benefits that would accrue from education.

Poor households in particular often fail to see that a women's education is important even if she never converts it into earning power by taking employment.

Households can benefit substantially from the education of its female members in several ways. As well as for her own personal benefit a woman would be able to help her children with their educational needs, monitoring and helping with their studies, dealing confidently with their teachers and in career guidance. Educated mothers help to produce educated children who can enhance the material resources of the household with well-paid jobs. Educated daughters also have good marriage prospects and command a higher marriage settlement. Female education can therefore be "converted into other kinds of social capital", (Sharma 1986:114).

(iv) Male control of women's activities

The resistance of husbands and fathers to women working is a major household level constraint on the supply of women into the labour market. Despite the fact that extra income is often very much needed by low income families, men often prevent their wives and daughters from seeking paid employment. In part this is a question of pride which stems from the wider cultural and ideological prescriptions discussed earlier in this chapter. There is also the male fear that if women go out to work their greater mobility may lead to sexual

indiscretion on the part of single women and infidelity on the part of wives. Salimah, a single woman in her late teens, was prevented from seeking factory employment on the orders of her father. He felt that if Salimah was away from the home unsupervised by her mother she may give into temptation and indulge in sexual relationships with male colleagues. Here it must be remembered that amongst the Bajau, women are considered inherently lustful, gatal, and must be protected from their baser instincts. Her father's underlying concern appeared to be that if Salimah was kept at home this would improve the family's bargaining power in terms of the amount of emas khawin he could request in any future marriage negotiations for his daughter. It would be difficult to prove to a prospective bridegroom that she was "untouched" if she were permitted to work outside the confines of the village. Whilst Salimah's family is by no means wealthy they can survive without the potential extra income that any work Salimah undertook would generate. Many less well-off families literally cannot afford to maintain a position similar to Salimah's father. Furthermore, as we have seen in a previous chapter, educated women who are involved in paid work can now often command a higher marriage settlement than women who do not work outside the home.

Community Attitudes to Working Women

The problems outlined above are further compounded by growing speculation in the village concerning the "moral" consequences of women's involvement in the waged labour force. Media attention has raised the issues of the propriety of women's waged work, particularly in multinational factories, and this has helped to raise concern in the village and Malaysian society in general.¹⁰ As well as at the household level, as described above, there are also negative perceptions regarding the perceived moral consequences of female employment at the community level. Social mixing between men and women which paid work usually entails is often thought to lead to permissiveness. Even when an individual household generally supports female waged employment there may be censure from the wider community. Norizam whose daughter, Latipah, works in a local restaurant expressed her fears thus;

"If I was rich my daughter would not have to work in a restaurant and I would be much happier. I can only hope she gets a good husband with a good job so that she can stop work. I worry about her being in the restaurant with all those men. She is a good, respectable girl but some of the men who eat there are bad. They try to take advantage of innocent girls like my Latipah. Often I hear gossip about the behaviour of other girls who work in the towns. It is said they sometimes get up to very bad things. Some get pregnant. It would be terrible if there was gossip in the village about my daughter. It would reflect badly on me, my husband and our

whole family if the other villagers started saying bad things about Latipah. If she acquires a bad reputation it would be very difficult to find her a good respectable husband. No one wants to marry a woman whose morals and reputation are questioned."

This type of attitude is common in the kampong. It is thought that when a young woman is out of the village, beyond the protection of her family, she may be at risk from predatory men. As has already been pointed out women are thought to be very weak-willed and easily tempted into illicit sexual liaisons. Female waged work then is something that is tolerated rather than welcomed. A widespread attitude in the community to women's employment is a kind of conditional approval; it is acceptable for women to work if they are doing the right sort of work. "Respectable" work such as teaching, nursing or clerical work is seldom condemned.

Despite the prevailing gender ideology by which waged work for women is still seen as questionable economic necessity forces many women to seek employment outside the confines of the village. They literally cannot afford to remain in the home as "seri rumah saja" (only housewives). Most villagers, both male and female, are forced to concede that female waged work is a practical solution to a household's immediate economic needs.

The Effects of Wage Labour on Women's Lives

The financial advantages to the households whose daughters have paid work are quite clear, but the question remains of what advantages the women perceive for themselves and whether or not working outside the home improves women's position within the home and community. It must be noted however that there can be no easy generalizations, for the female paid labour force in the kampong does not constitute a homogeneous group. There are marked differences between those employed in different sectors of the labour market. As it is predominantly young, single women with at least some secondary education who are engaged in paid work, this discussion concentrates mainly on Bajau women as working daughters.

One oft quoted benefit is the greater degree of self-determination. One young teacher in particular, Zariah, expressed a greater sense of independence and personal freedom from the restrictions of family life. "Now that I am working my parents treat me differently" she said. "They treat me as an adult and listen to my opinions now." These women by the very nature of their employment also have greater mobility than their non-wage-earning sisters. The social environment of the workplace, whether factory, shop or office, was another

benefit frequently cited as it provides an opportunity to socialize with friends. As we have seen unmarried women who stay at home helping with housework and childcare are often isolated from their friends. They are not permitted to casually leave the house as they please to visit friends. They may leave the house several times each week for specific errands but visiting for them is generally restricted to special social occasions.

For women from reasonably well-off households money for personal effects and leisure activities was another stated advantage. Zariah, the young teacher mentioned above, displayed the stereo system and clothes that she had bought from her earnings the first time I visited her. Her father, a university graduate, occupied a senior position in the civil service and so Zariah was not expected to make a financial contribution to her household. The majority of young women however could not afford the luxury of spending their earnings for their own personal use and were expected to contribute all or the most part of their wages to their household's budget.

Thus it would appear that Bajau women, on the whole, view employment as having a favourable effect on their

lives. They have more control over their leisure activities and more freedom to leave the village. Young women's greatly increased participation in wage work draws them into the centre of economic development in modern Malaysia, may provide them with greater personal autonomy, and expands their horizons not only in terms of work but also in terms of involvement in the wider world in general beyond the kampong. But the picture is contradictory. While these women have in some cases experienced measurable improvements in lifestyle and opportunities, they have made little progress towards equality with men. They are still expected to work in the home after their day's waged work. Additionally many of these women do not intend to continue in paid employment after marriage and still regard marriage as their most important goal. Female factory and office workers also experience low wages, dehumanising working conditions and various new forms of harassment as workers and as women. Hence, although women's subjective feelings of progress are understandable, qualitative amelioration of their standing with respect to men and to their position is, as yet, unrealised. It is clear that the relationship between employment and increased social and economic autonomy is a vexed one, but Bajau women themselves feel that there is a connection.

Conclusions

Development efforts have brought about changes in the structure of employment, accompanied by changes in skill requirements. One of the main problems facing women who seek paid employment in Sabah is that there are few employment opportunities for those who have had little or no formal education. Men, of course, face the same problem, but as we have seen, daughters are generally given relatively limited education in comparison to sons, particularly if they are from poor households. Older women are unlikely to have ever been sent to school and it is common even now for kampong girls to drop out of school or be withdrawn by their parents after primary level. Consequently when formal education and certificates are used as a screening mechanism for job allocation, the young women from those households find themselves at the bottom of the employment hierarchy. Although a good education and formal qualifications are now seen as the route to achieving a measure of economic security and success in the modern economy this does not mean that the jobs which most of the young villagers fill are commensurate with their educational achievements - most are decidedly not. High school graduates from the kampong often end up in a series of low status service occupations.

