The Rejang of Sumatra: 
Exploring Culture Through 
Literary Journalism

JILL BIRT  Grad Dip Journ.

This thesis is presented for the degree of Master of Philosophy 
of Murdoch University

2008
Statement of Original Authorship

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

Signed ....................................

Date .....................................
Previous page: Pak Taher generously provided introductions to his family in the village of Kelobak, Bengkulu Province, Sumatra, to facilitate this research project.
Abstract

This thesis is about border crossing. Literary Journalism is a border-crossing writing genre claiming ground in fields as diverse as science, mathematics, memoir, travel and culture. The established academic discipline of anthropology is also crossing borders as styles of writing ethnography are changing and being challenged. This work is situated at the meeting point of these two genres. It examines how literary journalism can be used to write about culture for a wider audience beyond the academic community.

The defining characteristics of literary journalism – documentable subject, exhaustive research, novelistic writing techniques, voice and attention to underlying meaning – signal strengths and possible limitations to its use in writing about culture when measured against the demands of academic ethnographic writing. The requirements for research and writing about culture are examined from the perspectives of literary journalism and ethnography in Part 1 of this thesis.

To explore literary journalism’s suitability to write about culture, research was conducted among the Rejang people of Sumatra. Part Two of the thesis, titled Family Strength, is presented as an example of a literary journalist approach to recording culture. It is the result of five fieldtrips to Sumatra to gather data about members of four generations of Pak Taher’s family group in the village of Kelobak in the early 21st century. Each section of Family Strength tells the story of Pak Taher’s relatives, highlighting changes within the lifetime of family members, including gender roles, religious values, the influence of education, generational change and farming practices. The work is not an exhaustive treatment of Rejang culture but records culture as several “slices of life”.
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Thanks

The news report announced another earthquake centred just off the coast of Bengkulu. I waited several hours, then dialled Pak Taher’s mobile phone. “Ibu Jill, where are you? Are you coming back to see us again?” “Not yet, Pak. I was just wondering if you are all OK. We’ve had reports of a big earthquake.” “We’re fine, no problems.”

At times this research project has consumed my life - house cleaning suffered badly, we ate scrambled eggs more than ever before, and our joint study is cluttered with research notes, books and draft copies layered from floor to desk height in an arc around my computer. Entertaining and visiting were curtailed dramatically while this has been a work in progress for almost four years.

Some significant people have supported me through this learning experience:

In Bengkulu Province, Sumatra, Pak Taher and Miskarnia generously opened their home and lives to me, introducing me to their families, giving me the opportunity to live in Kelobak with Ibu Upik and Pak Ujang and the extended family. Grateful thanks to you all. Your open and generous spirit helped me learn your story and your trust freed me to write it down. I consider you all my friends. Terima kasih banyak.

Dr Carol Warren (Murdoch University) encouraged and challenged my thinking through this Learning Journey and Professor Steve Tanner (formerly of Murdoch, now at Wollongong University) gave me confidence through his direction and belief in me as a very late starter in the academic world, to pursue my dream. From the beginning, Chris Smyth, Head of School (MCC) at Murdoch, fanned the spark to attempt this border crossing adventure. Dr Cecily Scott inspired, re-directed and encouraged me through her writing seminars over a long hot summer in the Board Room at Murdoch and Dr Julia Hobson’s insight and clarity will not be forgotten. Thank you all for persevering with me!

My work at Parkerville Baptist Church received the world–enlarging contagious influence of trips to Sumatra and the things I was learning about culture and writing. Thank you for your generous support with time and encouragement.

Brad and Sherri with Bijou and Jules and Sara, with Grace and Bailey: What a privilege to be encouraged by your sons and their families to press on for the goal, even when that means less help with their own young families. The baby sitting calendar is now wide open!

Finally, my beloved husband, Peter: Your support, encouragement, belief and long-suffering, even as you battled through bowel cancer treatment during 2007 while this work emerged, set me free to do my best. I thank God for you, but somehow that is not sufficient. For almost 31 years you have been my soul-mate, mentor and fellow-traveller as we’ve tackled life together. I am so much richer for journeying with you. Thank you.
Part One

The Exegesis
Chapter One

Introduction

The editorial limitations of news reportage – tight deadlines, demanding word limits and the insistence on “the facts and no comment” frustrated me when writing about cultures. Getting under the surface of a story, doing long-term immersion research and writing in a way that engages readers were not options for daily broadsheets.

Tom Wolfe, in his anthology *The New Journalism* (Wolfe 1973), highlighted some significant changes to journalistic writing during the 1960s. The new journalistic style of creative non-fiction, also known as literary journalism, continues to be a developing genre, crossing literary borders to write memoir, geography, travel and personal essay. It allows writers to research topics including science, history, anthropology, education, music, biography, geography and mathematics at a depth acceptable to academics, and then to produce creative non-fiction narrative that engages a broad readership. (Gutkind 2005).

As a journalist, I wanted to write culture at a deeper level than permitted by the constricting limitations of reportage. I had a strong desire to record culture more richly and intimately than as a fly-in fly-out tourist reporter producing 600 – 2000 word travel articles with a few eye-catching photographs of breath-taking scenery or “different” wrappings of culture – clothes, architecture or tools (Birt 2001, 2001).

An option would be to write about culture following the academic disciplines of anthropology. But this brought different constraints. The majority of academic ethnographic work remains marginalised because its specialised vocabulary and sometimes stiffly written analysis keeps the wider reading audience at arms length, instead of engaging their emotions as well as their intellects. This approach would not fulfil the need for a writing style that could engage a broad readership.

Literary journalism is a genre that continues to cross subject borders. It is based on research methods that will withstand the rigours of academic examination, but uses
language and style that engage a wide reading audience and gives voice to its subject. Writers including Susan Orlean (1995), Jane Kramer (1995), Richard Preston (1987) and Christopher Kremmer (1997) have used this style specifically to write about other cultures.

This thesis explores how literary journalism may be a valid writing genre to use for ‘writing culture’ (Clifford & Marcus 1986), giving a wide reading audience, from educators, travellers and students through to cross-cultural workers, the opportunity to increase their understanding of the life of a unique cultural group. I chose the Rejang people of Sumatra as my subject for this work of literary journalism.

To gather sufficient relevant data about the Rejang culture to allow the writing of a piece of literary journalism it was decided to use a single case study approach, focused on a particular family. Case studies have four defining characteristics. They are (1) particularistic; (2) descriptive; (3) heuristic; and (4) inductive (Yin 1989:13). According to Tanner this approach encourages the researcher to study a particular individual, group, institution, event or phenomenon in fine detail and enables greater insight into and understanding of the subject as principles and generalizations emerge through examination of the data (Tanner 1999:8).

Case study research focuses on real-life human events in their natural surroundings. This method also allows the researcher to assess social action in a manner that comes closest to the action as it is understood by the actors themselves. Yin says a strength of the case study is how it forces the researcher to be involved in a real-life situation with its full complexity – variables and uncertainties through the impact of people and situations connected to the case study subjects (Yin 1993). This immersion in the subject’s situation is a demand of research for both anthropology (Geertz 1973) and literary journalism (Kramer 2005).

Yin says the case study approach is ideally suited to asking the ‘why’ and ‘how’ questions of a subject, both trajectories of questioning are extremely relevant to exploring the culture of a people where an understanding of the beliefs behind the obvious actions of an individual or group is imperative (Marcus 1998; Clifford 1986).

Yin suggests the ethnographic case study will emphasise “thick” (detailed) description and will consist largely of descriptive, narrative text (Yin 1993). This approach was precisely what my research project required, seeking not so much
positivist information like "all males over the age of 18 are employed in farming activities", but rather a variety of personal stories that show how some adult males use their time and stills. The case study method allows the collection of data relating to multiple expressions of elements of culture within a narrative. Observing and recording the actions and speech of a range of individuals and groups through participant observation enables the researcher to justly represent the various realities (Yin 1993) including people’s intentions and interpretations of events as experienced in the field. Studying family life in a Rejang community in Sumatra allowed the researcher to consider a single event from several points of view – for example, the matriarch, the daughter and the third generation daughter-in-law all had different views on the matter of raising children.

In 2000 I made my first visit to the Province of Bengkulu in Sumatra, Indonesia, where the Rejang people have lived for centuries. I heard stories of the rapid changes taking place within their culture. The old ways and values were being challenged by politics, technology and education. I set out to learn all I could about this group of almost 500,000 people living mainly in the folds of the Barisan Mountains that form the spine of the island of Sumatra.

There are few examples of written Rejang history. Several the documents in a cuneiform script known as ka-ga-gna (Marsden 1811:90; Siddik 1977:37) carved into lengths of bamboo, are stored in the Bengkulu museum. The few individuals able to read this written form are cloistered in distant villages, deep in the high valleys of the Bukit Barisan ranges. Over the past 200 years several scholars have spent time studying Rejang culture. William Marsden used the Rejang as his ‘typical Sumatran’ (Marsden, 1811:43) in his 1811 monograph, The History of Sumatra. M.A. Jaspan studied the group's structural change from patriliney to matriliny in his 1964 doctoral thesis through the Australian National University, titled From Patriliney to Matriliny (Jaspan 1984), Jürg Schneider outlines changing rice farming techniques in the Rejang Musi region in his book, From Upland to Irrigated Rice (Schneider 1995). Indonesian scholars from the Department of Education and Culture wrote Syntaksis Bahasa Rejang Dialek Pesisir (Syntax of the Pesisir Dialect of the Rejang Language) (Afriazi 1994) in 1994.

In 2002 on a return visit to Bengkulu city I visited Pak Muhammad Taher and his wife, Miskarnia, at their home. Rejang by birth, Pak Taher was working as a lawyer
with the Department of Education in Bengkulu. He was passionate about his people and culture, and keenly aware of the rapid changes taking place within the culture.

While studying for a Graduate Diploma in Journalism at Murdoch University in 2003, I completed a unit in Literary Journalism. The experience of researching and writing a woman Afghan refugee’s story for that class ignited a dream – to rigorously research Rejang culture, and then to record it as narrative in the literary journalism genre.

Pak Taher promised his full support and access to his family if I would write their story. Four generations of his extended family group continue to live in Kelobak within a one-kilometre radius of the old family compound. They agreed to be the case study subjects for the participant observation based research during what became five field trips totalling nine weeks over 36 months. All members of the family were easily accessible and willing to participate in the study. They generously provided accommodation at the old family home in Kelobak for me during visits to the village.

As a single case study, this research does not claim to be an exhaustive account of Rejang culture. The limited time for field work enabled me to collect sufficient solid research data to write about limited aspects of the culture through the experience of Pak Taher’s family. I limited the case study to four generations of one extended family group in the Kabupaten of Kepahiang, Bengkulu Province, Sumatra. During the weeks of field work, I was able to learn phrases of Rejang language, but conducted my research in the *lingua franca*, Bahasa Indonesia. I had learnt Indonesian in 1977 before going to work among Dayak people who had recently embraced Christianity from an animistic background, in West Kalimantan for 8½ years.

The purpose of this thesis is to evaluate how well literary journalism is able to record culture for a general audience. Questions to be answered are framed around literary journalism’s ability to uphold the rigours of academic enquiry required for credible ethnography, while engaging a broad readership by using novelistic writing techniques of the narrative form. Issues of research methods, representation, ethics, reflexivity and meaning are addressed. This thesis will endeavour to answer the following questions:
1. To what extent is the kind of immersion research adopted by literary journalists able to provide the quality of data required for writing about culture?

2. How does writing culture as literary journalism embrace a wide readership and at what cost?

3. How well does literary journalism deal with issues of representation and reflexivity?

There are two sections to the thesis. Part One is an academic exegesis that examines the validity and usefulness of literary journalism as an approach to writing about culture. The argument highlights the distinctive features and limitations of literary journalism and academic ethnography, referring to my own literary journalistic account of a particular dimension of Rejang culture, *Family Strength*, to illustrate issues raised within the exegesis. The conclusion of the exegesis summarises the answers to the questions raised about literary journalism's effectiveness to write about culture for a varied readership.

Part Two, titled *Family Strength*, is the story of Pak Taher's extended family group of Rejang in Sumatra. This section is the result of immersion data collection in the village of Kelobak and includes a review of published information about the Rejang. It comprises several linked narratives, maps, a genealogical chart, photographs and glossary of Rejang terms generated from nine weeks of living with Pak Taher's family during my five visits to the area. *Family Strength* has eight sections written in the literary journalism style recording culture as a series of "slice-of-life" narratives or vignettes.

The reader may wish to read directly through the entire work or to read the literary journalism section, *Family Strength*, before the exegesis (Part One). Another option would be to read *Family Strength* part way through the exegesis, where the effectiveness of the literary journalism as a writing genre is considered.

As stated, Chapter 1 of the thesis introduces the research questions and considers the two fields of academic knowledge that are addressed: Literary Journalism and Ethnography.

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1 The topic of culture is addressed in Chapter 3. In summary we can describe culture as the integrated system of learned patterns of behaviour, ideas and products characteristic of a society (Hiebert 1976), (Kwast 1999). Others describe culture as the layers of a meaning—behaviour, values, belief forming a people's worldview (Geertz 1973).
Chapter 2 looks at the development of literary journalism as a writing genre following its historical roots and development, considering current proponents and uses of the genre around the world, including by Australian writers. It defines the characteristics of literary journalism and cites prominent writers and works, including some that have brought the genre into disrepute.

Chapter 3 introduces ethnography and the strict demands this discipline places on writing about "others". It examines how cultural data is collected, raises questions of reflexivity for the writer, and considers participant observation, record keeping, and some of the debates that have emerged concerning the problems of representation and voice.

Chapter 4 records how this research was undertaken among the Rejjang people, highlighting what is on the public record through research conducted in the colonial period by Marsden, Raffles, Hazairin, and in the post-colonial period by Jaspan, Schneider and the Indonesian scholar Siddik.

Chapter 5 evaluates the effectiveness of literary journalism in recording some aspects of Rejjang culture. It considers some of the positive contributions of literary journalism in recording culture and explores some limitations the genre has as an ethnographic tool.

The final chapter (Chapter 6) examines my experience in having a chapter of the work published in the mass media in 2006 and draws some conclusions about the use of literary journalism as a viable genre for ethnography. It also outlines some options for future research.
Chapter Two

Literary Journalism

*Literary journalists are boundary crossers in search of a deeper perspective on our lives and times.*

Norman Sims in *Literary Journalism* (p 19)

*The point of literary journalism is to cross fields, to marry, to rejoin our compartmentalized modern experience.*

Mark Kramer in *Literary Journalism* (p12)

To evaluate whether literary journalism is a suitable genre to express ethnography, in this chapter I will trace its history then describe and illustrate the main features of the style. In a later chapter I will use these distinguishing characteristics as the benchmarks for ascertaining how well literary journalism expresses ethnography.