In the above discussion of women's waged employment, certain issues have been highlighted that call for further consideration by Government policy makers. In Sabah the situation of women in waged employment proves to be a confirmation of historical stereotypes, regardless of dynamic developments in the economy, and this points to the need to enhance the effectiveness of existing policy measures to promote women's participation in "non-feminized" occupations, as well as female representation at the higher end of the occupational scale.

Greater emphasis on the promotion of women's entry to higher levels of employment, and to education and training of women so that they can acquire the necessary qualifications and credentials to assume skilled and knowledge-intensive occupations seems to be crucial in creating better job opportunities for women. The shift of women to non-feminized services and to higher levels would also reduce pay differentials between the genders.

"A continuous effort to upgrade human resources will thus be one of the most crucial elements in development policy...the upgraded human capital cannot effectively contribute to the enhancement of the services sector and the development process if women who account for half the population, are excluded from human resource management."

(United Nations 1989:209)

If countries such as Malaysia fail to upgrade female and male labour on an equal basis they may not be able to achieve their development goals in the long term. One theory holds that an expansion in job opportunities in general would lead to a greater demand for female labour, which in turn would induce a larger labour supply and would also lead to greater integration of the labour markets for men and women. But even if this proposition holds women may continue to be the "marginal" workers and to be discriminated against in situations where job opportunities cannot be expanded rapidly enough to provide jobs for all women and men who want to work. This is currently the situation faced by the women of Kg Mengkabong. The rural labour market is unable to cope with the increasing numbers of women who are forced through financial necessity to seek waged employment. This lack of work opportunities constitutes a major constraint on women's participation in the labour force and their problems are further

compounded by both social and cultural inhibitors and attitudes.

Footnotes:

1 Several legislative measures which protect the interests of foreign investors have either been relaxed or conversely enforced depending on the situation (Ariffin 1983:52). Additionally manufacturing firms are allowed to send their recruiting agents to the countryside to encourage rural women to migrate to and work in the urban-based factories.

2 There is a fear that as production in export processing zones is upgraded and diversified, the proportion of female workers will decline, as has happened in Brazil, the Dominican Republic and the Republic of Korea. The Malaysian Government's desire to achieve NIC status has encouraged the entry of higher- technology industries which demand technically skilled workers. Since women are generally unskilled they face the possibility of displacement. In addition these capital-intensive industries require less workers thus reducing job opportunities for women in general (Ariffin 1992:46).

3 There is a substantial body of literature pertaining to this, for example, Khoo Hoon Eng (1983) discusses the hazards faced by factory women at work, Heyzer (1988) in "Daughters in Industry" illustrates the poor working conditions and lack of promotion opportunities faced by factory women in Malaysia and elsewhere in Southeast Asia, whilst Hing Ai Yun and Rokiah Talib (1986) describe their unstable employment situation as they are buffeted by the tides of world capitalist business cycles.

4 Whilst elderly women are permitted to sit and chat in coffee shops it is viewed as unseemly for a young woman to be seen in these establishments. They are mainly a place for men to socialize with their friends.

5 The unemployment rate is estimated by the number of unemployed as a percentage of the labour force (those in the age group 10-64 years but excluding "housewives", students, retired or disabled persons).

The unemployed category covers both the active and inactive unemployed. The actively unemployed includes all persons who did not work during the reference week but were actively looking for work. The inactively unemployed includes all persons who during the reference period were not actively seeking work because of bad weather or temporary illness, or believed no work was available and if available they were not qualified or had jobs which they would start soon or were waiting for answers to job applications.

6 The unemployment situation in Sabah has been made worse by the influx of illegal immigrants and refugees from the Philippines who are prepared to work long hours for low wages. In Tuaran many of the coffee shops are staffed by Philipinas who have entered the State illegally.

7 At the time of writing data from the 1990 census of Sabah are as yet unavailable.

8 From my fieldwork, I suspect that many older women do not classify themselves as "actively unemployed" because they do not feel that there is any waged employment open to them. Many of them are illiterate and even although they would like to find paid work they do not even attempt to do so believing, quite rightly, that waged opportunities for them are almost non-existent. Many of these women generate income through petty trading and commerce.

9 Other reasons included not interested, childcare responsibilities, too much housework, no necessary skills and in one case no financial need.

10 Amriah Buang (1993:198) comments that in 1978 newspapers reported illegitimate pregnancies among factory workers, incidents of abandoned new-born babies in industrial communities and the involvement of female factory workers in social activities which conflicted with traditional Malay Muslim cultural norms and values. Jamillah Ariffin (1984) conducted a survey in several rural communities in Peninsular Malaysia concerning attitudes towards female employment in factory production. She states that many parents of factory girls were worried about the morality of their daughters and were also beginning to "feel ashamed that the girls were employed in an occupation which was rapidly acquiring a low moral and social status in Malaysian society", (ibid:240).

SECTION THREE

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT: GENDER DIMENSIONS OF INCOME ALLOCATION AND DISTRIBUTION IN VILLAGE HOUSEHOLDS

"Men have authority over women because Allah has made the one superior to the other and because they spend their wealth to maintain them."

The Koran

"...(Bajau) wives are kept in a state of poverty by the laziness and gambling habits of their husbands."

(Evans 1922:217)

As has been demonstrated in the preceding two chapters, village households receive income from a variety of sources. Although the Bajau make a linguistic and conceptual distinction between their three major forms of productive work - kerja makan gaji, kerja kampong and kerja makan nasi - what is immediately striking is the degree to which each household combines these different forms of work in practice. Each village household depends for its economic survival on a combination of two or three major forms of economic activity. In this chapter it will be demonstrated that women's earned income and their ability to stretch this and other resources is vital to the survival of most households. I will also examine whether the

traditional role of women as the controllers of household wealth has been eroded as a result of socio-economic change.

Women's Earnings and Household Income

In Kg Mengkabong households vary in the way that they arrange their financial affairs.¹ The Bajau use the Malay terms makan suku (to eat separately) and makan sekali (to eat together) which refer to financial as well as eating arrangements. Firth (1966) in her study of Malay housekeeping makes this distinction clear.

"...a grandmother living with her son's family might buy and cook all her rice and fish herself, or she might be fed by her children. In the former case she would say she was makan suku, in the latter makan sekali."

(1966:17)

For nuclear households the most common pattern is for the household to have a joint or common budget, that is makan sekali. In extended family households each husband and wife unit retains a large portion of their joint income for their own personal use and the remainder is pooled in a common budget with other household members. Staples such as fish, rice, other foodstuffs and firewood are generally pooled. For instance, in a household containing two husband and

wife units, each pair will contribute a portion of their earnings to buy the household's basic foodstuffs and to pay for other expenses such as water and electricity bills.² Any other single persons living in the house who are earning are also expected to contribute to the household's budget. Each marital pair then keeps the remainder of their income for their own personal use. Details of how these husband and wife units manage their income is provided later in this chapter. It is important to uncover how this system operates and which household members are responsible for marshalling the household's cash resources in order to understand the complex of gender relations within the Bajau household. I will begin this chapter with a discussion of female financial contributions to the household.³ I look at their contributions in the context of their roles firstly as unmarried daughters, then as wives.