Some acknowledge Tom Wolfe as the father of “New Journalism” in the early 1960s, when he referred to a style of writing and reporting that challenged the demands of news reportage for “the facts”. Wolfe’s work, which became known as literary journalism, models a different way of conducting research and constructing narrative, but it can hardly be called new (Wolfe 1973). This “New Journalism” employs an inventive narrative style that captivates and keeps readers engaged. Some say the term is indicative of the rebellious 1960s, reframing, pushing the boundaries, embracing the new and change. The term “new journalism” wasn’t used for long, as the style of writing had been used for generations. Daniel DeFoe’s work in the early 1700s (Defoe 1966) is the earliest example that educator and writer Mark Kramer cites (Sims and Kramer 1990:21). George Orwell demonstrates the complexity and creativity of the genre in his 1937 work, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (Orwell 1986). Later John Hersey (Hersey 1946), James Agee (Agee 1985) and John Steinbeck (Steinbeck 1948, 2000; 1962) wrote in a similar style.
The term “New Journalism” disappeared quickly being replaced by “literary journalism”. News reporting journalists found the term somewhat pretentious, bordering on grandiose, but it does embody two distinct elements of the writing style – literary, pointing towards word craftsmanship and a finely tuned narrative structure; and journalism, referring to factual news presented through mass media. The term describes how the style crosses genre borders, signalling its creative approach to recording stories and information. Writer and educator, Mark Kramer, speaks of literary journalism being used by “overlapping cousin-genres - travel writing, memoir, ethnographic and historical essays” (Kramer 2005:22). Literary journalism lends itself to ethnographic approaches because of its demand for thorough, deep research about the daily life of people and communities.

Literary journalism is being taught at seminars, workshops and universities around the globe. Several writers and educators have tried to define the elements of literary journalism that set it apart from other writing genres. In their book, Literary Journalism, Norman Sims and Mark Kramer (Sims 1995) outline eight defining elements. Kramer (Sims 1995:22,23) lists their defining elements as:

1. Literary journalists immerse themselves in subjects’ worlds and background research.
2. Literary journalists work out implicit covenants about accuracy and candor with readers and with sources.
3. Literary journalists write mostly about routine events.
4. Literary journalists write in “intimate voice”, informal, frank, human and ironic.
5. Style counts, and tends to be plain and spare.
6. Literary journalists write from a disengaged and mobile stance, from which they tell stories and also turn and address readers directly.
7. Structure counts, mixing primary narrative with tales and digressions to amplify and reframe events.
8. Literary journalists develop meaning by building upon the readers’ sequential reactions.

Australian Matthew Ricketson, in this book, Writing Feature Stories (Ricketson 2004:235,236), refines this to six distinguishing features.
1. Documentable subject matter chosen from the real world as opposed to 'invented' from the writer’s mind. This means no composite characters, no invented quotes and no attributing thought to sources unless they can be verified.

2. Exhaustive research, whether through conventional sources such as documents and interviews, or by 'saturation' reporting; that is, by immersing yourself in the world of your subject, often for weeks or months at a time, to get beneath surface realities. This implies a higher standard of accuracy.

3. Novelistic techniques, where bedrock of research makes it legitimately possible to use a range of techniques borrowed from fiction, such as creating whole scenes, quoting passages of dialogue, describing subjects (based on interviews with the subject). Literary journalists are restricted mostly to techniques drawn from socially realistic fiction.

4. Voice, which gives the writer freedom to be ironic, self-conscious, informal, hectoring, self-aware, etc. It is mainly through the authorial voice that literary journalists can move beyond a socially realistic portrayal of events and people. Daily journalism is tyrannized by the institution voice.

5. Literary prose style, both in the attention paid to structuring the narrative and choosing the words themselves.

6. Underlying meaning. The purpose of all this work and style is to go beyond the constraints of daily journalism and find the underlying meaning in issues and events. This implies great intellectual rigor in mounting an argument about the subject, even if that argument is embedded in an artfully constructed narrative.

Lee Gutkind, Editor of the magazine, *Creative Nonfiction*, doesn’t use the term literary journalism. Instead, he talks of “creative nonfiction” and “immersion journalism” in his editorial on the *Creative Nonfiction* website (http://www.creativenonfiction.org/thejournal/whatiscnf.htm) where he describes and illustrates five hallmarks of creative nonfiction writing:

1. Real life – being immersed, not distant and removed from everyday happenings.

2. Reflection – a writer’s feelings and responses about a subject are permitted and encouraged, as long as what they think is written to embrace the readers in a variety of ways.

3. Research – to gather and present information, to teach readers about a person, place, idea or situation.

4. Reading – Not only must writers read the research material unearthed at the library, but they must also read the work of the masters of their profession.
5. Writing – this usually happens in two stages: the creative burst when paragraphs, pages and chapters appear on the page, and the hard grind of ‘crafting’ the text.

There is considerable overlap among these three lists, so I have focused on the following defining elements of literary journalism which combines these writers’ concepts: documentable subject, exhaustive research, writing style, voice and underlying meaning.

In this chapter I will define and illustrate these foundation blocks of literary journalism, also known as creative nonfiction. To alleviate confusion, I will use the term literary journalism throughout this thesis since this term encompasses the sense of a carefully prepared text based on documentable research.

**Documentable Subject**

Literary journalism often deals with subjects that are in the physical realm, not composed fantasy, or fictions of the imagination. Many works of literary journalism / narrative non-fiction are longer than news reports, being crafted using two, ten, and even thirty thousands words or more to address the experiences of daily life rather than the exotic and unusual. As well as helping the reader engage with the characters and subject in the narrative, the research details can be checked and confirmed in the field. Quotes are recorded and used verbatim, characters are not manufactured or composite, and events are not embellished to entice readers to keep reading.

Science writer and literary journalist Richard Preston says;

*Nonfiction writing, at least as I practice it ...borrows heavily from the scientific method, which is based on the requirement that a successful experiment have "respectable" results. Journalists understand this because our work has to be subject to fact checking and independent verification, which is exactly what a scientist expects when he reports his results* (Boynton 2005:32).

Whether it be data from scientific experiments or the lives of individuals and communities, literary journalism requires that the subject material can be confirmed.

Jonathan Raban’s award winning book, *Bad Land* (Raban 1996), eloquently records life on the Plains of western America with the eyes and understanding of an insider observer, catching out even locals who confirmed Raban was able to describe elements of culture that locals may not have been able to articulate. Raban’s
participant observation research methods enabled him to write a book whose subject can be confirmed and that is far more than a travel journal. This work records history and culture with sensitivity and compassion.

Australian author Chloe Hooper’s work *The Tall Man* (Hooper 2006) narrates the events surrounding the death in police custody of Cameron Doomadgee, an Aboriginal man, and the inquest by authorities into his death on the volatile Palm Island and subsequently at the court in Townsville. A visit to Palm Island off the Queensland coast would allow a reader to see the police cell where Doomadgee died, to meet his family and see the despondency and brutality in the community that Hooper describes. A reader could confirm the congruence of Hooper’s carefully written record of the people’s language and what is actually spoken on Palm Island.

Although an author may take great care with the details and content of a story, remaining true to the gathered information, contested accounts raise the questions of positioning and the “partial truths” of representation (see chapter 3). In 2002 Norwegian Asne Seierstad spent four months living with a book merchant’s family in Kabul after the fall of the Taliban. With the full support of Mohammed Rais, the bookseller, she had unlimited opportunity to interact with and observe the men and women of the family and participated fully in the daily routines of family life during her stay with them in order to write a book based on this research. As an educated Western woman she had a privileged position and related to Rais as a peer. She also communicated deeply with the women of the family in their secluded sections of the house. Seierstad believes her portrayal of Rais as a domineering, self-focused male is balanced. After *The Bookseller of Kabul* (Seierstad 2002) was published and translated into 29 languages, the Afghan bookseller sued Seierstad in June 2006, his lawyer saying “what Seierstad has written is incorrect, offensive and dangerous” (Guest 2006). Rais claims he can no longer live safely in Afghanistan, and Seierstad’s work portrays him unjustly as a tyrant. To refute Seierstad’s portrayal, Rais was set to publish his own version of life as the bookseller of Kabul, *Once Upon a Time There was a Bookseller in Kabul* on 27 September 2006. Free-lance journalist Vanni Cappelli wrote a letter to the editor of *The New York Times* in 2004, stating he knew Rais well, had visited his home many times and could vouch for his good character, inferring that Seierstad was in the wrong (Cappelli 2004). It is interesting to note that being male, Cappelli would not have had access to the women’s quarters of Rais’ home because of their Islamic beliefs and practices, and is unlikely to have had uninhibited conversations with any of the women of the
household. Within the school of anthropology it is acknowledged that male researches may have difficulty in gaining access to the world of women, especially in cultures where there is a strong division between the sexes (Hammersley 1995:93).

Seierstad believes she has resolved the ethical issues of being entrusted with sensitive material. Rais is not convinced she handled his family's story carefully enough. The consequences of both stances continue to play out in the public arena. Although a writer may be able to verify all the details of a narrative work, the ethical issues of whose story it is and whether sensitive information should be placed on the public record remain and must be addressed.

Literary journalism uses the data recorded through in-depth research. It does not "improve" or enhance events to entice readers to keep reading. Mark Kramer (Sims 1995) insists accuracy is a key element of literary non-fiction - recording events as they happened and retaining their drift and proportion. Memoirs written in the literary journalism style by Australians Helen (Demidenko) Darville (Darville 1995) and Norma Khouri (Khouri 2003) were promoted as factual records of life but were revealed as fabrications after their publication. James Frey's memoir, A Million Little Pieces (Frey 2004), had the second highest sales worldwide in 2005 with millions of copies sold. Mark Simkin on the ABC's 7.30 Report (Simkin 2006) reported that Frey admitted some parts of the book had been embellished, but Frey insisted he had nothing to apologize for, rather he defended the "emotional truth" of the book. Instances like these, challenge literary journalism's credence in the literary world and it is little wonder that the term "creative non-fiction" is rarely used by writers who hold strongly to the tenets of narrative non-fiction where the facts are important.

Literary journalism uses quotes that were recorded verbatim and records the stories of characters that are not manufactured or composite by combining several individuals into one character. Ricketson (Ricketson 2004) discusses the work of novelist Helen Garner who caused uproar in the Australian literary community when it was revealed that she took the legal advice of her publisher and blurred a single female character in The First Stone (Garner 1995) by dividing her speech and actions between six to nine characters in the book. This ploy, to avoid being sued for defamation, challenged her work's claim to be literary journalism which embraces the requirement that there be no made-up or composite characters (Tapsall 2001).
Scholars continue to promote Estelle Blackburn's work as literary journalism, accepting the genre's flexible borders to accommodate a variety of works. In her book, *Broken Lives* (Blackburn 1998), she gave the condemned Eric Edgar Cook a thought life even though he had been hanged three decades before she began researching her book. She justifies her decision saying she felt she knew him well enough through her research processes to do this, using it as an aid to help express his personality (Blackburn 2007).

Literary journalism explores documentable subjects to write engaging stories for a variety of audiences. A writer needs to consider the ethics of individual situations before placing sensitive material on the public record and should carefully engage the subject of the narrative to establish a clear understanding about publishing the material. Literary journalism can withstand close scrutiny by academics, critics and the general public because of the rigorous research methods used to collect all the required information.

**Exhaustive Research**

Literary journalism differs from news reporting in the type and quantity of research required to compose a narrative work. Often a news story has a short time line and story length because of the daily or weekly publication deadline. News reporting demands answers for the who, what, where, when, why and how of an incident or a subject. Literary journalism explores the situation and people just as an anthropologist conducts field work for ethnographic research. Leon Dash (Boynton 2005) spent four years researching his Pulitzer Prize winning work on poverty and survival in New York.

Writer Mark Kramer describes conducting research for a literary journalist account:

> The reporting part of the work is engrossing and tedious. It is not social time. One stays alert for meaningful twists of narrative and character, all the while thinking about how to portray them and about how to sustain one's welcome...Literary journalists take elaborate notes retaining wording of quotes, sequences of events, details that show personality, atmosphere, and sensory and emotional content (Sims 1995:22,23).

Australian writer, Anna Funder, spent months living in Germany, interviewing people who had experienced life controlled by the Stasi guards of the East German regime to write *Stasiland* (Funder 2002). Barbara Ehrenreich worked menial labour jobs for
months conducting participant observation research among the low income workers in the USA to write with authority in Nickel and Dimed (Ehrenreich 2002). John Heresy travelled to Hiroshima, Japan shortly after the end of World War II and spent weeks interviewing six hibajusha – those who survived the atomic bomb blast that levelled the city killing 100,000 people, to write his affronting work, Hiroshima (Hersey 1946). Ted Conover rode freight trains with the hobos of the USA for a year before he wrote Rolling Nowhere (Conover 2001). Australian Broadcasting Corporation’s African correspondent from 2000 - 2005, Sally Sara crossed the country reporting Africa’s news for an Australian audience. After her assignment concluded she re-traced her steps to the homes of a dozen women, conducted in-depth interviews over a number of days with each woman then wrote their stories in Gogo Mama (Sara 2007). These return visits gave Sara the opportunity to build deeper rapport with her subjects and to share in their daily lives.

Part of the research process is this approach to gaining access to the people who are the story. Anthropologist Clifford Geertz wrote in his article, "Notes on the Balinese Cockfight", about gaining access:

The culture of a people is an ensemble of texts, themselves ensembles, which the anthropologist strains to read over the shoulders of those to whom they properly belong. There are enormous difficulties in such an enterprise, methodological pitfalls to make a Freudian quake, and some moral perplexities as well... (O)ne can start anywhere in a culture’s repertoire of forms and end up anywhere else. One can stay ... within a single, more or less bounded form, and circle steadily within it. One can move between forms in search of broader unities or inform in contrasts. One can even compare forms from different cultures to define their character in reciprocal relief. But whatever the level at which one operates, and however intricately, the guiding principle is the same: societies, like lives, contain their own interpretations. One has only to learn how to gain access to them (Geertz 1972:29)

Award winning American writer Jane Kramer with her background in sociology and journalism demonstrates her skills of gaining access to her subjects. Sims and Kramer (1995:386) comment on her work, Fernande Pelletier:

Jane Kramer's skill in gaining access to other cultures gives her writings an erudition that has been admired by anthropologists, social historians and general readers.... She read a French agricultural family's culture "over the shoulder" of her subject, spirals outward to link in French agriculture and the European Union, then returns to the illusionary stability of Fernando Pellentier's changing life.
This extended time of immersion in everyday life alongside a subject is only part of the research required by a literary journalist. Background information from libraries, the internet and individuals require the writer to search widely for relevant facts that bring understanding to the subject, situating it in the context of wider learning and information and revealing the underlying meaning that a brief conversation or interview would never reveal. A writer needs an inquiring mind that grasps new information and can make the links to the story line being written. Accuracy with place, event and personal details gives the writer’s work authority and authenticity. In Hiroshima, Hersey’s vivid word pictures of the devasted city could enable a reader to re-trace Hersey’s steps across the scarred landscape and through the narrow streets of the city, in part because of his attention to detail while collecting his research data.

Perseverance with the research is important, both in the silent solitude of rarely used printed word repositories and in the field where the immersion happens. Ted Conover writes as a participant observer, “I am a great believer in the value of a writer witnessing something first hand, of putting himself in others' shoes, be they huaraches or ski boots. Of writing from other than a sitting position, you might say” (Kerrane 1997:331). Conover embeds social analyses in storytelling and in an open-hearted approach to his subjects.

Susan Orlean was spending a lot of time with Colin, the 10-year-old subject of her writing. He wasn’t terribly interested in her story for Esquire magazine so she had to push through a barrier, the temptation to quit or settle for less than she dreamed of, when things changed:

The first few days he would hardly look at me,” Orlean said. “Then one day at the end of school he said, ‘Do you want to see my bedroom and meet my dog?’ And I thought, ‘We’ve done it!’ There was a threshold we crossed when he started treating me as one of his ten-year-old friends. I was no longer a foreign object (Sims 1995:98).

Orelan’s deep commitment to “the dignity of ordinariness” (Sims 1995:4,98) makes her an ideal writer for the literary journalism style where proponents “write narratives focused on everyday events that bring out the hidden patterns of community life as tellingly as the spectacular stories that make newspaper headlines” (Sims 1995:3). This type of research is closely aligned to ethnography’s requirement of participant observation at the data collection stage of research.
Research at this level demands a close on-going relationship with the subjects of the story. The attitude of reportage writing that bursts into someone's life, collects the facts then writes copy mindful of the editor's red pen and a very finite word count, cannot be entertained or promoted. News reporters must provide the facts as quickly as possible in a plain form. There is no time for developing characters or looking at underlying meaning, no time to check cultural implications of the actions, language and attitudes they observe, no time to confirm or question the complexity of culture. The reporter's person is removed from the writing, but literary journalism “depicts and conveys moments in time, behaviour in society and culture. It broadly and subjectively explores how and why, to produce prose characterized by, to use Henry James’ phrase, “felt life” — the frank, un-idealized level that includes individual difference, frailty, tenderness, nastiness, vanity, generosity, pomposity, humility, all in proper proportion” (Sims 1995:23) or quality stories that engage the emotions and intellect and are impacting on lives (Blair 2006).

Lee Gutkind says, "the research phase actually launches and anchors the creative effort" (http://www.creativenonfiction.org/thesjournal/articles/issue06/06editor.htm). He highlights how research also includes reading the work of and being influenced by the experts and pioneers of the craft, people like George Orwell (2003), John McPhee (1996) and Annie Dillard (1998), looking for how they record life experiences, immersion or real life research and what Gutkind calls “spontaneous intellectual discourse” (http://www.creativenonfiction.org/thesjournal/articles/issue06/06editor.htm), relating the theory and foundational background information required to illuminate the meaning behind the actions of their subjects.

Journalistic and ethnographic research both require flexibility and hard work that often consumes the writer's life. Every possible avenue of information collection needs to be used to build a compelling, authentic narrative that reveals layers of meaning as it gives voice to the subject. As with ethnography, a writer will never collect all the required information relating to a situation or person and will inevitably have to accept some unknowns in the final narrative. This may lead to the story being told with some pieces of the puzzle missing, but this can actually deepen the reader's understanding, as there are assumptions and interpretations for the reader to make, just as there are in life. Reviewer Debbie Elkind says there is a major
weakness in Garner’s *Joe Cinque’s Consolation* (Garner 2004) about the plot to murder Australian National University student Joe Cinque, because two of the main characters refused to be interviewed, rendering their characters in the book two-dimensional. On the other hand, Melissa Firth says Garner’s work is ethnography and literature, and Garner has strength in the way she compassionately probes situations and her rendering of clearly ironic detail so poignantly (Firth 2006). The book won the 2005 Walkley Award for non-fiction writing.

**Writing Style**

Literary journalism tells stories in a unique style, “a definitive blend of the factual basis of journalism and the creative writing techniques of fiction” (Blair 2006:14). Gutkind says the writing of literary journalism and narrative nonfiction often involves two phases, “the creative first stage and then the craft part which comes into play after your basic essay is written – is equally important – and a hundred times more difficult” (http://www.creativenonfiction.org/thejournal/articles/issue06/06editor.htm).

Literary journalism uses novelistic techniques to engage the reader and modulate the tempo of the writing. Writers use scene, dialogue and the narrative, or frame, as ways of organizing and pacing the narrative. Sometimes the form is a simple timeline. Sometimes a complex juxtaposition of time elements is used to control the tempo and order of the writing, endeavouring to keep the reader engaged, creating suspense, intrigue and interest as well as taking side steps to weave the factual data and theory into the writing, giving the needed background for revealing the underlying meaning of a narrative.

Mark Whittaker recently spent time on the streets of the CBD in Sydney begging. His personal experience on the streets leads his story about the growing number of people who regularly beg for financial help from the city’s patrons. The article continues with studies of several people who regularly beg on the city’s streets (Whittaker 2008).

Background material adds to the understanding of the reader but needs to be included in a manner that assists the story, rather than bogging it down in mundane facts. Anthropologist and literary journalist Ted Conover adds crucial background
material in anything from a sentence to a couple of paragraphs throughout his work to help his readers (Sims 1995).

John Hersey replays the same moments following the atomic bomb being dropped on Hiroshima from the viewpoints of six victims (Kerrane 1997). Orwell wrote five vignettes about culture, poverty and daily life, to show the coming demise of empire in *Marrakech* (Orwell 2003). Critic B.T. Oxley describes them as “documentaries”. He means that these social reports are sustained investigations, suffused with atmosphere and carried forward by a far more personal voice than a straightforward sociological survey would allow” (Kerrane 1997:19).

Other writers use flash backs to different times to situate the present more clearly. Hooper inserts passages of the history of Palm Island at stages throughout her narrative of Doomedgee’s story (Hooper 2006). In *The Unknown Story of Cornelia Rao* (Manne 2005), Robert Manne turns the clock back part way through his narrative and includes carefully crafted passages about Rao’s working life as an air hostess and at another point diverts to explore her spiritual journey that may have contributed to her mental instability. Joe Nocera writes often about the routine culture of the business world. In *A piece of the Action* (Nocera 1994) he structured the book around a set of character studies that interlocked like puzzle pieces.

The choice of words and crafting of sentences and paragraphs is of particular interest to the writer, as these elements carry the story, helping develop the characters and giving energy and drive to the narrative line. Blackburn admits she honed the descriptive terms she used for wrongly convicted John Botton, the police investigators, murderer Eric Edgar Cooke, and the various victims of his lethal crimes to help her readers understand the complexity of their characters, developing their place in the narrative and pacing the story (Tanner 2002).

Some writers interrupt the flow of the narrative with elements of memory allowing the subject a unique voice within the work. Australian author Christopher Kremmer said at a conference at the Australian National Library in Canberra in May 2008 that he refocuses his readers using the personal pronoun to ration his own reactions within the his works by giving glimpses of himself which not only confirm his presence but develop narrative tension to give focus and nuance to the story.
Voice

Literary journalism differs considerably from news reporting. Journalism educator Ben Yagoda compares the voice of classic journalism with the role of voice in literary journalism.

The disembodied, measured voice of classic journalism is a kind of flimflam: the pure objectivity it implied is probably unattainable by humans. By stepping out from the shadows and laying bare his or her prejudices, anxieties or thought processes, the reporter gives us something firmer and truer to hold on to as we come to our own conclusion (Kerrane 1997:16).

Literary journalism expects the writer to be present in the writing, either by the inclusion of his or her own voice through the use of “I”, or more subtly as John Hersey does, confirming his presence through his response to some of the action he witnesses without actually using the personal pronoun. The over-use of the personal pronoun is discouraged by the purists of classic journalism, but recognition of the authorial voice is acceptable as it lends authenticity to the participation as well as observation of the researcher. Kremmer worked as a frustrated ABC foreign correspondent in Asia for several years. He felt short changed by his editors who required the bald details of international news. Kremmer yearned to include more (2008). His three non-fiction works (Kremmer 1997, 2002, 2006) are the result, written as literary journalism where his voice and those of his subject are clearly heard. In a conversation with him in Canberra in May 2008 he said to me, “I was tired of journalism. (It) was inadequate to convey the essence of the people. Quotes left inadequate gaps. (But) ambiguity wasn’t allowed … (for me) the story has to be more than the sum of the parts.”

Because of literary journalism’s commitment to recording the stories of ordinary people in everyday situations, there is a strong emphasis on giving these people a voice. Their individual life stories are like the flicker of candles gathering intensity and giving meaning to the big picture of a society. Every life story is valid and relevant to show people another aspect of the global family.

Sylvester Monroe and Peter Goldman aimed to give a public voice to the ten subjects of their book Brothers (Kerrane 1997). These ten men were friends of Monroe. Men like Edward (“Half Man”) Carter. Monroe asked them to share the most intimate details of their lives. Until then, Carter noted, “nobody had ever asked
me what I thought about "anything" (Kerrane 1997:204). Monroe talks of "trying to
tell about characters' lives in their own voices" (Kerrane 1997:204).

Richard Preston explains his goal for a distinctive authorial voice:

"I try to maintain a cool, understated tone. "Litotes" is the Latin term of
rhetoric for the understated, simple voice, which is often grammatically
simple as well. I have a somewhat self-deprecating, humorous, mild-
mannered persona. You need a little bit of "I" to provide a validating
consciousness for the events you're describing, but it has to be done subtly"
(Boynton 2005:320).

The reporting of Norman Mailer or Hunter Thompson, or of Wolfe himself, shows
that the genteel and clipped voice of traditional reportage was no longer sufficient to
articulate public reality. Narrative nonfiction allowed that shift to happen.

Deep respect for the people they write about is important for many writers of literary
journalism. Martha Gellhorn is renowned "because she combines a cold eye with a
warm heart. Her powers of observation and compassion are evident in a lifetime of
socially engaged writing, from early sketches of Depression-era America to a 1996
essay on the plight of street children in Brazil" (Kerrane 1997:422).

At the conclusion of her appointment with the ABC in Africa, Australian journalist
Sally Sara revisited a dozen women she had interviewed for news stories from a
broad area of Africa and wrote their stories as narrative non-fiction biography in
Gogo Mama (Sara 2007). Sara's deep affection for several of these women is
evident in her work. At times she moves from merely observing life and recording it,
to being immersed in the setting, emotionally and spiritually as well as physically.
Her visits with Hellen Lanyom who had her lips slashed from her face by child
warriors of the Lord's Resistance Army in 1991 clearly display the move from
detached observer to fellow traveller on the path of grief. Sara heard the news that
her friend, journalist Kate Peyton, had been murdered hours before she was to visit
Hellen for the last time. Hellen covered her face with her hands and began the
mourning wail of the Northern Ugandan people in response to Sara's news. Sara
says she was comforted by this display of shared grief from a woman who had
personally suffered so deeply but willingly embraced Sara's pain as her own. The
inclusion of this material is Sara's story gives insight into both Sara and Hellen
Lanyom. If Sara had remained merely an observer of Lanyom's life, she would have
missed the understanding of forgiveness and healing grief that Lanyom's life

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exudes. Participating in life with those whose stories are to be told gives depth, insight and meaning to literary journalism (Sara 2008).

John McPhee’s work *The Pine Barrens* (1968) displays his ear for speech-rhythms and eye for detail in an account that exudes not only a sense of place, but a sense of people too. Vietnam war correspondent Michael Herr wrote "stories full of unfinished conversations and unexplained acronyms, bits of song lyrics, and sensory flashes, all held together by Herr’s voice – meditative, ironic, compassionate, and often afraid. “You lost your non-combatant status very quickly,” Herr told Tom Wolfe, “because nobody thought they were going to get out alive.” Kerrane speaks of Herr’s work as “rich in atmosphere and sensibility, tragedy and absurdity, brutal reality and eerie dream” (Kerrane 1997:494). The voice of characters and writer fit the story.

Literary journalism explores the world of its subjects and gives them an voice. Through this process the readers experience elements of a culture as more is revealed of the subject’s life and the reader senses the subject’s morality, catches glimpses of their limitations and potential and engages with their resilience and fragility (Websdale-Morrissey 2005).

**Underlying Meaning**

News reporters capture part of an event in their haste to gather the facts and file a story. Perceived understanding and explanation of a situation or setting is often only one level of the story. Literary journalism pursues the layers of meaning that affect a story as it explores more than the surface facts.

Norman Mailer wrote *The Armies of the Night* as participant observation of the 1967 march on the Pentagon to protest the Vietnam War (Mailer 1968). This tumultuous event blatantly challenged American politics. Mailer was there: not as an observer, but fully involved as a participant. With empathy and passion he wrote from an insider’s perspective, recording far more than a news report highlighting the facts such as how many protesters were present, what they were demonstrating against, how the authorities reacted, what impact the activity had on the city. Mailer wrote about the protesters, giving pertinent historical background information and helping his readers to understand the meaning of the event through the personal stories of those affected by the brutality of the war. This work is a valuable contribution to the
historical and cultural record of America’s involvement in the Vietnam War. In reflecting on the importance and contribution such a piece makes to a nation’s history, Mailer claims “the political is the personal and to report the great events of the time in purely objective terms is to miss an essential part of the story” (Kerrane 1997:290). Literary journalism, like ethnography, allows a writer to expose the layers of meaning embedded in an event.

Adhering to the straight-jacket demands of news reportage for the fast production of a news story by discovering the answers to the who, what, when, where, why and how questions of a subject tends to produce a one-dimensional, fact-based, streamlined account (Tanner 2002).

Leon Dash in The New New Journalism anthology by Boynton says intellectual framework gives depth to a writer’s research (Boynton 2005:61). Dash regularly asks the ‘why’ questions which lead him to research sociological issues that impact upon the lives of the people he writes about. As in ethnographic research, literary journalistic research probes these “why” questions in order to dig deeper and discover the layers of meaning and implication.

Science writer Richard Preston’s work, First Light (Preston 1987), tells the story of astronomers at Caltech’s Hale telescope. More than just anecdotes of late night star observations, Preston weaves history, scientific theory and technical explanation into the narrative, giving a layered and woven effect to the meaning of the story.

Estelle Blackburn researched the case of John Button who was wrongfully convicted and imprisoned for the manslaughter of Rosemary Anderson in 1963. Button had exhausted all legal and political avenues to clear his name. A journalist taking his case to the general public made the difference. Blackburn wrote a narrative in the language of the wider population. ‘Legalese’ had kept the story within the isolation of the legal fraternity because hear-say evidence was not accepted in court proceedings and records, but the book reveals this dimension of the trial giving a public voice to Button. From February 1992 to publication in 1998, Blackburn’s life revolved around the research for what became Broken Lives (Blackburn 1998). Her years of immersion and investigative journalism enabled her to write a riveting narrative that had Button’s legal case re-opened. The Appeals Court overturned the original decision in February 2002. Blackburn excavated the story revealing
information that had been overlooked by police investigators about Button and Cooke, who confessed to murdering Anderson prior to his execution in Fremantle jail in 1963. She organized for an American crash expert to re-enact the car crash that injured Anderson, proving beyond a doubt that Button's car was not involved. Interviews with many of Cooke's other victims revealed more about his character and activities and her compelling writing convinces the reader that although Cooke was a prolific liar, he was telling the truth when he confessed to murdering Rosemary Anderson. Layer upon layer of research added facts and proof to the meaning of Button's claim of innocence.

Summary

This chapter described how literary journalism comfortably and competently crosses writing genre allowing for immersion research and crafted writing to express points of view and layers of meaning within a narrative, confidently allowing both the writer and subject to have a public voice. Time consuming, intellectually and emotionally engaging, this type of writing differs greatly from the stiff, two dimensional voice of reporting of news stories which rarely deal with anything quirky, moody, conflicting or mundane. The things that make up real life are left un-stated in conventional reportage, but literary journalism thrives on recording real life as it encourages longer works giving a broader picture with light and shade, depth and firm foundations because of its demand for documentable research material and attention to how the story is told.
Chapter Three

Ethnography

This chapter outlines what ethnography is, examines how several elements of ethnographic research are conducted and considers the production of a written ethnographic text for a general readership. It does not explore the shifting ground of current anthropological theory.

Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture (Fetterman 1989). Anthropologist John van Maanen describes ethnography as a written representation of culture (Van Maanen 1988) and culture as a fluid representation of life. Others have described “culture” to be the recording and consuming of everyday life together with how everyday life is accounted for and storied into meaningful patterns of people and things (Goodall 2000; Marcus 1986). Ethnography observes and seeks to understand human groups and convey that understanding to a wider audience, with an emphasis on cultural difference (Davies 2002). Clifford refers to ethnography as “a form of culture collecting (like art collecting): in particular diverse experiences and facts are selected, gathered, detached from their original temporal occasions and given enduring value in a new arrangement” (Clifford 1988:231).

Ethnographers attempt to describe as much as possible about a group of people including their history, religion, politics, economy and environment. They have two roles: scientist – examining, testing and interpreting the research material; and storyteller – writing and recording the story from an insider’s perspective (Fetterman 1989).

Based on these defining elements, ethnography can be understood as the representation of the cultures of many and varied people, for example fishermen of an isolated Indonesian island (Spyer 2000), Africans working in cities away from their villages (Turnbull 1963), Mexican street vendors (Behar 2003, c1993),

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Taiwanese village life in 1960 (Wolf 1992), spiritual life of tribal people in Papua New Guinea (Robbins 2004), or village life in Bali (Geertz 1972). Most ethnographies are written texts, like Anna Tsing's *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* which was researched and written as a collection of observations in the postmodern style (Tsing 1993). Breaking free from the anthropological academic norm of qualitative writing methods is not a new issue for ethnography. The past two decades have seen the way ethnography is written being challenged from within the academic worlds of anthropology and literature (Geertz 1973; Keesing 1989; Rabinow 1996; Clifford 1988; Clifford and Marcus 1986; Behar 1995).

Anthropologist Ruth Behar wrote ethnography as a narrative focusing on the life of a Mexican woman (Behar 2003, c1993). On this changing stage of written ethnography, Ellis and Bochner edited a compilation of alternative and experimental forms of qualitative writing (Ellis 1996). Among other examples, they included a work by African American Deborah A. Austin (Austin 1996) who explores her friendship with African born Mari Obenga through a 654 line narrative poem, giving substantial time and space to reflexively exposing her attitudes, learning and change throughout the research process. She encases her narrative poem within short sections of prose that give background, anthropological theory, more reflexive confession and observations as well as questions she still has. Another writer, Judith Hamera, produced an experimental work of ethnography with the subjects being a refugee family of classical Khmer dancers in the USA. Hamera writes about memory and adapting to a new culture in five short pieces of prose and some transcribed conversations. These are shaped to be fleeting vignettes of actual conversations with her subjects, interspersed with thematic summary statements framed by her experience of performances of music, dance, opera and photography (Hamera 1996). Roberts suggests biography as a relevant method for ethnography (Roberts 2002).

Recent ethnographies encompass visual representations through film, such as Bob Connolly’s documentaries including *Black Harvest* (Connolly 1992), about coffee growers in Papua New Guinea. Sound bytes and performances including dance, poetry and dialogue (Taylor 2003; Denzin 2003) may be included as experimental expressions of ethnography. The writing genres of ethnography are not limited, but continue to embrace cutting edge forms as described.
Academics, including Marcus (1986), Goodall (2000) and Fetterman (1989), outline several key factors for undertaking rigorous ethnographic research. In this chapter the defining elements of fieldwork - participant observation, interviews, fieldnotes and reflexivity - will be discussed for the purpose of establishing the quality of research required by a journalist to write culture. Some of the issues surrounding the production of an ethnographic text, raised by a number of contemporary commentators (Geertz 1973; Clifford 1986; Marcus 1986, Strathern 1990) involving questions of representation and audience reception will also be addressed.

Ethnographic Research

Fieldwork

Ethnography is built on extended thorough research in the location of the "other" collecting data to be analysed and written as a representation of the culture (Fetterman 1989). This re-locating to collect data is referred to as fieldwork. Thorough ethnographic research requires extended time in the location of the subjects (Fetterman 1989). Renowned anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski contended that long-term continuous fieldwork is essential when studying foreign cultures. Malinowski spent two years between 1915–18 conducting research among the Trobriand Islanders (Malinowski 1922; Young 1979). His goal “to grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise his vision of his world” (Malinowski 1922:25) changed the world of academic anthropology by requiring the researcher to go to the field to conduct research, rather than to theorise from their armchairs about the research data someone else has collected (Frazer 1940). Clifford sees “anthropological fieldwork as something specific among overlapping sociological and ethnographic methods: an especially deep, extended, and interactive research encounter...with specific attention to length of stay, mode of interaction, repeated visits, grasp of languages” (Clifford 1997:54). The "physical displacement and temporary dwelling away from home" (Clifford 1997:53) are important elements of fieldwork allowing the researcher to observe and record a range of phenomena around prototypes in an intense interactive collection of ethnographic data. While acknowledging dependence of some early fieldworkers on missionaries, colonial administrators and travel writers for some help, he firmly states anthropology’s separateness because of differences of agenda and attitude (to missionaries), an apolitical stance (to colonial administrations) and the use of scientific practices of research and writing as compared to travel writers' transient
and literary approach (Clifford 1997:64,65). Some suggest at least twelve months is required to learn language and conduct field work (Marcus 1986) but Fetterman asserts that continuous fieldwork is not always necessary and cites his own experience of two weeks on location every few months over a study period of three years (Fetterman 1989).

**Participant Observation**

A researcher goes to the "other's" location, learning language and immersing herself in the situation, participating in daily life and observing daily activity. Anthropologists use the term "participant observation" to embrace both of these elements of field work (Behar 1995; Geertz 1976 c1960). The ethnographer fully immerses herself in the subject's situation and location, connecting with the rhythm and ritual of daily life, establishing rapport and relationships of trust in the community (Marcus 1986). The research data gathered reveals layers of multiple networks of meaning borne by words, acts and other symbolic forms contributing to demystifying a culture. Geertz asserts that it "exposes their (the subject's) normalness without reducing their particularity. It renders them accessible – dissolves their opacity" (Geertz 1976:6 c1960).

Margery Wolf conducted field work in the Taiwanese village of PeihoTien in 1960. Her description of the process of conducting fieldwork removes any romantic notions a researcher may have about the mystical process of recording culture.

We do not sit around in our villages and atolls absorbing culture like sunshine.... In fact, most of us exhaust ourselves mentally and physically in our attempts to see, hear, and experience as much as we can in the too brief period academic schedules allow for fieldwork. We do research. It is not something that simply happens to us as a result of being in an exotic place. Our willingness to speak and write about that experience results from our serious engagement in discovering what we can about how life is lived in another social/cultural setting. The first field trip is a stunning roller coaster of self-doubt, boredom, excitement, disorientation, uncertainty, exhaustion, bullying, being bullied, cajoling, being cajoled – in the course of which we somehow accumulate "data," precious notebooks packed with disorganized thoughts, detailed observations of minutiae, descriptions of rituals, transcripts of conversations, diagrams, and detritus (Wolf 1992:127,128).

Living in another culture is highly rewarding, but can also be extremely challenging. Wengle acknowledges there is often anxiety in fieldwork (Wengle 1988). Moving to
a different place entails leaving the familiar and comfortable. Competence in
corver, basic living functions like ablutions, eating, and sitting can be abruptly
challenged in a new location. Fieldwork requires a researcher to come from a place
of self-acceptance and self-understanding to deal with the anxieties that arise from
the intensity of emotion and the physical challenge of being totally immersed in the
new location. This understanding of self gives confidence to explore new and varied
situations and to face fieldwork as a constant learner, willing to change, to be
misunderstood, to grow and develop. Both ethnographer and journalist walk this
path of dislocation and distancing (Clifford 1997) as they endeavour to learn all they
can and participate in as much as feasibly possible in the fieldwork location without
causing major offence to their hosts.

Literary journalist Ted Conover is also an anthropologist. Talking of how he prefers
to conduct research he commented:

Participant observation, which is the anthropological method, is the way I
prefer to pursue journalism. It means a reliance not on the interview so
much as on the shared experience with somebody. The idea to me that
journalism and anthropology go together, which sort of dawned on me while I
was writing Rolling Nowhere, was a great enabling idea for my life – the idea
that I could learn about different people and different aspects of the world by
placing myself in situations, and thereby see more than you ever could just
by doing an interview (Sims 1995:13).

Dressed in second-hand clothing, with very limited funds and carrying a bedroll,
Conover travelled with hoboes across the USA for several months in the early
1980s. His book, Rolling Nowhere, recounts his experiences, describing the culture
of railroad hoboes, their language, mindset, beliefs, habits, interaction with each
other and “other” people including authority (police and railroad workers), charity
workers, people in shops and streets, and even their own estranged families.
Conover insightfully reveals his own thinking and responses to situations (hunger,
dirty clothes and body, isolation from family and friends, not knowing how to act with
other hoboes) as the narrative unfolds. Looking like a hobo wasn’t sufficient to know
what it was like to be one. Conover’s experience of hobo culture, a culture so
different from that of American suburbia, equips him well to write about hobo culture
with ethnographic authenticity.

Full participation in the host culture may mean a researcher loses sight of the
familiar patterns of daily life. Together with this emic stance, experience-near as
Marcus and Fischer refer to it, a researcher also needs an etic perspective, *experience-far*, where she is more objective about the elements of the patterns of daily life and the decisions and choices being made by members of the community (Marcus 1986). Why does this person always do this task? How was that decision made? Who is responsible to implement decisions? What does that tone of voice imply? Are their words and action congruent?

The research data collected from the emic and etic experience is recorded as fieldnotes, often in the form of written notes, sound recordings, photographic images, maps and diagrams.

**Field notes: Interviews, questions and language**

Field notes are generally intended to capture and represent the lived experiences of others (Goodall 2000). The goal is to be able to “recreate” the observed situation through reference to the written word.

Goodall reminds us “You can’t observe everything, you can’t write down all that occurs.” (Goodall 2000:97). He suggests taking copious notes in the interview situation and then reviewing those notes thoroughly soon after the interview to confirm all the details of the situation are recorded to help with the writing of ethnography at a later date.

Goodall says:

> ...fieldnotes are less about what you initially “see” and “experience” than they are about connecting those fieldwork details to larger and more self-reflexive issues. Which is to say that what fieldnotes represent is one part recorded observations and experiences and two parts interpretation, or how you learn to hear in and through all of that. (Goodall 2000:86)

Fieldwork “requires a tolerance for differences, and for ambiguities” (Goodall 2000:86). As Wolf describes her fieldwork:

Experience is messy. Searching for patterns in behaviour, a consistency in attitudes, the meaning of a casual conversation, is what anthropologists do, and they are nearly always dependent on a ragtag collection of facts and fantasies of an often small sample of a population from a fragment of historical time. When human behaviour is the data, a tolerance for
ambiguity, multiplicity, contradiction, and instability is essential (Wolf 1992:129)

Fieldwork is a very complex process so the more records taken, the more likely the researcher will capture the vital things that help reveal the culture. Unravelling the complexities of notes made sequentially in a variety of situations requires attention to fine detail and perseverance as the field notes are categorised and classified. Things that appear clear in the situation can become quite uncertain weeks later in another context when writing takes place.

Prior to arriving at the research location, an ethnographer's preparation includes planning for the fieldwork season. Fetterman states that defining the extent of the research subject prior to arriving in the field work location helps the ethnographer place parameters on the scope of the research area (Fetterman 1989). Structuring the research by pursuing macro themes then addressing micro issues helps build the representation of the culture. Each part of the process of discovery requires editorial decisions of inclusion and exclusion: What data will be included? Which individuals will be interviewed? At another level a subject is making "editorial" decisions also – what part of their story will they reveal, what will they not state? The subject position of cultural informants, old / young, male / female, traditional / modern, formally educated / no formal education means that ethnographic knowledge is inevitably partial (Clifford 1986:7) and these limitations demonstrate how holism, the effort to represent a particular way of life fully has an ultimately unattainable goal (Marcus 1986). There is always more to be revealed, to be recorded, to be included. Ethnography and journalism face similar challenges.

Interviews take various forms including structured, semi-structured and informal (Hammersley 1995:139). Audio recordings enable the researcher to review the content of the interview and use the tone and vocabulary of the interviewee in the written ethnography. It is not always suitable to record interviews, however. Sometimes the presence of a recorder will inhibit natural conversation. Sometimes even a notebook and pen may unsettle an interviewee. Privacy for a one on one conversation may not be suitable in the culture or possible because of the communal orientation of the society.

A journalist may not always conduct field work as clinically as an ethnographer, preferring to intuitively follow a line of questioning allowing the story to reveal itself
before attempting to fill in the details. Preston refers to this intuitive line as an “organic process” (Boynton 2005:308), but the intensity and thoroughness of the interviewing techniques is similar to the ethnographer’s rigorous research.

As well as immersing herself in the culture, a researcher must use her time with contacts wisely. Like many journalists, ethnographers (and their readers) are inquisitive and intrigued by people’s stories. They can find they have used valuable time on topics that are outside the boundaries of their research area because the data and the people being interviewed are engaging. Time with the interview subjects in the field is always limited for both journalists and ethnographers, so managing the research process is crucial.

A researcher requires flexibility and adaptability when conducting interviews. The subject is the focus of the interview not the researcher. An informant may not tell their story because they need the confidence that comes from speaking on their terms and being given freedom to talk about what matters to them rather than badgered for the exotic or sensational. Trust by the subject towards the researcher, to record their story with balance and ethical responsibility, and the reciprocal trust placed in the subject by the researcher reveals another layer of the “collaborative relationship and mutual understanding” required within this “dialogical” relationship where initially the subject holds the power over information, after which the power transfers to the researcher who makes editorial decisions about what is included in the ethnography (Roberts 2002).

Verbal language is the basis of interviews, so learning the local language is an important element of fieldwork (Fetterman 1989; Malinowski 1922; Marcus 1986). The use and interpretation of languages requires appreciation of the ambiguity of meaning (Keesing 1989; Abu-Lughod 1993). Brittleness in trying to force specific meanings for specific words can alienate an interviewee who has lived with the ambiguities all his or her life and intuitively understands them.

Interviews require on-going contact with people, building on to the layers of understanding, exploring meaning, refining understanding. The researcher will be tested at times – is she willing to give up a personal goal (collecting certain data) for the sake of a subject’s comfort at a particular level of openness? Humility and respect in relating to the subject will challenge the notion that any approach is legitimate to extract the required information.
A subject group's comfort with the presence of a researcher is invaluable. As Fetterman says of participant observation, "given time, people forget their 'company' behaviour and fall back into familiar patterns of behaviour" (Fetterman 1989:46). This familiarity of subjects with researcher enables the researcher to see below the surface of the subject's life, the sometimes contrived actions of 'company behaviour', to something deeper, a more unencumbered or automatic response to situations and people. Agar understands these issues and widens the responsibility of ethnographers in stressing that fieldwork is an interpretive act, not merely an observational or descriptive one (Agar 1986). This process begins with the explicit examination of a person's own preconceptions, biases, and motives, moving forward in a dialectic fashion toward understanding by way of an on-going dialogue between the interpreter and interpreted (Rabinow 1996; Strathern 1990; Rabinow 1977; Van Maanen 1988).