In a growing number of households, the daughters' wages are becoming an increasingly crucial part of the family's income. As we have seen, in the rapidly changing economy of Sabah the extended family household remains a key institution in Kg Mengkabong. Economic cooperation and the pooling of the wages of household members are seen as part of an essential strategy to

sustain the household and to advance its social status and prestige. It is taken for granted that earnings should not be spent by the women themselves. Almost all of the women questioned stated that they give all or most of their wages to their parents, usually directly to their mothers. Indeed in a few cases the entire cash income of the household is obtained from wage-earning daughters. For example, in one of the households in my house cluster it is the three unmarried children, two female factory workers and one male soldier (sending occasional remittances), who support the entire household of ten. The father had to retire from the fishing industry due to health problems and relies completely on his children to support him and his household.

This contrasts sharply with Margery Wolfe's findings in a rural Javanese community who like the Bajau have a female-centred bilateral kinship system. Although the community in which she worked was very poor Wolfe found a high degree of income retention by working daughters rather than income pooling.

"...these Javanese factory daughters control their own income, remitting little if anything from their weekly wage to the family till and often asked their parents for more."
(Wolfe 1989:9)

Although Wolfe provides no explanation for this I would surmise that this difference may be due to the fact that these Javanese women are living and working away from the community and thus have more personal freedom and decision-making powers than the Bajau women who are still residing in their parental home. The Javanese women will also have to buy all their own provisions and pay rent for accommodation which in the urban areas can prove very expensive. As the women from Kg Mengkabong are still residing in their parental home they do not have the expense of accommodation and food. Additionally there is more immediate constant pressure upon them to contribute to the household's finances.

In Kg Mengkabong it is often stated that daughters are rather more reliable contributors to household budgets when they are in paid employment than sons. Married sons tend to live with their wives' families and make little contribution to their natal household's finances. Unmarried sons who are in employment are said to make less regular contributions and tend to keep back substantial amounts of their earnings for personal spending money. Contributions of wage-earning children in the village, both male and female, have made possible the purchase of consumer goods such as televisions, videos, refrigerators etc, for a number of

households. As was mentioned previously in the discussion on marriage, parents whose daughters have educational qualifications and have paid work are able to request higher marriage settlements for their daughters. There is a distinct possibility of households becoming differentiated by the educational achievements and occupational status of their younger members. As yet it is impossible to tell whether this will affect household composition with sons and daughters resenting the financial drain on their resources by other household members, but it is possible that in the future this may lead to a growing number of young people leaving the village on marriage and setting up home themselves.

Whilst a number of village women leave paid employment on marriage others continue until they have children and beyond. Those not engaged in paid work are often involved in petty trading and small-scale vending when their childcare responsibilities allow. The wide range of income-generating activities in which women are involved provide a substantial contribution to many household budgets.

"I worked as a waitress in a coffee shop for five years", explained Noorimah. "I married my husband when I was eighteen. Some of my friends joke that when they get married they don't want to work. They say that they want to stay at home and get fat! There was no question of me giving up my job. We needed the money. My husband's income as a fisherman is not regular (tidak tentu). Then when I became pregnant with my first child two years ago my boss at the coffee shop asked me to leave. He didn't think it was good for his business to have a pregnant waitress serving customers. I borrowed some money from my aunt to buy a secondhand sewing machine. Now I work at home as a seamstress. At Hari Raya and at weddings when people need new clothes I can earn quite a lot of money. I can also make school uniforms for the kampong children. Although most weeks I don't make a great deal of money my earnings help pay for my son's milk and my mother's medicines. We also save money now that I make all my family's clothing."

On marriage the daughter will no longer hand over her entire wage to her mother and instead will pool her income with her husband and put an agreed amount each week into the household's common pot for shared household expenses. This amount varies according to the financial resources of the parents. If the household is a poor one a greater portion of the daughter's and son-in-law's income will be given to the senior woman of the household than if the parents are relatively well-off.

It is clear that in most households members would face an inferior standard of living without the income generated by wives and daughters. Indeed in several

cases the household would not be able to maintain the minimum conditions necessary for independent survival without their contributions. Thus women's earnings are in no sense marginal to the household economy, often representing 30% or more of the cash coming into households. This figure of course varies greatly according to the general level of income and employment situation of other household members as well as household size and composition. Nevertheless women make a substantial contribution in terms of earned income to household budgets as the following case study will illustrate.

While Marinah works as an unpaid shopkeeper in her family's small village store her husband Hamid holds a wage-earning job as an armed security guard at one of the local banks, contributing cash to the household budget. Her father works as a fisherman producing the household's staple food. These three forms of productive activity together provide the major income for this household of nine. Marinah's mother takes primary responsibility for childcare and household maintenance work. In addition to her other responsibilities she raises a small number of chickens from which she collects the eggs and sells to other villagers. Periodically she bakes traditional Bajau cakes and sends her eldest grandchildren to sell them around the village. These marginal economic activities are by no means insignificant to the household economy.

The example above illustrates the "hidden" work engaged in by many village women that supplements their household's more substantial sources of income. Whilst

Marinah and her mother are not involved in paid wage labour their activities leave the men of their household free to engage in waged work. In addition Aminah and her mother supplement the household's income from their petty trading activities. In female-headed households, that is those headed by widows or divorcees, the importance of women's cash income is even more obvious. In these households female-earned income seldom represents less than 80% of the total household income.

The poor in particular must draw upon a broad range of survival or coping strategies both inside and outside the money economy. Bajau households often engage in different forms of work because they have different degrees of access to or possibilities of obtaining these various forms of employment. For example waged work is primarily open to the young and educated. Those who do not fall into this category therefore pursue economic activities elsewhere such as in small-scale vending in the case of women and fishing for men. Households engage in several forms of work because this strategy increases their possibilities for economic survival and security. Every household in Mengkabong must now have a regular and substantial source of cash due to their dependence on consumer goods and services

so every household must supplement their subsistence work with some form of cash-producing work. On the other hand most forms of waged work do not provide a sufficient income to support a household and so other forms of work such as small-scale vending and subsistence fishing to meet the household's needs must be done. Women's income is therefore essential to the survival of many households as it forms a substantial element in the household resource system.

Having established that women's earnings form a crucial component of the household's total income, it remains now to examine who controls and manages the household's financial affairs.

Gender Roles in Financial Control and Management

Throughout Southeast Asia women have traditionally played a decisive role within the household performing executive and managerial, as well as labour, functions. Commonly women handle the financial affairs of their households and act as conservers of the family or household wealth. They are thus often able to exercise considerable power within the household. Willner, for example, notes that Javanese women are involved, and often determine, transactions and obligations with

respect to land, marketing, wages and harvesting in addition to everyday household matters and the welfare and socialization of their children, (1980:186).

Stoler (1977) states that Javanese women have considerable independence through their access to strategic resources and that it is this which gives Javanese women high "status" within the household. Several studies on Malay women report that women control finances and dominate decisionmaking in the domestic domain. Wazir-Jahan writes,

"Traditionally, a Malay woman had as much economic independence as her husband, not only through contributing a major share of her labour on farming, but also in conducting small-scale petty business related to her particular skill or trade...a Malay woman also had full control over domestic finances and this usually gave her added prestige and esteem."