**Reflexivity**

Nothing we can know about a culture or about ourselves is free from interpretation. Fieldnotes based on experiences, thoughts, hunches, hypotheses, dreams, interactions, and observations are head-work. The story you write will be part of the larger story of who you are, where you've been, what you've read and talked about and argued over, what you believe in and value, what you feel compelled to name as significant. (Goodall 2000:87)

In writing fieldnotes, Goodall suggests a researcher will write what she has "been attracted to and convinced by" (Goodall 2000:87). A researcher comes to the project with a unique construct of biases and understanding, forged through life experience, beliefs, education, their economic and historical place (Strathern 1990; Clifford 1997; Behar 1995; Rabinow 1996). As well as detailed notes on the settings and conversations, the everyday happenings of life in a culture, ethnographers are advised to keep detailed personal notes, a commentary of their experiences and responses throughout the time of research. This may well be new territory for some news reporters, but the work of those who write ethnography reveals a conscious effort to incorporate reflexivity (Sara 2007; Kremmer 2002).

As trust develops between researcher and subject, often the interviewee feels comfortable enough to reveal more of themselves and their worldview. This experience is common among ethnographers and literary journalists. Clifford Geertz
writes of his experience in Bali where the people actually ignored him and his wife “as though we were not there” (Geertz 1972:1). This finally dissipated after Geertz and his wife ran with villagers from an outlawed cockfight they were attending when police raided proceedings. "Demonstrating solidarity” (Geertz 1972:4) with their fellow villages helped them become flesh and blood people – suitable to be teased and made fun of, talked with and included in community life.

Behar’s revelations of her Jewish-Cuban street merchant background in Translated Woman (Behar 2003, c1993) and Abu-Lughod’s acknowledgement of her Arab-American ethnicity (Abu-Lughod 1993) confirm the importance of self exploration and revelation as part of the ethnographic enterprise. Ruth Behar believes transparency with her readers engenders learning and communication of a deeply personal level:

When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably. A different set of problems and predicaments arise which would never surface in response to more detached writing. (Behar 1996:16)

Writing Ethnography

Academic anthropology has developed over two centuries. Writing ethnography is in part an issue of communication of the data collected during the research phase of a project. (Fife 2005) The issue of communication covers several important considerations for writers.

1. Whose story is it? (Representation)
2. Who are you writing for? (Audience)
3. Which story will be written? (Partial truths)

Whose story is it? Representation

Ethnographers are trusted to represent the culture and people who are the focus of their research by writing to give them a voice, primarily for an outside audience. Geertz explained the complexity of representation as a two-way process: "We see the lives of others through lenses of our own grinding and...they look back on us through ones of their own" (Geertz 2000:65). Stephen Tyler (1987) and George Marcus (1998) suggest that the multi-voiced postmodern approach to writing can
contribute importantly to the task of representation. Nonetheless, as Strathern points out (1990:130):

The polyphonic ideal of the postmodern essayist in anthropology is just that – an ideal, one among others, that masks a body of work that is, at least since the 1970s, both experimental in ethos and, at the same time more interesting and more sophisticated than but thoroughly in line with preceding ethnographic traditions.

Abu-Lughod researched the lives and culture of Bedouin women in Egypt. She doesn’t claim the written work is exhaustive in representing the entire Bedouin people, but refers to her work as only a “snapshot” of culture. She hopes her book “might stir memory and a nostalgic remembrance of people and time now gone” (Abu-Lughod 1993:37).

My work in Kelobak came about through the invitation of a successful Rejang man, Pak Taher, who holds a strategic position as head of planning and development in the Kabupaten (District) of Kepahiang. Pak Taher is very aware of Rejang culture’s rapid change and infiltration by mass media and the dominant culture of Indonesia’s Javanese people through education, politics and commerce. He invited me to record his family’s story, arranged for accommodation in his home village, Kelobak, escorted me to report to the police in Kepahiang, then drove me to Kelobak and introduced me to his extended family. Within hours of my arrival (and his return to Kepahiang) it became very obvious that the whole family was deeply committed to the process of recording their expression of Rejang culture. Long into the evening brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins and neighbours arrived at Ibu Upik’s home where I stayed, to meet me and start telling their story.

Currently Rejang culture has no formal ‘storyteller’ in the community who recounts the stories of the people (village or family) and hands them down to younger generations. I observed older women using stories to instruct younger women about marriage relationships and heard in Pak Taher’s personal story of how an old man used to sit on his veranda in the late afternoon weaving fishing nets and telling stories and myths of courage and heroism to the boys who gathered to share his veranda.

As head of the family, Taher had secured their support for on-going interviews, access to their work situations and photograph opportunities. Gaining their initial
confidence and trust was in this case not difficult because of the family’s desire to see their story published. The fact that my research would be written in English did not appear to be an issue as Pak Taher speaks some English and the children and grandchildren are all learning English at school. My decision to write ethnography as literary journalism because the style embraces a general readership through the use of the narrative form and a less academic vocabulary will also contribute to the family having access to their story. Writing in the style of conventional ethnography with its particular vocabulary and structure would marginalise the family from their published story, as English is their second or third language and only Pak Taher has any experience with academic literature.

Like Abu-Lughod’s work, the ethnographic narrative non-fiction produced from my research in Sumatra does not claim to be an exhaustive representation of Rejiang culture, but rather the result of a single case study producing a “snapshot” or a captured slice of life in Kelobak in the early 21st century. As Fetterman points out, this type of research can result in dense autobiographical material and as a distinctive personal story can also deliver an informed picture of the social group (Fetterman 1989).

After discussions with Pak Taher and his wife, Miskarnia, the decision was made not to use pseudonyms and to acknowledge the exact location of the village in Bengkulu Province. All the adult members of the family concurred with these decisions and gave me verbal approval to include their children’s stories in the narrative. They realize their story will be on public record. Some ethnographers choose not to reveal the location and identity of their subjects, preferring to allow their contacts some anonymity (Wolf 1992) and allowing the possibility of some sensitive material to be recorded without the revelations causing friction within the research location (Marcus 1986).

**Who are you writing for? Audience**

Marilyn Strathern writes: “The ethnographer’s job is to make the data trans-culturally intelligible” (Strathern 1987:13). The resultant work, ethnography, can be written for a variety of audiences: academics; government bureaucrats requiring reliable information on which to base programs, aid or training; non-government agencies; multi-national corporations or a wider reading public with an interest in the work (Fetterman 1989; Marcus 1998). Anthropology has developed and refined theory,
practice and vocabulary over the past 200 years. Like other fields of learning, it’s project reflects constantly contending and changing schools of thought (Marcus 2002). This immense background of theory and practice was expressed, until the 1970s, in a dense form of academic writing that has typically marginalized the wider reading public because of the heavy burden of theory and specialized terminology deployed by academics writing ethnography. During the 1970s, as postmodern theory gained broader acceptance, ethnographers began experimental writings that included more reflexive inclusions and gave greater voice to their research subjects (Clifford 1986; Wolf 1992; Wikan 1990; King 1978; Behar 2003, c1993; Tsing 2005). As Marcus states in Writing Culture, the change in how ethnographic texts were constructed at this time saw “the introduction of a literary consciousness to ethnographic practice” (Clifford and Marcus 1986:262).

The focus on its reading audience is a significant factor in the development of the writing style for an anthropologist. In the field of theology, for example, Professor Dallas Willard, head of the School of Philosophy at the University of Southern California published Renovation of the Heart (Willard 2002), a book concerning the spiritual transformation of individuals. Deliberately written for the academic theological community, the book was considered high brow and difficult to understand by the reading public with an interest in theology and the issues Willard addressed. Willard acknowledged the problem of his work’s limited access to a wider reading audience, and so worked with Don Simpson, an editor/writer from Navpress, to produce a new book called Revolution of Character (Willard 2005), for the wider reading audience with less academic background and understanding of the theological issues embedded in Renovation of the Heart. This second book is as robust and relevant to followers of the Christian faith as Willard’s earlier book. It covers the same material but is written in a way that a broader, more general readership can grasp. Willard himself acknowledges the need for such a version in his Note to the Reader: “This book is a distillation of Renovation of the Heart and is designed to make that book’s contents more accessible and more useful...” (Willard 2005:7).

In a similar manner, a journalist with anthropological understanding and training could attempt to write ethnography for a broader readership with as much as possible of the “thick description” (Geertz 1973:6), or layering of meaning revealed through exhaustive research that is used to write the ethnography. Another option could be collaboration between anthropologist and journalist in the production of an
ethnography based on the anthropologist's research and the journalist's writing skills.

**Which story will be written? Partial Truths**

Ethnographic writings can be called 'fictions' in the sense of being "something made or fashioned". Clifford says "writing ethnographies involve silencing incongruent voices, deploying a consistent manner of quoting, 'speaking for', translating the reality of others. Anthropological writings are fictions, in the sense that they are made" (Clifford 1986:7). As well as this element of a written work being a "created fiction" or composition, ethnography, among other forms of expressed "knowledge", also represents a "partial truth"(Geertz 1973:15) or one of "many stories that can be told in many ways"(Strathern 1987:128).

Goodall sees the data of ethnography as "socially constructed" (Goodall 2000:96) out of the raw materials of lived experience and observed phenomena. The researcher is "encountering part of many on-going stories, the final shape, editing and interpretation of which would be up to them" (Goodall 2000:96). This point is demonstrated by Abu-Lughod when she records her decision to exclude some material because she sensed the women who gave her the information would not be happy seeing it in print, so she settled for "a more conventional and less personal ethnography" of the Bedouin women she was living with (Abu-Lughod 1993:37). Ethnographic researchers regularly make ethical decisions to include and exclude information.

The life of the ethnographer and the journalist is finely entwined with the written ethnography she produces. Ethnographers are trusted with representing the culture using the research data collected. Reflexivity can be a means to explore self-consciousness in the written work (Marcus 1998; Geertz 1972; Marcus 1986). Goodall writes of the impact non-reflexivity can have on the ethnography:

> We learn about the lives and accounts of others (depictions and accounts of which are vital to the development of a skill set for any ethnographer), but to the virtual exclusion of autobiographical information about the self who produced the text. The result is often the creation of an authoritative, omniscient narrator – a modernist textual god – whose observations we are supposed to trust simply because they
appear to be born out of a kind of “immaculate perception” (Goodall 2000:91,92).

An ethnographer is constantly influenced by their background, training and life-experience. Acknowledging these biases is important (Clifford 1986; Marcus 1986; Strathern 1990).

Descriptions of the outward world come from deep inside us. Because each of us has been shaped and informed by different deeply personal experiences, our descriptions of the same scene are likely to be as distinctive as they are personal. Facts are personal interpretations. Examined reflexively, they show us not only how we see the world, but also why we interpret it as we do (Goodall 2000:95).

Even the metaphors a researcher uses in writing are interpretation, where the writer constructs the story using metaphors she believes will assist her readers to best understand and empathise (Strathern 1990; Marcus 1986; Geertz 1973).

Being in touch with her inner life through living and recording an examined life influences a researcher’s handling of data collected through sensitive observation and skilled analysis. As writers of ethnography when we describe a scene, we are “constructing its factual meaning by interpreting the individual fragments available” (Goodall 2000:94). Those “fragments” will include the physical appearance of people and objects, conversation and actions of people and our interaction in the situation. There are ethics at work in these processes of construction as the writer makes decisions to include or exclude material, partly resulting from personal preference or value judgements and partly as a result of negotiated revelations where parts of a story may not be included for the security of the individual or group. The issue of using a pseudonym on these grounds may also be considered an ethical decision in the production of partial truths.

As Ruth Behar comments: “When you write vulnerably, others respond vulnerably. A different set of problems and predicaments arise which would never surface in response to more detached writing” (Behar 1996:16)

In summary, the participant observation method used by anthropologists and some journalists to collect reliable data for a written ethnography needs to be ordered and able to withstand robust examination. Ability with the local language, location and length of time in the field are significant issues, and a researcher’s inclusion of
reflexive material contributes transparency and a sense of the ways personal biases and life experience position the account. These self-reflexive issues also have repercussions for the production of a written account which considers the "owners" of the story, the readership of the work and the "partial truths" it represents.
Chapter 4

Adding to the collection of knowledge of Rejang culture

Who are the Rejang?

The Rejang people comprise three main groups: The Rejang-Lebong living in the Curup region and further north in the upper Musi Valley of the Barisan Mountains; the Rejang Pesisir who inhabit the coastal plain from Bengkulu north to around the town of Ketahun on the coast and inland to the region of Arga Makmur. The third group lives in the Barisan Mountains but lower down the Musi Valley, south of Curup, around the town of Kepahiang, extending a few kilometres south and east of Kepahiang. Current estimates put the total population of the groups at 500,000 people.

A number of people have studied the Rejang people and written descriptions of aspects of Rejang culture in English, Dutch and Indonesian over the past two centuries. Early works include Marsden's *The History of Sumatra* (Marsden 1811). Marsden was just 16 years old when he started as a writer with the East India Company at Fort Marlborough, Bencoolen (currently known as Bengkulu), and progressed to Secretary by 1776 (page vi). During his employment from May 1771 to July 1779 he researched the local people, the Rejang, and described them as 'typical' of the natives of Sumatra. Understandably, given the era when Marsden wrote this work, it reflects strong colonial and paternal attitudes towards the 'natives' (Collis 1966). We can assume that the people Marsden had most contact with were the Rejang Pesisir, who until this day continue to live in the coastal areas around Bengkulu city. It is likely this was the first record of Rejang culture written in English. Marsden commissioned the etchings of scenery, people, flora and fauna included in his work, an original copy of which I was privileged to study at the National

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2 See map of the region in *Family Strength*, Section 1 – A Learning Journey.
3 Figure quoted by Pak Taher from official statistics in the Office of the Bupati of Kepahiang in October 2007.
4 Marsden chose the Rejang as his “typical” Sumatran because of their isolation from western influence for centuries, their proximity to Bengkulu where he was stationed, and because they have a distinct language and written characters (Marsden 1811:90). Siddik adds further details of this writing form called ka-ga-nga (Siddik 1977:37,38).
University of Singapore's library in 2005. This work includes general descriptions of physical features, kinship, work, customary laws and cultural beliefs with an underlying attitude that the natives' situation can be 'improved' by exposure to Western learning. Despite its orientalist assumptions, it provides a very useful baseline for observing change in Rejang culture over 220 years (Marsden 1811).

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles also wrote about the Rejang during the Colonial period (Bastin 1965). He was the East India Company's Governor of Bencoolen from 1819 to 1824\(^5\) and his writing reveals a man with a deep humanitarian concern for the people for whom he was responsible. He instigated public education in Bencoolen and set up the first printing press in the town. Raffles freed the Bugis slaves who had been brought to the area years before to alleviate the labour shortage that came about because the local Rejang people refused to work for wages or to do manual labour (Collis 1966; Bastin 1957). Today the people of the fishing villages along Bengkulu city's coastline trace their ancestry to these slaves. Raffles dismantled the forced cultivation of coffee system\(^6\) which demanded Rejang farmers sell their crop to the British and implemented a free trade system where the market price was paid to local farmers (Norlund 1986).