(1983:14)

Strange (1980:140) reports a similar arrangement existing among the Malays she studied in Peninsular Malaysia, and Carsten (1989:130) among the Malays of Langkawi. Firth (1966) in her analysis of the position of women in Kelantan notes,

"The real influence of the woman...comes from her control over the purse strings. All money earned by the fisherman is given to the woman both to spend and to save. The peasants say that it is natural 'for who should guard the money while we are away all day, if not the woman'."

(1966:26-27)

The Bajau of Kg Mengkabong also mention that it is more practical for the women of the household to be in charge of the money since the men are often away from the home fishing for long periods. Nimmo reports,

"Most commonly the wife is in charge of the small finances each family maintains which she parcels out for purchases and payments."
(1972:22)

In Kg Mengkabong women are assumed to be more adept than men at the management of money. One evening I asked a mixed group of villagers whether men or women were considered better at managing money. One middle aged woman replied, "Men and money do not go together very well. All men do if they have money is spend, spend, spend. Some like to go to town and stay there for a few days gambling on the horses and eating in coffee shops with their friends. Others have girlfriends in town who they spend money on. A few even visit prostitutes!" The men present laughed and agreed wholeheartedly with her comments. It is generally agreed that women were the better financial managers and so in most households they are given responsibility for overseeing the household's budgeting and for other resources. One of the most important legal rights of Bajau women is the right to possess

their own property which they may dispose of as they please. Under Muslim inheritance law a woman is entitled to a half-share in her husband's property on his death (one-fourth if there are no male descendants). However the Bajau of Kg Mengkabong do not follow these laws, preferring to follow their adat in matters of inheritance. Under Bajau adat a female inherits equally with her male counterparts. Perhaps one of the most important financial resources of a woman is her jewellery. Poorer women may have little gold but each attempts to accumulate what she can. It is her insurance against disaster as it can be quickly converted into cash. This is particularly important for widowed or divorced women. Daughters usually inherit their mother's jewellery which can constitute an important financial stake for them. A Bajau woman is able to dispose of her own funds as she sees fit without the necessity of first obtaining her husband's approval and he is unable to touch these funds without her permission. So, as well as managing the material resources of the household, women also possess and control their own inherited wealth.

Meredith Edwards draws our attention to the important distinction between the "work" dimension of resource management and the "decision-making" dimension of

households' financial affairs, that is, between "management" and "control". Control refers to decision-making while the person who manages carries out decisions already made (1981:4). Thus the power dimension and the work dimension of resource management need not be vested in the same person. It became increasingly clear to me that this distinction may have different meanings at different income levels, and I will now examine financial arrangements in both susah and sederhana households to illustrate these differences.

In Kg Mengkabong there is a clear relationship between income control and management practices and income level. In poor households women remain both the controllers and managers of the household's cash resources. This pattern is commonly found in western working class households, (eg Pahl 1980; Whitehead 1981). Meredith Edwards, for instance, found that in an Australian sample, income management on the part of the wife is more common where household income is low or where the wife is employed outside the home (1981:132). Amongst the Bajau employment of the wife does not appear to be a significant variable but for low income households it is the woman who manages and controls household budgeting. Pahl (1980) refers to

this income allocational form as the whole wage system, that is the entire wage is handed over to the wife for housekeeping expenses and a sum of money is then given to the husband for his personal needs.

Traditionally Bajau women's control and management of the household's financial resources gave them a considerable measure of power within the household. As we have seen in previous chapters, a man must ask his wife for money if he wishes to purchase anything other than inexpensive items, for example new fishing equipment, clothing or electrical goods. If she does not agree with the intended purchase she has the right to deny him the necessary money.⁴ Women have thus been able to construct for themselves an arena of social action which demonstrates their value in Bajau society. This power is publicly valued and women function in Bajau society not as objects but as individuals with some measure of control. These powers within the household are viewed as particularly important by the women especially as they have little formal voice in kampong affairs. The traditional community leadership structures of the village are exclusively the domain of men. Although women are free to comment on any decision taken by the headmen or village committee they are viewed as somewhat marginal to the political

process. Their decisionmaking powers within the household are thus an important sphere of influence for women who hold no formal power in community affairs. There has been an ongoing debate within feminist circles on this very issue of women's power within and outside of the household. Moore (1988) neatly summarizes the argument,

"If we want to see women as effective social adults in their own right is it enough to say that they have power within a specifically female domain, or must we argue that they have power in those areas of social life which have so often been presented as the public, political domain of men?"
(1988:39)

However, whichever view one takes, and however illusory this power may seem to outsiders, village women themselves regard their financial control of the household's resources as an important source of power and authority and one which they would not gladly relinquish. In their own eyes it provides them with an arena of powerfulness in a society where they are otherwise powerless.

Whilst women's role as financial managers can be viewed as enhancing their position within the household, and indeed it is clear that the women themselves view it in this light, for poor households it can also be seen as

yet another burden on women. A man delegates to his wife the chore of managing the money; when money is short budgeting and managing become chores rather than a source of power within the household. Having to stretch the household's meagre resources to cover all household members' financial needs constitutes an awesome responsibility. Women from susah households must prioritize all members' needs and decide how much of the household's budget must be kept for different purposes such as food, electricity and water bills and schoolchildren's educational requirements. Often their income barely covers these essentials. The poorest households have no surplus cash after their basic needs have been satisfied. There is never enough money to stock up on rice to guard against emergencies and few households are in a position to save any cash for future needs. Many live from day to day or week to week. If the main breadwinner, whether male or female, becomes incapacitated through illness for example, the consequences for the household can be quite dire. At these times women must tap their kinship networks for financial aid. The State provides very little in the way of welfare for needy families and so the extended family household and wider kinship networks become crucial for the household's very survival.

It is therefore clear that below a certain level of affluence there is no real question of "choosing" how the household's money should be spent, and for the woman who controls household budgeting that control does not confer any real privilege, only responsibility. They have very little discretion in deciding how to spend the money to which they have access. The choices open to these women are strictly limited and the survival of their households often depends on their capacity to economize and keep their eyes open for bargains. Thus for these women resource management constitutes a form of work, that is, a set of tasks which consume time and energy.⁵ It is the time and labour of the female members of households that are most continuously deployed in this work of budget planning, looking for bargains and organizing credit to deal with shortfalls.

A rather different pattern of financial management is emerging in more prosperous households where the chief wage earner is the senior man. Depending on the salaries of their husbands, women in such households tend not to work outside the home and have no source of income themselves.⁶ Men from sederhana households tend to be educated and work in white-collar occupations. They usually open bank accounts in the local town and

give "housekeeping" money (belanja dapur, literally "kitchen expenses") to their wives/mothers. Typically the wife in sederhana households will receive a weekly or monthly allowance from her husband to use for ordinary household expenses. Pahl (1980) refers to this income management pattern as the allowance system. These wives usually have complete control over the sum of money allocated to them by their husbands and most of them claimed that their husbands never enquired how much of it they had spent and what they had spent it on. The majority of the husband's wage however is out of their wives's hands. They have no control over it and many of them have little idea of exactly how much their husband's earn. The man is free to do whatever he likes with his wage although it is likely that he will bank at least some of it. This is an important development within households with male wage earners who command a relatively good salary, because in most cases the women are losing control of the cash resources of the household. Whilst these women have largely retained the responsibilities of managing the daily budgeting they have lost the control of the household' resources. This phenomenon has also been described by Willner who notes that, "When the sources of a man's income are far from the locus of his

household, the wife tends to have less control over it" (1980:187).

It is not surprising that this new development has caused a considerable amount of consternation within the kitchens of the kampong. Whilst I was there it was a constant topic of conversation amongst the women and there was always a great deal of sympathy for the women who had lost control of their household's finances. "It's not right. Not right at all", one old woman remarked. "We women have always looked after the money. In the past Bajau husbands and wives shared everything. We knew how much money we had. Now the men hide the money in the bank. We don't even know how much they have. They even hide their bank books so that we can't look inside".

To sum up, in *sederhana* households it is often the person who earns the money, usually the man, who has control over it. Although poor women have retained control over the household's income there are a great number of factors which inhibit them from exercising this control in a free and independent way. For susah households the planning of the household's budget, working out the priorities for the week, calculating

whether anything can be saved or how much will be needed for a forthcoming feast is a woman's responsibility and this often constitutes a heavy burden for her. In both systems however there is asymmetry in men's and women's relations to the cash left over after compulsory expenditure has been accounted for. Men from both susah and sederhana households take a sum of money for their own personal expenditure or "pocket money" (duit sendiri). There is no similar category of money for women. It is therefore necessary to examine this gender difference in relation to income utilization.

Gender Differences in Income Utilization

"Men and women in the same cultural setting and class group - and family - have very different prospects in life. The contrasts are often dramatic, in their participation in labor markets, the content of their work, the returns of their labour, the pattern of economic participation over the lifecycle, daily time-use, and parenting responsibilities."

(Bruce 1989:979)

The structure of Bajau household economics is more elaborate than would appear at first glance. Traditional economics construes the household as a basic unit within which the resources acquired by individuals are assumed to be shared among household

members (Pahl 1980:238). The gender inequalities among household members outlined above by Bruce mean that households do not constitute a unified economy but several often competing economies. One pertinent example of the tensions that exist between husbands and wives is in the use of income. The evidence presented here will show that men's and women's needs and interests are unlikely to fully accord within the household.

The problem of the allocation of income is often a source of considerable tension in kampong households. Minor quarrels over the use of income and other resources and over shortages of income are fairly common. This is often the result of an incomplete pooling of a family's income. It became clear to me that Bajau women and men exhibit different priorities in consumption and use of income. A central objective of much of women's work is to earn income for household survival. Men, of course, also work to support their households but utilize their income for other purposes as well. Women allocate a greater proportion of their income (that is, almost 100%) than men do to everyday subsistence- food and clothing. Men, on the other hand, withhold a portion of their income for personal use even when the household's total income is

inadequate. Wives are not entirely ignorant of the size of their husbands' earnings but if for instance the husband is a usik and so does not have a constant, regular wage it is much easier for him to "cheat" his wife and retain a portion for his own use. Whilst this causes quarrels between husbands and wives it is generally accepted that a man will always try to keep a little money back for himself.

One afternoon when I was visiting a friend in the village I was surprised to find her rummaging through her husband's clothes and belongings whilst he was out fishing. "I know he has a little bag of money somewhere here" she explained. Last time I found M\$30 in one of his shoes. I took it and when he discovered it missing we quarrelled. He accused me of stealing. It would not be so bad if we had a lot of money. But we don't." Sure enough a few minutes later she uncovered his stash, M\$45 hidden in a rolled up sock, which she promptly pocketed. "That will buy Zariah (her daughter) some new school shoes," she smiled mischievously.

The consequences of this pattern of men regularly subtracting a small amount of their wages for personal use can have potentially serious consequences in a community like Kg Mengkabong where the majority of households are living in poverty. Bajau gender ideology appears to support the notion that men have the right to personal spending money, which they are perceived to need, and that women's income is for collective purposes. There is no concept of personal

"pocket money" for women. As they are expected to spend the vast majority of their time either at home or at work they are perceived to have less need of personal spending money. In contrast, men tend to spend a considerable amount of time socializing in the town coffee shops. This sociability entails the buying of food and drinks for friends and acquaintances. Others enjoy gambling on horse racing and lotteries. For purposes such as this Bajau men withhold a portion of their income even when their families live in or near poverty. Whilst it is almost expected that men will do so, this often causes friction between marital partners and can even, in a few instances, lead to divorce as the following case illustrates.

"Several times a month my husband goes into town to watch the horse racing. Sometimes he tells me that he is going to town on 'business' but I know that he goes there to gamble on the horses", Noirani confided. "Most of the time I don't really mind. He only bets a few dollars each time and if he wins he buys toys for the children and little treats for me. He is not like some of the men in this village who spend a lot of money gambling. My sister and her husband divorced because he often gambled away their money at the race track. Sometimes she would have no money left to buy the things her children needed. If she got angry with him he would shout, 'You never go hungry. You always have enough money for food so why are you complaining? What more do you want?' Eventually she got tired of this and, after discussing it with our parents, she asked him for a divorce. A husband who wastes money is useless. Her life will be better without a husband like that."

A woman will be pitied if her husband is wasteful with money but she may also lose the respect of other women. Rather than endure such behaviour it is sometimes considered better for a woman to request a divorce. It is often said that having no husband is better than having a husband who fails in his duty to provide for his wife and children because of his spending habits.

Conclusions

In Kg Mengkabong we see the continual manipulation of resources and opportunities to ensure the maintenance of the household. Income earning is a necessary but not the sole component of this. Other sources include kin networks and the reciprocity system outlined in Chapter 7 by which households exchange goods, services and information. Managing this range of activities constitutes work, more precisely women's work. The totality of these activities shapes the working lives of Bajau women.

The importance of a woman's role as financial manager and accountant for the household goes beyond the fact of her authority and influence over expenditures; her ability in performance of this role also has an influence on the esteem in which the family is held by

the rest of the community. Whatever the size of the total household income women are judged by others according to their ability to stretch and utilize available financial resources to maximum effect. This holds whether the household earns M\$100 or M\$1000 a month.

Footnotes:

1 It should be noted that the Bajau are very open about financial matters. I experienced very little difficulty in obtaining information from individuals about their income and resource management patterns. Everyone knows how much other household members and relatives earn and how much they spend on shopping, festivities and so forth. I was often asked how much I earned, how much my father earned and how much my clothes and belongings cost. Every time I came back from town I would be questioned on exactly how much everything I had bought cost. This lack of embarrassment concerning financial affairs helped me obtain reasonably accurate data on such matters.

2 However, it should be noted that not every husband and wife unit is able to contribute to the household's joint budget every week. For example, an elderly couple who are too frail to engage in any income-generating activity may be unable to contribute any money. Furthermore, during periods of bad weather a fisherman may be unable to put to sea and therefore be unable to cover his share of household expenses. On these occasions other household members may have to pay for all household expenses.