Raffles records his encounters with Rejang people as he travelled in the area and describes living and working in village and town situations (Bastin 1960). His writings are insightful but reflect his strong Orientalist position. Raffles' extensive writings, maps, drawings and collection of flora, fauna and artefacts were destroyed when the ship, *Fame*, on which he was travelling back to England burnt to the water line on the first night out of Bencoolen (Collis 1966). After a dramatic rescue Raffles continued his journey on another vessel and spent the entire trip writing an extensive report on his work in Bencoolen that was published in England soon after (Raffles 1978). Sophia Raffles, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles' widow, wrote about her husband's work after his death in 1825. She based her work on letters he had written while in Bencoolen and her experiences travelling with him throughout the region. Her insightful stories help describe the fine detail of day to day life in the area from a colonial perspective during the early 1820s (Raffles 1830).

\(^5\) The British had been in Sumatra at Bengkulu (Bencoolen) from 1685. Fort Marlborough was established in 1714 and now functions as a tourist attraction at the northern end of Bengkulu city.

\(^6\) The forced production of coffee was set up by the British authorities prior to Raffles' rule. It was modelled on the West Java *Perangerstelsel* system developed by the Dutch East Indies Company (VOC) in Java and other parts of Indonesia (Cribb 1992).
Following the British colonial period the Dutch took control of the region from 1825 to 1942. Hazairin outlines the Dutch expansion through the Rejang area and describes some details of the land ownership system and farming methods. His work also has an imperialist sense of superiority (Hazairin 1936). Among other writers, Barend Ter Haar’s work on customary law across Indonesia compares some aspects of Rejang adat with similar customary beliefs and practices among other Indonesian ethnic groups. His descriptions of types of marriage contracts and explanation of how Islamic worldviews have influenced groups like the Rejang are insightful (Haar 1948).

Rejang scholar, Prof. Dr. Haji Abdullah Siddik, was born in Muara Aman, Rejang Lebong in 1913. His works *Hukum Adat Rejang* (Siddik 1977) and *Sejarah Bengkulu 1500-1990* (Siddik 1996), give an overview of Rejang history and describe in detail the marga (clans) of the Rejang. As a lawyer his descriptions of Rejang customary law covering the areas of land ownership, marriage and inheritance from an insider’s perspective were invaluable to my research and understanding of the Rejang of Kelobak village in the early 21st century. Pak Bahrun, *Rego Adat* (head of customary law) for the Merigi clan which includes Pak Taher’s family, often referred to Siddik’s work during our discussions on issues of customary law. This is a significant written record of Rejang culture. A companion to Siddik’s work is Hanifah’s *Undang-Undang Simbur Cahaya* (Hanifah 1994) that lists the fines for transgressing *hukum adat* (cultural law) of the Rejang. Now out of print and unavailable in Bengkulu, I was fortunate to source the booklet at the Murdoch University library and take a copy to Pak Taher, who was the legal advisor to the regional head of local government for the Kabupaten’s cultural collection while I conducted research in Kelobak.

Marvin Jaspan’s doctoral thesis gives a post-colonial understanding of Rejang culture. During the early 1960s, Jaspan conducted research looking at the shift from patriliney to matriliney among the Rejang that has occurred over the century since the Dutch occupied the Lebong region in the heart of Rejang country in 1850-61 (Jaspan 1964, 1964) from his base in the village of Topos, in the upper reaches of the Upper Musi valley north east of Curup. Jaspan’s work includes a photographic record, maps, sketches and a Rejang language word list. Strong in theory, Jaspan records glimpses of daily life in a closed Rejang village community during his three
years of research while an armed uprising\textsuperscript{7} destabilized Indonesia during the early 1960s. Until the rebels surrendered in June 1961, he travelled in the area with military or police escort. Jaspan describes farming practices and the detail of the rituals connected with rice farming in the area. By the late 1980s when Jürg Schneider conducted research into rice farming around the Curup region there were few visible remnants of public rituals connected with rice farming as Islam made stronger claims on the people’s lives and practices connected with spirit worship were taught against in mosques throughout the region. Schneider’s work, \textit{From Upland to Irrigated Rice} (Schneider 1995), focuses on issues connected with farming including work allocation, land, markets, methods and tools used in growing rice. Jaspan and Schneider’s work does not include the Rejang Pesisir group.

The available literature displayed a lack of detailed exploration and interpretation of daily life of Rejang people. My plan to write ethnographic vignettes using the literary journalism genre required a significant amount of anthropological research. I had the opportunity to learn from and share the lives of an extended Rejang family unit from the Musi Valley area, close to Kepahiang; consequently the research topic began to take form around the daily lives of the different members of four generations of Pak Taher’s family. Within these vignettes of daily life issues surrounding modernization work, education, gender roles, community harmony, inheritance, marginalization within family relationships and the family’s expression of Islamic belief emerged. I was privileged to attend several marriage and thanksgiving ceremonies and to record the processes of the rituals surrounding these ceremonies in the early 21\textsuperscript{st} century, then to have family members reflect on similar ceremonies up to 70 years earlier. How the Rejang embrace change is also addressed. One area where change may happen quickly is a consequence of the shifting world market where there is an increased demand for organically grown produce like the coffee, pepper and other spices Taher’s family produces. The group’s response to education and technology is explored through the stories of younger members of the family. Although this case study is limited in its parameters, it aims to add a significant layer to the public record on Rejang culture.

\textsuperscript{7} Jaspan mentions members of the armed rebellion as forces of the PTTI (Pemerintah Revolusionir Republik Indonesia) which had been proclaimed at Bukittinggi, West Sumatra on February 15, 1958 and surrendered between April and September of 1961. Jaspan records that the surrender of the major part of the rebel forces operating in the Bengkulu Province occurred on 4 June 1961 (Jaspan 1964; Cribb 1982).
Planning the research

Through conversations with Pak Taher, I knew his family came from the village of Kelobak in the Musi Valley, situated on the only road between Kepahiang and Curup. The family group owns houses, coffee gardens and wet rice fields (sawah id.) on both sides of the road and have lived in the area for over a century. Pak Taher’s mother (aged 79) still lives in Kelobak, along with four of her children. As a public servant based in Kepahiang, Pak Taher is the only sibling living outside the village.

Research planning included designing questions to help elicit life stories from members of four generations of Pak Taher’s family. I also planned to map the village, recording names of heads of households, location of houses, rice mills, granaries, government infrastructure including schools and roads, places of worship, the cemetery and irrigation channels. I hoped this data would reveal how the family was connected to other people in the village.

The family owns several plots of sawah (wet rice fields) close to the main road in Kelobak as well as several hectares of coffee and fruit gardens within an hour’s walk of their homes. Together with two of his nephews, Pak Taher rents another piece of land for an experimental crop of ginger. Individually Pak Taher owns rice fields and gardens in Kelobak and Palengkian as well as an experimental garden east of Kepahiang where he is growing cocoa and coffee organically. These holdings situate him as a wealthy member of the community while his sister and brothers are among average land holders in Kelobak. With this understanding of the land ownership by the extended family group I wanted to learn about their agricultural activities, looking at changes in farming techniques over the decades of life experience represented by the four generations, rice growing methods, the production of coffee, pepper and other crops and how the family was involved in animal husbandry. As rice and coffee farmers, Upik and Azman’s story describes in detail how they farm in wet rice fields and gardens on the slopes of the hills marking the extent of the Musi Valley.

A second broad area of research was shaped around interpersonal relationships including finding answers to the following questions:
1. What evidence is there of matriliney based power in this family group? What evidence is there of *kawin jujur* or *beleket* (marriage following the patriliney form) or *kawin semendo* (matriliney) (Siddik 1977:386)?

2. How are people from different clans or ethnic groups treated by the family? What status do in-laws have in the family group?

3. How close is the extended family — aunts, uncles, cousins?

4. How is the family’s stated Islamic faith expressed in daily life and how is it connected to Rejang *adat* (customary law) and pre-Islamic culture?

5. How do they deal with illness?

6. What influence does this family have in the village?

Finally I planned to record and research community events that regularly take place in the village including marriage, thanksgiving, births, naming, death and the rituals connected with these.

On a micro level I planned to explore the impact of education and the social mobility it affords this family group, especially how Pak Taher’s siblings have dealt with him being the only member of the family who has tertiary education and a foothold in the urban official world of the capital. I was interested to know why this came about and how it has affected his siblings and the subsequent generation. Pak Taher’s children have grown up in the city of Bengkulu and recently (2006) moved to the provincial town of Kepahiang. His youngest brother’s children have lived their entire lives in Kelobak, rarely leaving the confines of the village, so I planned to ask about how this branch of the family regarded education. The narrative account (*Family Strength, Section 6*) compares and contrasts the experiences of the oldest children from these two branches of the family.

*Family Strength* is a set of stories following several members of Pak Taher’s family. They can stand alone as stories, but as a collection they give much greater insight into Rejang culture because the lives explored and stories recorded cover four generations, a significant expanse of time and history for a group of people who have little written record of their culture. *Family Strength* gives individuals freedom to tell the stories that are important to them and provides perspectives from men and women, old and young that underscore the plurality and polysemy central to authentic cultural rendering.
Themes
As I thought through the broad parameters of my research topic, I planned to explore some binary concepts that emerged in the literature as well as from my observations as I interviewed people and participated in village life. These issues included modern education (structured and formal) and informal education (learning skills from former generations), village life and town life, and gender roles and their inherit expectations and limits. These expressions of culture may enable me to see how change is being expressed within Rejang culture and where some of the external pressures being placed on village people in the early 21st century are coming from. These binary concepts allowed comparisons within the family and also the inclusion of sometimes opposing expressions of life experience within a culture.

Slice of life
The ethnography I planned to write would be a slice of life in the Kabupaten of Kepahiang in the early 21st century. It would be the life observed and revealed of a family group, focusing on two houses, which are home to four families and a widowed matriarch in the village of Kelobak, and a further family living in the nearby town of Kepahiang. These households represent four generations of Rejang people. This research does not claim to be a comprehensive account of Rejang family life, but it gives insight into the daily lives of one Rejang family group as they work and socialize in a remote area of Indonesia.

Within days of arriving in Kelobak, I became aware that I could not do justice to the very broad scale of my initial research plan, so I decided to limit the scope of research to Pak Taher’s immediate family, including his in-laws, Pak Harun and Ibu Sar’oa, and his siblings living on the site of the old family home in Kelobak. This includes his mother, Amaria, his sister Upik and her family and his youngest brother, Alamudin, and his family. This meant Pak Taher’s brothers, Buyung and Bulyan, who live at the northern end of the village, would not be a focus of the research, although they are mentioned in the narrative.

The Limits

Time
The ideal fieldwork situation would be to live in a Rejang community for a year, collecting data, building relationships of trust, learning Rejang language and exploring the topics to be researched. This was never going to be possible because of work and family commitments in Perth, so a plan to make several visits to the region and stay for up to three weeks at a time was agreed upon. I had already made three visits to Bengkulu in 2000, 2001 and 2002, before I began this research project. During the period of formal study between 2004 and 2007, I made five trips to Sumatra, for a total formal fieldwork period of nine weeks.

**Language**

In 1977 I first studied the Indonesian language at Curtin University, Perth, before leaving to work in Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia from late 1977 to mid 1985. While living in Kalbar, Bahasa Indonesia was the main language for trade, teaching and socializing as I worked as a missionary among Dayak people who had become followers of the Christian faith. Between 1985 and 2002, I made several return trips to Indonesia and taught Bahasa Indonesia at Beginners and Intermediate level at Peel TAFE, Mandurah, in 1998 and 1999. Although I do not have "native speaker" fluency, I have a competent command of the language.

Within Indonesia, Bahasa Indonesia is the language of instruction in all government schools. This means that Bahasa is a strongly unifying tool for building national culture, while potentially threatening regional languages and cultures tied to them. Younger generations all speak Indonesian fluently, but I was interested to discover that Pak Taher's children do not speak the Rejang language fluently, although they can understand much of what is said to them. While living in Bengkulu (until 2006) the children visited Kelobak where Pak Taher's family lives and Palengkian, where his in-laws live every few months. Pak Taher is concerned at his children's lack of fluency in the Rejang language. Since his family moved to Kepahiang in 2006, his eldest son, Irving, has had increased opportunities for short visits with his relatives as he completed his final years of senior high school in the town of Ujan Mas requiring him to ride his motorcycle through Kelobak and Palengkian six days a week. His fluency in Rejang language has increased. Pak Taher's younger children, Sisi and Anggie, appear more relaxed visiting their mother's family at Palengkian than their aunt's home in Kelobak. Living just five kilometres from the village may enhance their Rejang language learning further.
Going to Kelobak speaking Indonesian I was confident that I would be able to conduct interviews with anyone who had completed at least two or three years of primary school. Although I spent time collecting Rejang terms and phrases, and practiced using them with Rejang people in the region where I conducted research, it was not practical given time constraints to devote time to learning Bahasa Rejang. Every time I greeted someone or asked a question using Rejang language my faltering efforts were soundly applauded, but limited facility remained a constraint on access to the familiar conversations of everyday life in the household and community. A glossary of Rejang words collected during the fieldwork weeks is included as an appendix to *Family Strength*.

**Limits to the research**

Life in the village continued to ebb and flow over the periods of my visits. Preparing rice fields and gardens for planting engrossed everyone for days and sometimes weeks, depending on the crop to be planted. For generations past, the distinct season of planting and harvesting an annual rice crop dictated some social events like marriage ceremonies and feasts which took place after harvest when food was plentiful. The current generation grows rice on a repeating 100-day cycle, allowing more opportunities for seasons of “plenty” after harvest. This allowed me the privilege of participating in and observing three marriage celebrations at different times of the year. Unfortunately I was not living in the village in August 2007 when Upik’s younger daughter, Mirna, was married. In typically generous style, however, a written invitation to be present at the marriage arrived in Perth just 10 days before the ceremony.

Ibu Upik announced to the family that I could not visit the ginger garden the family was preparing for planting in early 2006. Upik was adamant I would not be able to endure the 2 – 3 hour walk on muddy jungle paths required to visit the new garden her son Budi and son-in-law Amin had reclaimed from encroaching secondary jungle growth. The land was last used as a garden about a decade earlier.

Pak Azman (Upik’s husband) refused to allow me to see him at work as a masseur in his home one evening. I believe this had some connection with spiritual aspects of the practice and how the oil he used for massage was given power through a form of incantation (*dijampi* id.), the wording of which he also declined to reveal to me.
I did not visit the schools attended by children of the family, but did meet at least two of the teachers who lived in Kelobak.

Otherwise, very little that I asked to participate in or to observe was denied. The family took to heart Pak Taher's instruction that they should "open any doors that Ibu Jill needs opened".

Fieldwork: Participant Observation

Geertz says participant observation, the backbone of anthropological research, reveals the subjects' normalness, dissolving their opacity (Geertz 1976 c1960, 1973).

In total I made five trips to Sumatra to complete the data collection for this thesis. These ranged from three weeks to just 48 hours when I was able to incorporate a short stay with Pak Taher's family while I was travelling through the region in October 2007. These trips were made in October 2004, July 2005, February and November 2006 and October 2007 giving me a total of nine weeks and two days in the village and covering various seasons: hot and dry; hot and wet; hot and very wet.

When in Kelobak I stayed with Ibu Upik's family, and at Pak Taher's home during visits to Kepahiang. Almost exclusively I travelled on public transport, allowing me unique opportunities to participate and observe the daily life of Rejang people beyond the Taher family households.⁸

The trappings of my life in Australia as a wife, mother, grandmother, daughter, student, and employee were abruptly interrupted as a result of flying from Perth to Bengkulu, Indonesia. The awkward stage of preparing to leave, knowing that a dramatic transition is coming may be similar to the liminal period in many cultures, particularly the stage between childhood and adulthood, the end of which brings new status and roles (Turner 1977). A successful researcher leaves the familiar and re-locates to experience and learn the new.

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⁸ *Family Strength* Section 7 – The Wedding, includes the story of a bus trip from Bengkulu to Kelobak.
My research experience included watching and recording the daily rhythm of life as an observer and participating with four generations of my host family – regular prayer times, early morning coffee, washing clothes, cooking, shopping, travelling to the gardens to work or guarding the drying coffee beans from the front verandah and rescuing them from predatory chickens or rain showers. It also included times of family and community celebration and times of sadness and disappointment.

The intensity of the experience initially invigorates and heightens a researcher’s senses, then the shock of the absolute change hits. I needed to work through initial feelings of being disconnected because I was unknown, being physically uncomfortable in a tropical climate, adjusting to a new diet, feeling on the “outsider”, experiencing a lack of privacy, being mentally exhausted from learning and listening to a different language, and the constant absorbing, sorting through and analysing the intricacies of life and relationships in the village of Kelobak, not wanting to miss anything.

The messiness of ethnographic research quickly emerged. Conversations were interrupted, people with relevant information were not available or failed to appear at appointed times, someone changed their story considerably during a visit several months after my initial conversation with him. Octogenarian great-grandmother, Amaria, was not the best informant to reveal data concerning current market processes for rice farmers, whereas she proved to be a formidable source of information and understanding concerning details of dress, marriage and birth rituals before the road was upgraded from a track to a graded road through her isolated village in the 1930s.

Having some sense of the broad areas of life about which I was hoping to gather data guided my research, helping me make decisions about whom I talked with while still being open to other possibilities as daily events unfolded. For instance, I talked with Pak Bahrun, Rego Adat (head of customary law) for the village, several times. He has a strong passion for preserving the local flora and has started building a garden boasting several of the magnificent Amorphophallus titanum or Corpse Flower. I spent time walking to the garden to see the plant in bud and more time listening to his stories of Japanese academics who had visited his home in recent years to see his new garden. It was a unique experience to see the endangered plants, but maybe I could have learnt more by questioning him more closely about the current trends towards relaxing the fines for people involved in sex outside of
marriage. However my visit to his garden and interest in his hobby strengthened my relationship with Pak Bahrun, allowing me entrée at a later date to explore more issues of customary law.

Alongside participating in the daily life of the family in Kelobak, robust anthropological research requires intentional observation of daily life. Participation requires total involvement in local activities; but the canons of observation demand a deliberate focused shift to a more detached position where critical analysis can take place. This phase of research is not a daily quota of hours of observation, but typically take place in the context of participation, requiring an almost clinical diagnosis of the activity, or lack of activity, attitudes and language employed by the research subjects.

Often during my stays in Kelobak, I spent hours at a time sitting on the bench seat at the front of Upik’s home with members of the family or guests and sometimes on my own, observing life as it unfolded around me. It felt as though I was almost transparent some days as people went about their lives ignoring my presence while I observed.

- neighbours yelling at their disobedient children;
- a group of small children throwing stones and yelling abuse at Alamudin, Taher's physically handicapped youngest brother, as he limped home from working in the family's rice fields;
- Pak Azman storming out of his bedroom on a Saturday afternoon awakened by granddaughter Keke's crying because of older brother Rindo's incessant teasing. Pak Azman displayed a rush of physical anger as he chased his grandson from the house which made me feel afraid for my own safety.
- Twelve year-old Rindo sitting on the verandah bench tears trickling down his cheeks as he mourned the death of his dog on my first morning in the village.

Observing and recording these happenings enabled me to understand that the words and/or actions of individuals and groups needed to be explored. Their face value was not necessarily sufficient for interpretation. Sometimes there was incongruence between what was observed and the verbal explanations given. I recorded the following statements: “We don't make fun of people.” “Rejang people
are calm and good natured.” “Animals are dirty. They smell. We don’t keep any.” 
Observing and questioning the daily life activities of people highlighted that some of 
these general assertions made by family members about their ‘culture’ as a whole 
may be expressions of personal biases, or generic glosses belying more complex 
realities. Care in recording these situations and analysing them later exposed 
incongruence and confirmed Clifford’s assertion:

Cultures are not scientific “objects”. Culture and our view of “it” are produced 
historically and are actively contested. There is not a whole picture that can 
be “filled in” since the perception and filling of a gap lead to the awareness of 
other gaps (Clifford 1986:18).

Interviews
During my first visit to Kepahiang I met with Pak Taher at his home each afternoon, 
following his return from work at the Bupati’s office. These formal interviews over 10 
days were recorded and helped me begin to understand Pak Taher’s life and work. 
They also enabled me to build a deepening relationship with his wife, Miskarnia, and 
their children, Irving, Sisi and Anggie. My husband, Peter, travelled with me on this 
first trip and we stayed at a modest hotel in Curup, 30 minutes drive from 
Kepahiang.

Peter’s presence on this visit proved to be a bonus for my acceptance in the village 
of Kelobak. Although I was not aware of it at the time, many people from Kelobak 
saw us together and heard we were a married couple with adult children. On 
subsequent visits, I travelled alone, but people in Kelobak and Kepahiang knew I 
was a married woman and afforded me the respect and security which that status 
holds in their culture.

Over the weeks I lived in Kelobak, I conducted formal interviews with a number of 
significant people: Amaria (Taher’s mother), Pak Harun (Taher’s father-in-law), Pak 
Bahrun, the head of customary law (adat) in the villages and Ibu Haini, Taher’s aunt. 
As well as these formal interviews, some of which were recorded, I conducted 
informal interviews with about 40 people – men and women, young and old. Mostly 
these were residents of Kelobak or the neighbouring village of Palengkian where 
Pak Taher’s in-laws live.
On my return visits to Kelobak, repeat interviews with individuals and groups afforded a unique opportunity to record changes in their attitudes, experience, education and work. This was more marked in the younger members of the family group who were high school students (*Family Strength* Section 6). It also gave me the opportunity to meet other members of the family who were not available for interviews during the initial periods of data collection.

**Artefacts and tools**

Throughout the research period I was interested to learn about work methods and tools, including types of fishing nets, woven baskets made for specific uses, harvesting tools and bamboo water carriers. I was amazed that many of the younger generations (those born from the 1970s onwards) had not seen or used some of these tools and didn't know what they looked like. Upik escorted me to visit Pak Uce who still made several types of fishing net until his death in September 2007 and Ibu Kartini who continues to weave the four-legged, lidded box used to carry the paraphernalia required for the *adat* (customary law) marriage ceremony. At the market in Kepahiang I bought a blade used in the *tu'ai*, a finger knife used by past generations to harvest rice. On the journey back to Kelobak, Upik commandeered the small blade and arranged with a fellow traveller to make a *tu'ai* for me. Within a couple of hours the entire household gathered as I was taught how to use the cutter. Pak Azman made a full-size *griegik* (bamboo water carrier) for me, and on a later trip, a miniature *griegik* because the full-size version had cracked in Australia's dry climate. Upik graciously walked with me through wet rice fields and coffee gardens to show me the planting and harvesting processes of various crops and to see *pondoks*, the little huts built for shelter at the coffee gardens and rice fields.

**Photographs**

As well as collecting samples of various tools and equipment, I made a photographic record of life in Kelobak during the fieldwork period. Susan Sontag talks of a photographer “taking” an image, framing it a certain way to include some material and exclude other material (Sontag 2003). My original intention was to only take
candid photographs\(^9\) of the subjects, however, soon after arriving in Kelobak, I realized I needed to be far more flexible as the family group wanted me to take portrait type photographs of them in groups and as individuals, often in their finest clothing. As we talked about the concept of capturing images of them at work and play to express their daily lives so that they would have a record of how they lived in the early 21\(^{st}\) century to reflect on (and hopefully have that collection stimulate memory for them) (Quinney 1996), the whole family welcomed the idea of a photographic essay accompanying their story. I took about 600 images on slide film and digitally. I delivered multiple copies of many of these images to the family on my return visits. As a resource for them I have also created a CD of digital images for each of the family groups. I photographed two entire marriage ceremonies and a thanksgiving ceremony\(^10\).

The Writing Process

**Voices of individuals and the group**

I decided the ethnography I would write would be based around the stories of several individuals in Pak Taher’s family. Using the narrative form, I started with Pak Taher and developed a narrative, not chronological, but building around vignettes of this highly educated, analytical man’s life. Throughout the research process it had been challenging to explore Pak Taher’s emotional responses to situations. Often his answers were clearly articulated statements, with little embellishment of feelings. He portrayed a very controlled persona.

His expression of Rejang culture displays some of the weight he carries as the oldest son of the family, but he also reflects upon the activities and decisions he has made in life that have shaped him. Hence, *Taher* (**Family Strength** Section 2) incorporates vivid vignettes of his story from childhood to present day. At times he interprets his own actions and comments as well on those of other members of his family. His story displays one among a range of expressions of being “Rejang”.

I noticed early in my research that Miskarnia, Taher’s wife, is a gentle, compassionate and emotional woman, still strongly connected to her own family. As

\(^9\) Robert Capa’s photographs of Russians in John Steinbach’s *A Russian Journal* (Steinbeck 1948, 2000) fascinated me and I wanted to try to capture similar images in Sumatra.

\(^10\) Several photographs were published on the Glimpse website (http://www.glimpse.org/Wedding-Traditions-in-Indonesia) and one in Glimpse magazine (Birt 2006)
I began writing her story I found her natal family continued to shape her and give her strength and courage, so I wrote scenes of her life in the context of her family of birth (Family Strength Section 3). Her tenderness and compassion are reflected in how she describes her response to her brother’s death, her father’s illness, her support of Taher and mothering her children. These vignettes allowed me to explore issues of birth, death and grieving, folk medicine and raising children in the context of Miskarnia’s life.

Amaria’s story included considerable personal reflection allowing this illiterate octogenarian a public voice and giving the reader a glimpse of Rejang life as Amaria remembers it from the 1930s onwards (Family Strength, Section 4). She was very keen to tell her story as head of the family and anxious to articulate how she perceives life. Totally unafraid to express a personal opinion she talked boldly about the Dutch and Japanese occupiers as well as about her daughter’s lack of culinary skill.

Living so closely to their children and grandchildren appears to complicate some interpersonal relationships for Azman and Upik at times, (Family Strength, Section 5), but from observing the village situation, this is something that happens in many Rejang families. The need to provide food and shelter for their family drives their hard work in planting, growing and harvesting their crops for food and cash. The details of work, familial relationships, land and money all fit within this couple’s story.

Juxtaposing the daily experience of the two cousins, Irving and Valenti (Family Strength, Section 6) enabled me to compare male and female experience, to consider the impact of town and village living and to look at the place of formal education in present day Rejang culture. Interviewing these young people over three years of their formative adolescence enabled me to observe changes in their worldview and emotional maturity.

The wedding chapter, (Family Strength, Section 7) documents the current processes of marriage in Kelobak. The only written record I have been able to find of the Rejang inai ceremony was a brief comment in Marsden’s work about the dye being used in the preparation of the bride (Marsden 1811:90). The description in this work of the ceremony where the groom and bride’s hands and feet are stained orange may possibly be the first written and photographic documentation on the public record.
Summary

This work of literary journalism aims to allow the family to tell their story, in their own words using their life experience to reveal Rejjang culture to a broad reading audience. The input of theory and historical data expands the work helping situate the culture in wider spatial and temporal setting.

 Academically robust, the data from this research contributes to the body of recorded information about the Rejjang people and their culture. The written record is shaped for a broad readership interested in learning about the culture of the Rejjang people and for Pak Taher's family as a record of their family life and work in the early 21st century. As described above, there are some limiting aspects of the ethnography, but I believe it can stand as an authentic expression of the culture of the Rejjang as they revealed their lives to this researcher over the years.
Chapter 5

How well does literary journalism record ethnography?

"The talented writer will ensure the literary value of the record; the writer with integrity will ensure the accuracy of the record, and the committed literary non-fiction writer will ensure both." Di Websdale-Morrissey 2005

"We ethnographers are storytellers. We are creating contexts for interpretation." Goodall in Writing the New Ethnography 2000

The previous chapters have defined and illustrated the narrative non-fiction genre of writing (Chapter 2) and explored the meaning of ethnography, the conventions on how reliable ethnographic data is collected, and debates surrounding ethnographic representation (Chapter 3). In Chapter 4 I outlined how I conducted my research among the Rejang people of Sumatra and composed the narratives titled, Family Strength, which are presented at the conclusion of this exegesis and represent a literary journalist approach to writing Rejang culture.

As has been established, literary non-fiction is a "border crossing" writing genre, an important tool for recording science, memoir, biography, travel for a wide audience. Ethnography also has a "border crossing" fringe where experimental works are positioned, works including drama, poetry, photography and narrative. Much of the experimental work of ethnography is situated around the reflexivity of the author (Marcus 1986). This case study is an effort to establish the contributions and limits of literary journalism as a writing genre competent to represent culture in a manner that is intellectually robust while appealing to a broad readership.

In this chapter I will evaluate several components of the literary non-fiction work, Family Strength, to demonstrate the possibilities of the genre to record and represent culture: I will deal firstly with the strengths and limitations of the research; then how the literary novelistic techniques used enhance or limit the reader’s engagement with the text. The reflexive stance and ethical decisions of the writer are critically discussed followed by a consideration of how the ‘partial truths’
inherent in a representation (Clifford 1986:7) are dealt with in these narratives. Literary journalism highlights the voice of the author and the subjects, so I will consider how this is accomplished and finally consider the extent to which the narrative genre deployed in Family Strength is able to convey the layered meanings and ambiguities of Rejang experience and to incorporate theoretical issues and background research information that may be important to interpreting Rejang cultural issues.

Research

Rigorous research was conducted to collect reliable data for this case study. The nine weeks of contact with Pak Taher’s family over several visits throughout a period of three years would normally be considered too short for exhaustive anthropological research. For a journalist this is a significant period of time collecting material for one project, although many literary journalists including Sara (2007), Ehrenreich (2002), Conover (2001), and Kremmer (1997, 2002, 2006) all spent at least several months collecting research in the field. Hersey (1946), spent several weeks conducting research in the war ravaged Japanese city of Hiroshima shortly after the end of World War 2 for his acclaimed work Hiroshima.

The limited time I spent in the field meant I was not able to carry research beyond the confines of Taher’s family group, the subject of the case study I was conducting. This meant I was not able to fully research issues such as syncretic behaviour or folk healings in the local expression of Islamic beliefs and I was unable to fully explore gender roles within the extended family, questions of considerable import in a period of dramatic social and economic change. But I was able to observe and record personal interactions between the younger generations and their parents and grandparents. I also observed interchanges between mothers and daughters and daughters-in-law, involving both Rejang family members and an intermarrying Javanese trans-migrant.