3 Women, of course, also contribute indirectly to the household's income through their unpaid labour in the home.

4 It should be noted however that if a husband considers his wife to be too mean with the household's money he may threaten to divorce her. Rosemary Firth (1966) makes a similar point in reference to her study of housekeeping in Kelantan.

5 Most writers have tackled the subject of the allocation of household resources purely as an

expression of power relations and not as a form of work. I have borrowed this idea from Sharma (1986) who, as far as I am aware, was perhaps one of the first to write about the marshalling of the household's resources as a form of work.

6 There are few cases in the village where both husband and wife in stederhana households have salaried positions. In the one case about which I was able to gather data the husband banked the majority of his salary and gave his wife "housekeeping" money for household expenses. Her salary paid for her clothing as well as their children's clothing, shoes and education. It is likely that in the future, as more and more young women are finishing secondary education and obtaining salaried positions that there will be an increase in the number of these dual salaried households. It is as yet unclear what forms of financial arrangements they will choose.

CONCLUSION: WHAT CONTRIBUTION CAN FEMINIST THEORY MAKE
TO THE UNDERSTANDING OF THE PROCESSES OF SOCIO-ECONOMIC
CHANGE?

That developing societies are currently undergoing extensive fundamental transformations is increasingly being recognized and documented by anthropologists, but what are not well understood are the actual dynamics of change in these societies and the implications of these dynamics for both anthropological theory and, not least, for the women and men involved. It is to these issues that my study of the Bajau of Sabah can contribute further insights and new perspectives. Much of the literature focusing on the roles of women in developing countries conveys an impression of women as a cohesive group facing common problems in rural communities, but this study illustrates that Bajau women's lives in Kg Mengkabong are striking for their diversity. A series of central variables shape the diversity of women's experiences such as the differing economic bases, varying strengths of kinship networks, the particulars of their biographies and of their personalities. Their lives are also influenced by larger patterns of historical change on both national and international levels. Local economic, social structural and cultural variables form the general

background against which individual biographies and national historical change play themselves out. For these reasons Bajau village women can never be considered a homogeneous group. My findings show that we must give attention to the fact that different economic classes generally imply important differences in the position of women in a given society and this clearly has important implications for development planning. My research indicates that the development process is affecting Bajau women from varying socio-economic backgrounds in different ways. For example, many sederhana women are losing out compared to their menfolk as men enter the waged labour market and women are more and more becoming confined to the home as "housewives". Importantly, they are losing their influence over household financial resources and thus a crucial arena of women's power within the home. On the other hand, accelerating pauperization of the rural sector is forcing many susah women to seek waged labour. They are often disadvantaged in the labour market where educational qualifications are used as screening mechanisms and the rural labour sector has not expanded sufficiently to cope with them. The poorest households are becoming increasingly poorer in comparison to other village households. The income gap is clearly widening between subsistence fishing

households and households in which members are engaged in paid labour. Thus the village is becoming increasingly stratified according to the work backgrounds of different households. This has important implications for gender relations in Kg Mengkabong and for relations between women in the village. The recognition of class and gender as mutually determining systems, and of the fact that gender differences find very different expression within class levels, is important for understanding the changing nature of gender relations (Moore 1988:80).

Bajau women's perceptions of how their lives have altered over their lifetimes are illuminating. They generally recognize concrete improvements in educational opportunities, in healthcare and in their political and legal rights, but they also indicate negative changes such as increased financial difficulties through high prices coupled with inadequate cash earnings. In describing and analysing these changes I was continually forced to deal with the issues of the relevance and applicability of Western feminist models and goals in the context of Malaysia and developing nations in general. Euro-American feminists have often been accused, quite correctly in some instances, of formulating or reviewing policy

recommendations based on theory that does not accord with the reality of women's lives in developing countries as seen from these women's own perspectives. Clearly, feminist theory cannot be effective if it is merely doctrinaire, "a ritual chanting of pre-established formulae" (Goodman 1985:7). Rather its strength will come from reconceptualizing and articulating insights into women's conditions, problems and capabilities. Thus whilst I have my own individual feminist values and perspectives I have not pushed my analysis and data to a pre-determined destination. I feel that to be of any real benefit feminist theory analysing the lives of Third World women must prove itself compatible with their values, beliefs and needs. For instance, Western feminist calls for the complete independence for women and freedom from the restrictions of patriarchal family structures are not a viable or desirable option for most Bajau women. Indeed, their particular form of female-centred social organization, (the extended family household and house cluster) is of vital importance to many Bajau women. These women are sustained by their complex networks of female kin who fulfil practical, emotional and social needs. Without these support networks women's lives would be made much more difficult. Thus in Kg Mengkabong whilst capitalist relations of production

increasingly structure the lives of the Bajau, these changes have not resulted in an abandonment of previous kin-based economic and social organization.

Bearing this in mind, how then can feminist theory be utilized in the analysis of developing countries particularly when western feminists are frequently criticised for interfering in and imposing alien views on other diverse cultures? To my mind many of these criticisms are often based on the erroneous assumption that so called traditional cultures and societies are somehow "pure" and unchanging. Furthermore, why is it that challenging gender inequalities is seen as tampering with the traditions of other cultures, and thus taboo, whilst challenging inequalities in terms of wealth and class is not? (Mehta 1991:286). My descriptions of women's lives presented in the foregoing chapters reinforce the wisdom that so-called traditional cultures, such as that of the Bajau of Sabah, cannot be treated as static, isolated entities. "Traditional" societies and cultures have throughout history continually changed and recreated themselves and gender roles and divisions of labour have been constantly reconfigured and transformed in line with changes in national and international economies. The Bajau of Kg Mengkabong have long been involved in a

process of intercultural contact with other ethnic groups in Sabah, particularly the Malays. But over the last two decades this change has been especially rapid and extensive. All of the women I interviewed in the kampong regardless of age and personal circumstances - from schoolgirls to market traders to factory workers - are currently caught up in the throes of a period of transition involving fundamental and far reaching transformations that are largely out of their control. Everywhere in the developing world dramatic upheaval and change are occurring which can be tied to the growing incorporation of developing nations into the global production system. It is clear that detailed ethnographic description is essential to gain an understanding of socio-economic change in the Third World, and the attendant transformations of societies. It is particularly important to describe and analyse the differing roles of men and women in developing societies and how these are being transformed and recreated through the development process. The findings of my research in Kg Mengkabong clearly indicate that gender relations within the village are being restructured and reconstituted in response to both internal and external forces. I have highlighted how this can largely be attributed to the progressive integration of the Bajau into the modern world system.

Perhaps one of the most important contributions of my research is the explanation of how the articulation of these forces has produced particular forms of change in the gender division of labour, and the concomitant changes in the pattern of gender relations in general within the Bajau community.

I suggest that the use of feminist research frameworks which explore gender distinctions are crucial in any attempt to understand and explain processes of socio-economic change. Feminist anthropology reflects a world of two genders where women and men mingle in work, domestic life, religion, politics and play. It also emphasises that women and men not only live side by side in human society, but that they also exist in relation to each other in a way that is frequently marked by conflict. Equally crucial is the importance of feminist theory for the formulation of gender aware development planning to ensure that women are not excluded from the development process.

The Empowerment Approach to Development Planning

"We want a world where inequality based on class, gender and race is absent from every country and from the relationships among countries. We want a world where basic needs become basic rights and where poverty and all forms of violence are eliminated. Each person will have the opportunity to develop her or his full potential and creativity, and women's values of nurturance and solidarity will characterize human relationships...only by sharpening the links between equality, development and peace can we show that the 'basic rights' of the poor and the transformations of the institutions that subordinate women are inextricably linked. They can be achieved together through the empowerment of women."

(DAWN 1985:73-75)

Gender aware development planning questions current planning strategies about women's work and roles in developing societies. It identifies the multiple roles women perform in the household, community and economy and reveals the extent to which women and men unequally share resources within the household. In the identification of the needs of women it is important to make a conceptual and planning distinction between practical and strategic gender needs. This allows planners to distinguish between interventions that help women perform more effectively and efficiently tasks and roles that they are already undertaking as opposed to interventions that assist women to achieve greater equality, remove structures of gender inequalities and

transform existing gender relations (Moser 1993). Thus development planning for the empowerment of women must be informed by the principles and methodological tools of the GAD approach and take into account both practical and strategic gender needs. Practical gender needs are concerned with the inadequacies of living conditions such as water provision, healthcare and employment. They do not challenge the existing gender division of labour or women's subordinate position in society, although they arise out of these. Essentially they are a response to an immediate perceived necessity which is identified by the women involved.

Strategic gender needs are those needs that are formulated from the analysis of women's subordination to men. They relate to the gender division of labour, power and control, and may include such issues as legal rights, domestic violence, equal wages and women's control of their own bodies (Molyneux 1985:233). It is only by meeting these strategic gender needs that women can be empowered. The empowerment approach seeks to define power less in terms of domination over others (with the implicit assumption that a gain for women implies a loss for men) and more in terms of the capacity of women to increase their own self-reliance and internal strength. They would then have the power to determine their life choices and to influence the

direction of change through their ability to gain control over crucial material and non-material resources.

Strategic gender needs are often negatively identified as feminist and linked to Western feminist theory. Given the challenging "political" nature of the GAD/empowerment approach to development it is highly unlikely that the Malaysian government will adopt this approach. But it is possible that if development planning focuses on attending to women's less threatening practical needs this has the potential to translate into women organizing themselves to demand that their strategic needs are met as they become more aware of the unequal power and gender structures of their societies; indeed this is often how the empowerment approach is expected to function. It seeks to reach strategic gender needs indirectly through practical gender needs. In essence, it utilizes practical gender needs as the base on which to build a secure base, and a means through which strategic needs may be attained. For example, in the Philippines GABRIELA (an alliance of local and national women's organizations) ran a project which combined women's traditional task of sewing tapestries with a non-traditional activity, namely, the discussion of women's

legal rights and the constitution. A nation-wide educational "tapestry-making drive" enabled the discussion of rights in communities, factories and schools, with the end product a "Tapestry of Women's Rights" seen as a liberating instrument (Gomez 1986). The meeting of Bajau women's practical needs could similarly provide a platform for the discussion of their strategic gender needs.

How Can Bajau Women be Helped to Help Themselves?

Development policies that do not accord specific consideration to the needs of women and do not contain any well formulated strategy for improving the conditions of women will invariably further undermine their already inferior position by building on conventional biases that shift the gender balance of power more in favour of men. In order to design development programmes to help Bajau women to help themselves, we must first dismiss false assumptions about women's responsibilities and duties and instead examine what women really do, their activities, and what time they have at their disposal beyond that taken up by existing tasks (Nelson 1979). This study has examined in detail the work patterns and responsibilities of women within Kg Mengkabong and

could be utilized by planners in the formulation of effective development policies. It is also important to stress that such programmes must be designed by planners in cooperation with local women. Any programme which ignores the most pressing needs of the women concerned will inevitably be doomed to fail. In Kg Mengkabong Bajau women's practical needs are many but their most immediate needs are concerned with raising income, therefore development efforts to help them should focus primarily, but not exclusively, on increasing women's income-earning opportunities.

As we have seen Bajau women have long been involved in various income-generating activities within the home and market. There are few cultural restrictions preventing women from engaging in this type of work. Although the Islamic ideology of female subordination remains strong in Malaysia, it is clear that for Bajau women it does not mean helpless dependence. Rather they have distilled the essence of the duties assigned to women in the traditional economy and translated this into new forms of contributing to their households' budgets. In their cash earning activities most women work using the skills which correspond with the stereotypical role of women and most women have worked within this narrow boundary of women's skills

throughout their work history. The areas where women are concentrated in the cash economy tend to coincide with the areas in which the traditional skills of women acquired through their socialization process can be utilized, such as cooking, sewing and services for others. Older women especially lack the formal qualifications to participate to any great extent in the waged sector. All but the most menial occupations are closed to them, so alternatives can be sought in the entrepreneurial sector. The major problem Bajau women face in this sector is the lack of sufficient capital to invest in business enterprises. Two possible ways of overcoming this obstacle and increasing women's earned income are the formation of credit cooperatives and the provision of credit from the Government. Currently access to credit is difficult for Bajau women since they have restricted access to collateral necessary to receive a bank loan. They are also unlikely to have essential skills such as literacy or experience in dealing with formal bodies, to negotiate appropriate fees and interest rate charges. Women entrepreneurs with small-scale business ventures could therefore be aided by facilitating their access to credit and providing them with information, management, and technical assistance and know-how about business development.

As well as the provision of Government credit schemes, it would be both practical and beneficial for the women, and their households, if they were encouraged to build on already existing informal money lending kinship-based networks within the village and to formalise these into rotating credit associations or cooperatives. Such cooperatives have proven successful in other developing nations (for example, in West Africa (Mickelwait et al. 1976) and Mexico (Brydon and Chant 1989)). With even a small amount of credit, many women would be able to expand their businesses and thus increase their household income. Every two weeks or so members could deposit a fixed sum of money into a fund and the entire fund could then be placed at the disposal of each woman for reinvestment or diversification of their businesses on a rotating basis. The exact details such as the amount and frequency of contributions could be discussed and agreed upon by all members. For this scheme to work effectively it must be adapted by the women to fit their own purposes and perceived needs. Community pressure ensures that each member holds up their end of the bargain.

Greater access to credit and small business loans could greatly help these women to expand their small enterprises into profitable occupations and meet their short term practical needs. These women already possess considerable home management and budgeting skills and so relevant training could be given to develop these skills further in their business activities. As well as building on women's considerable traditional skills, they could be encouraged to learn new skills and participate in non-traditional business fields. Importantly, many village women would be willing to participate in such a training scheme if it took place at a time and place convenient to them.

Immediate measures should also be taken to improve the education system since most channels for self-improvement are opened through education. At the moment, female students study Home Science which imparts to them all the skills supposedly required of the homemaker, including cookery and tailoring, whilst male students are instructed in industrial arts such as carpentry and metalwork. Serious reform of the school system is required to eradicate such gender role stereotyping. If all restrictions and biases in assignment of school courses of study according to

gender were removed this would help young women greatly in their search for waged employment, as would the development of positive programmes to encourage girls to enrol in vocational training, paying special attention to dispelling gender-linked preferences. For women to compete equally in the waged labour market with their male counterparts conditions of employment would also have to be reformed. The Government should ensure that women have access to all occupations and branches of employment to counter occupational segregation and discriminatory practices in hiring and promotion. There should also be strict enforcement of the equal pay for equal work ruling in both the public and private sectors. Working mothers would also be helped if the possibilities for flexible working hours were expanded.

In short, in order to address the needs of Bajau women the emphasis of development programmes should be focussed on increasing women's income and employment opportunities through skills training, fundraising programmes and through more favourable access to credit. Furthermore, educational and employment reforms are vital if gender role stereotyping is to be eradicated in Malaysian society as a whole.

Final Comments

Gender planning should not be seen as an end in itself but a means by which women, through a process of empowerment, can emancipate themselves (Moser 1993:190). This is best achieved through a process of negotiated debate about the redistribution of power and resources within the household and society. It is apparent that certain aspects of women's roles have been modified as increasing opportunities for formal education and the diversification of the labour force have occurred through socio-economic development in Sabah. However, notwithstanding these influences, attitudes towards women have remained substantially unaltered. Women continue to be confined to certain roles in the household, economy and society as whole. But as Bajau women are becoming more educated and exposed to the world outside the boundaries of the village, they are becoming exposed to alternative life options. These young women are increasingly beginning to renegotiate and debate the distribution of power within the household and society. It is hoped that gender aware planning can provide assistance to them in this quest. Feminist theory can be beneficial in this process if it is grounded in the practical and strategic needs of the local communities involved. It cannot avoid the challenge of situating itself and

examining its role in a global economic and political framework, for to do any less would be to ignore the complex interconnections between the First and Third World economies and the profound effects of this on the lives of women in all countries, (Mohanty 1988:64).

APPENDIX ONE

GLOSSARY OF BAJAU TERMS

<u>adat</u>	customary law, traditions
<u>adat perpatih</u>	matrilineal customs/law
<u>adik</u>	younger brother or sister
<u>adik-beradik</u>	siblings
<u>ahli</u>	expert, member
<u>akhad nikah</u>	marriage contract
<u>akal</u>	self control, rationality
<u>anak angkat</u>	adopted child
<u>atur bunga</u>	flower arranging
<u>babo</u>	aunt
<u>balai raya</u>	community hall
<u>bapa</u>	father
<u>belian</u>	ironwood
<u>bersanding</u>	ceremonial sitting in state at wedding
<u>bidan</u>	midwife
<u>bilik turi</u>	sleeping room
<u>bini</u>	wife
<u>bodoh</u>	stupid
<u>bomoh</u>	village doctor, magico- medical practitioner
<u>cucu</u>	grandchild
<u>daing</u>	fish
<u>dapur</u>	kitchen, hearth

<u>dinakan</u>	relatives
<u>emak</u>	mother
<u>emas khawin</u>	marriage prestations, literally "wedding gold"
<u>fasakh</u>	order for dissolution of marriage
<u>gatal</u>	lustful, hungry for sex
<u>iddah</u>	period immediately after divorce during which a Muslim women may not remarry
<u>ikan</u>	fish
<u>ilmu</u>	knowledge
<u>ilmu batin</u>	occult knowledge
<u>imam</u>	Muslim religious leader
<u>ipar</u>	brother-in-law, sister-in- law
<u>isteri</u>	wife
<u>jodoh</u>	fate
<u>kakak</u>	sister
<u>kampong</u>	village
<u>kati</u>	unit of measurement equivalent to 0.06kgs
<u>kawan</u>	friend
<u>kayu</u>	wood
<u>kerja</u>	work
<u>kerja rumah</u>	housework
<u>ketua kampong</u>	village headman/headwoman
<u>khalwat</u>	illicit sex

<u>kueh</u>	cake
<u>kumpulan rumah</u>	house cluster
<u>laki</u>	man, husband
<u>lain</u>	different
<u>madu</u>	honey, second wife
<u>makan</u>	eat
<u>malam berinai</u>	night before wedding and attendant rituals
<u>malas</u>	lazy
<u>malu</u>	ashamed, embarrassed
<u>masjid</u>	mosque
<u>ma to'oh</u>	grandfather
<u>mentua</u>	father-in-law, mother-in-law
<u>mee</u>	noodles
<u>nafsu</u>	lust
<u>nelayan</u>	fisherman, fisherwoman
<u>nipah</u>	palm used for thatching
<u>orang</u>	person
<u>orang lain</u>	stranger
<u>pasar</u>	market
<u>pelamin</u>	wedding dias
<u>perempuan</u>	woman
<u>rumah</u>	house
<u>sakti</u>	supernatural powers
<u>sampan</u>	small conoe-like boat
<u>sederhana</u>	middle, average

<u>sekot</u>	close, near
<u>sepupu</u>	cousin
<u>seri</u>	queen
<u>sireh</u>	betel nut
<u>sombong</u>	proud
<u>susah</u>	difficult, poor
<u>swami</u>	husband
<u>tamu</u>	periodic market
<u>tengoh nasib</u>	fortune telling
<u>teruna</u>	young unmarried man
<u>tidak tentu</u>	uncertain
<u>toh</u>	distant, far
<u>towkay</u>	middleman, middlewoman
<u>tukang urut</u>	masseur, masseuse
<u>usik</u>	fisherman, fisherwoman
<u>yang to'oh</u>	grandmother
<u>wali</u>	guardian

APPENDIX TWO

DIVORCE

There are three forms of divorce available to a married Muslim woman in Sabah.

1) Khul' or cerai tebus talaq

The husband agrees to let his wife redeem her freedom by compensating him with an agreed sum of money. A woman can only avail herself of this form of divorce when she has an adequate and independent source of income or sufficient savings.

2) Ta'lliq

The wife needs to prove a breach of promise made at the time of marriage on the part of the husband. It is however difficult to prove the breach and women often find it difficult to produce witnesses to support their case.

3) Fasakh

A woman is entitled to obtain an order for fasakh on any of the following grounds:

- * the whereabouts of the husband have not been known for one year or more
- * the husband has not given financial support for 3 months or more
- * the husband is in prison for 3 years or more
- * the husband has not performed, without reasonable cause, his marital obligations for a period of one year
- * the husband was impotent at the time of marriage and remains so
- * the husband has been insane for a period of 2 years
- * that she, having been given in marriage by her father or grandfather before the age of 16, repudiated the marriage before the age of 18, the marriage not having been consummated

- * that her husband treats her cruelly (for example, habitually assaults her, disposes of her property or associates with women of ill repute)
- * the husband wilfully refuses to consummate the marriage even after a period of 4 months of marriage
- * she did not consent to the marriage or her consent was not valid because it was given by force, mistake or an unsoundness of mind

Divorce initiated by the husband:

Talaq

This is a declaration in unequivocal terms of his repudiation of his wife. If there is consent from the other party to the divorce and the court is satisfied that the marriage has irretrievably broken down the court will advise the husband to pronounce one talaq which is a revocable divorce and the parties may resume cohabitation if they mutually consent to a ruju'. If however the wife does not consent or where there is a chance of reconciliation a committee comprising of a Religious Officer as Chairperson and two other persons, one to act for each party, will be appointed to try to effect a reconciliation. If it succeeds the petition for divorce will be dismissed. If it fails the court will advise the husband to pronounce a talaq.

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