Return visits to Kelobak allowed a unique opportunity to observe the development of younger members of the family group, especially the teenagers Mirna, Irving, Rindo and Valenti as they faced significant life decisions about further education, work and marriage. Return visits also allowed me to move beyond simply being a foreign
guest to become a family friend, familiar with the processes of village and family life. This afforded me the opportunity to see elements of life in the family like Azman's angry response to his grandson who had woken him from an afternoon sleep. The ferocity of his physical threat to Rindo during the latter stages of my third sojourn with the family was the only time I felt afraid during the entire research project. I believe Azman's reaction slipped under the radar of his calculated public persona because my presence was no longer an obvious intrusion.

Anthropologists expect to learn the language of the people they are studying, but this would have been an impossibility for me because of time constraints on field work. Being fluent in Bahasa Indonesia gave me direct access to all of the people I interviewed. Some of the group, including Taher's children who have lived most of their lives in Bengkulu, do not speak Bahasa Rejang, while others, like the ancient Amaria, speak limited Indonesian. When interviewing her, Mirna, her 18 year-old granddaughter, acted as interpreter for me. My research showed a predictably diminishing use of Bahasa Rejang in the city of Bengkulu partly as a result of the universal adoption of Bahasa Indonesian for education in the nation but also because of the cultural hegemony of Indonesian as the language of the modern and bureaucratic domain (see Parker 1989). 11

With very limited ability in Bahasa Rejang I found it difficult at times to gather the nuances of meaning of words and phrases used in everyday conversation in the household. Some individuals including Taher, Harun, Azman and Miskarnia were more able than others of the family in helping me fine-tune translations of quotes and comments and understand the varying meanings of Rejang vocabulary. Living totally with another language consuming your thinking, conversation and dreams is mentally tiring and challenging, but it is also a specialized doorway to deeper understanding and communication.

11 Lyn Parker (Parker 1989:399-407) conducted research in Bali and examines how Bahasa Indonesia was introduced to primary school children from Year 1 and used as a unifying tool by the national government. She writes: "Bahasa Indonesia was the most important subject for the purposes of both Government and students. It was taught from Grade One. "The course aimed to teach understanding of and literacy in the language by the end of SD" (page 399). In Sumatra, Bahasa Rejang was prohibited from being taught in school during the early part of President Soeharto's 'New Order' government where a unified national identity was high on the national agenda (see note in Family Strength).
Reading Audience and Novelistic Writing Techniques

This work has the intended readership of a wide group of people beyond the academic community. The structure of the literary journalism narrative around the lives of individuals and nuclear families within the extended family group was planned to help readers build their understanding of an early 21st century family group's expression of Rejang culture. The novelistic writing technique of flash back is used in Taher's story where the narrative starts in the present day then flicks back to his childhood, runs chronologically for a period then jumps forward again. This technique helps keep the reader engaged. It also allows the writer to include in the narrative elements of culture to be explored further, such as the discussion of Rejang tiger mythology at the point in Taher's story where he had a personal encounter with a tiger as a child.

Literary journalism uses direct quotes as a powerful tool of engagement with the reader and to develop the character of its subjects as well as to give them a voice. Hearing Amaria's comments about the Japanese occupying forces and her assertion that her wedding celebrations were more impressive than what happens in Kelobak today helps the reader understand the personality and perspective of this aged widow, and the losses that accompany the gains of social change. Harun's humour and irony shine through in the narrative in which he is quoted directly telling how stable his marriage is now after a volatile incident where his wife, Saro'a, threw a jungle knife at him following a domestic dispute.

Using the novelistic technique of juxtaposition I was able to record the stories of the two cousins, Irving and Valenti, in a way that not only developed their characters for the reader to engage with but also to compare and contrast their life experiences and how Rejang culture is revealed in two very different situations: a young man born and raised in the coastal city to highly educated and strongly motivated parents, and a girl born to marginalized parents, because of their lack of formal education and her father's physical disability, in a village setting where she has had few opportunities.

Novelistic techniques allow the writer to pace the story, develop the characters by revealing personality and strength, or lack of it. They also facilitate the paced introduction of information that contributes to revealing the layers of meaning within the narrative.
Literary journalism’s demand for carefully crafted “wordship”, allows the writer to shape descriptions that paint vivid word pictures for the reader. The account of Amaria at the beginning of her story positions her as an ageing matriarch with increasing physical limitations but a sharp mind and very clear opinions.

None of these elements is ground-breaking, but together they enhance the readability of the work, enticing the reader turn the next page and read on. This writing style places communication with the reader as a high priority. As stated earlier, Family Strength does not claim to be an exhaustive representation of Rejang culture, rather it offers a slice of life in Kelobak village, written in a manner that a general readership can engage with and that will add to their personal learning.

In their collection of experimental ethnographic works, Ellis and Bochner (Ellis 1996) included a narrative by Richard Quinney in which he traces his father’s 1924 adventure driving from Nebraska to San Francisco. The narrative is based on his father’s letters and photographs from the period. This work tracks closely with the requirements of literary journalism. Quinney uses quotes from letters and postcards his father wrote to family members during his travels to give a voice to his father, who died 25 years before Quinney wrote this piece. The direct quotes also help retain the reader’s interest and modulate the pace of the narrative. Quinney uses his father’s photographs to authenticate what once was in expressing the reality of his father’s experiences and the places he visited. As Barthes argues in his book Camera Lucida (Barthes 1993, c1981), a photograph does not necessarily call up the past but "attest(s) that what I see has indeed existed" (Barthes 1993, c1981). Quinney sees “wonderment” in his ethnography, saying it is "about the ecstasy that comes in looking between the cracks, beyond the veil...evidence of time past and time passing" (Quinney 1996). In reviewing Quinney’s work, Ellis comments on the importance of photographs in evoking and validating memory (Ellis 1996).

I used colour photographs throughout Family Strength to augment the reader’s understanding of the situation in Kelobak and Kepahiang; the architecture of the family homes and huts in rice fields and gardens; people at work – shopping, drying coffee, planting, weeding, cooking, harvesting – and socializing, as well as individual portraits of people crafting products like the bamboo water carrier (griesik rej.), weaving fishing nets and baskets. A pictorial record of marriage ceremonies and preparations adds visual information to the narrative.
Richard Quinney's simple voice, telling a gentle narrative, reflexively includes his personal journey - mourning his father, his heritage, his family and the family farm of his youth – while recounting his father's adventure of pre-depression USA. He highlights the richness of mundane, everyday life. *Family Strength* has several of these characteristics – a simple voice relaying a gentle narrative with the storyteller interacting with the characters and action; the richness of mundane, everyday life recorded pictorially and through the subjects' stories. Quinney's work may be considered a legitimate expression of literary journalism based on the definitions by Kramer (2005) et al. Ellis and Bochner's (1996) inclusion of Quinney's work in their collection of alternative forms of ethnography allow it a place also within a genre that is continually seeking space to include exploratory records of culture.

Anthropologist Tsing (Tsing 1993, 2005) conveys layers of meaning in her work and includes passages of narrative prose telling stories of individuals, but based on the criteria outlined earlier, Tsing's monographs may not be classed as literary journalism. Anthropologist Abu-Lughod's work about life with a group of Bedouin women (Abu-Lughod 1993), uses the layered effect of revealing and building on understanding by incorporating information from other sources and reflecting on the gathered data within the creative narrative. Although Wolf uses this layering of revealed meaning, her work in Section 3 of *A Thrice Told Tale* (Wolf 1992) questionably fits the strict criteria of literary journalism because of her fictional ending where she assumes a position and actions for the characters of her work. Her position on the other hand finds resonance in post-modern approaches within the repertoire of anthropology's "persuasive fictions" (Strathern 1987) which bridge the cultural gap between subjects and audience. Literary journalism's requirements for no invented characters and exact quotes may paradoxically be too restrictive for some anthropologists.

**Reflexivity**

Throughout *Family Strength* I included elements of reflexivity and the influence of my life experience and training, including living in a remote rural area of Kalimantan Barat, Indonesia from 1977 to 1985, the birth of my sons in villages in Kalimantan Barat, and my late arrival to academic study. My training in Christian theology and

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[12] The stated criteria for literary journalism include documentable subject, exhaustive research, writing style, voice and underlying meaning.
work among new followers of the faith in Indonesia, the Philippines and Papua New Guinea, where people had a strong animistic background, had prepared me well to explore the spiritual life and practices of the Kelobak family. This transparency enables the readers to gain insights into the author’s positioning. It may also remind the reader of the author’s presence, sometimes silent, sometimes vocal, and encourage interrogation of my relationship with the family during the prolonged exposure to their everyday lives. This reflexive stance is positively valued in both literary non-fiction and ethnography (Clifford 1986; Ricketson 2004).

Partial truths and ethics

The anthropological issues revolving around the “partial truths” of representation within a constructed narrative were addressed in Chapter 3. Literary theory and post-modern thought challenge the notion of “the” truth, considering the constructed narrative to be “a” truth defined by time and place and the openness of individual characters in the narrative (Clifford 1986; Marcus 1998). One example of the ethical complexities involved in determining what and how to represent potentially sensitive subjects was highlighted when significant changes emerged in one man’s account of a ritual at Mt. Kaba, the active volcano near Kelobak. During an early research visit he described to me in detail how the family made offerings of doves at the volcano for several consecutive years in order for the family to move from poverty to prosperity. During a later visit he denied this, saying his family would never do such a thing. I assume that this was because the offerings were strongly connected with the Rejang’s animistic practices before they embraced Islam in the 1860s (Jaspan 1964), and that mixing the old forms of spirit worship was not acceptable to current Muslim teachers. In his later rendition, he described how the Rejang now invoke the name of an Islamic ‘saint’ when they make offerings at the volcano and this practice, although it still reflects syncretistic activity, is condoned by the Imams. Literary journalism allows for a written text to include such contradictory accounts caused by a subject’s ambivalence towards the researcher or from being influenced by their inaccurate memory or alternatively to exclude them. Excluding the material from Family Strength may solve a problem of representation for a literary journalist writing for a general audience, but an ethnographic account would need to be transparent about the issues of inclusion / exclusion and changed stories when writing for an academic audience.
Renowned literary non-fiction practitioner John Hersey acknowledges, non-fiction writers hold authorial power when they do not include some details of their research material. He says this position does not make their work “fiction”. Websdale-Morrissey (2005) attests that the writer who adds extra imagined information to embellish the narrative, crosses the line into fiction. In holding Hersey’s position, I made an ethical decision not to include the conflicting information about the rituals at Mt. Kaba in the narrative. I believe further research, including conversations with the Islamic teachers in Kelobak, Kepahiang and Curup would be valuable and asking a wider group of people in the village about the ritual is required to unravel the details of this issue. Including it in the narrative at this point may cause the man who told the story some angst within the family and may confuse a popular audience because the recorded information is ambiguous. This ethical decision of exclusion is another expression of the narrative being a partial truth.

As Harrington says:

“The complexity of the journalist’s ethical situation is only compounded in the case of narrative journalism. In some ways the work of immersion journalists resembles the work of anthropologists... Their constituency is their subjects, first and always. I believe narrative journalists should operate under an ethical code similar to that of anthropologists.” (Kramer 2007:170)

An ethical journalist has similar responsibility to be on guard to ensure the subject is not harmed by publication of details in the narrative (Websdale-Morrissey 2005).

Voice

As well as the author having a voice in the narrative, literary non-fiction allows subjects to have a voice on the stage of the public record by recording the stories of individuals. The genre does not create composite characters but records the stories of everyday people with power and dignity, people like the aged Amaria who is illiterate and increasingly confined to her home because of her physical limitations, and Valenti, marginalized within the family structure, but given a voice to tell her story. Literary journalism allows for these stories to be challenged or problematized through the juxtaposition of conflicting research material or the stories of other people with different perspectives or memories. In Family Strength for example,
Pak Taher states his desire for Bahasa Rejang to be re-introduced to the school curriculum as a means of re-vitalizing Rejang culture at a grass roots level. This position seems incongruous with what he told me of his family situation where his own children are not fluent in Bahasa Rejang showing some disparity in his stated and lived values.

Miskarnia is gentle, gracious and unimposing, but a strong compassionate woman, expressing a side of Rejang culture not seen during a quick visit to a market or sitting in a group on the front verandah of a village home. Her story of her brother, Win’s, death following an accidental fire in Jakarta was revealed after several hours of conversation during which our friendship and trust of one another developed. I believe this foundational relationship gave her confidence to tell the story, allowing the written narrative to give her a public voice to express elements of Rejang culture not able to be collected and analysed through completing a list of pre-written questions that a travel writer might prepare. Miskarnia’s grief, the intensity of her personal physical pain which caused her to faint when she initially heard of Win’s death and a second time when she subsequently viewed his coffin and the on-going loss she continues to experience in daily life reveal telling details of how Rejang people deal with death. Disclosing this information required courage on Miskarnia’s part and perseverance, respect and humility on the researcher’s part.

Layers of understanding

In *Family Strength* each section includes cultural material that amplifies the meaning within the narrative. Pak Taher’s personal story revealed an encounter with a tiger when he was a young boy. Learning of that event led directly to further research concerning tiger mythology and the inclusion of examples of Rejang people from other areas interacting with tigers dating back to the late 1700s as documented by William Marsden (Marsden 1811) through to present day research conducted by Bakels in the Kerinci province of Sumatra, north of Bengkulu (Nas 2003; Bakels 2003). Including this background material which revealed that tigers are considered the keepers of community harmony, helps explain Taher’s fear of his

---

13 Miskarnia quoted the Rejang proverb, "If you lose your parents, you lose your head; if you lose your wife or husband, you lose your feet; if you lose your older sibling, you lose meaning," to highlight the impact of death on the family. She summarized her feelings: "Rasanya seperti hilang pegangan" ('It felt as though losing a mainstay').
parents' possible anger at his disobedience when he went into the jungle with his friend. Further research may help reveal the articulation of orthodox Islam and secular modernity with this and other traditional Rejang beliefs and practices.

The effect of a rapidly changing urban environment on how customary law (adat) is upheld is described in Amaria's story. Taher relates how a young couple in the village of Kelobak during the 1970s had to make a blood sacrifice in front of the head of customary law (adat), then visit each house in the village, painting the blood of the sacrificed animal on the door frame or steps of each house as they both asked for forgiveness from the householders after they were discovered to be involved together in a sexual relationship outside of marriage. The event was so traumatic for the young man concerned that he left the village shortly after the ritual and has never returned. Although customary law remains important in Rejang culture, how it is implemented in the coastal city of Bengkulu is very different in the early 21st century. Limited research showed that leaders of customary law in suburban Bengkulu in 2006, only require a goat to be sacrificed for such a transgression in the contemporary period. There are so many young people practising sex outside of marriage, the leaders of customary law cannot deal adequately with them, so the fine is limited to the purchase of a goat and the guilty parties no longer have to ask forgiveness from each household in the locality. Further research looking at how these changing practices are connected with pre-Islamic beliefs and orthodox Islamic beliefs as well as 'modern' ideologies would be important to understanding contemporary Rejang culture. This example in particular is of significance for understanding how relationships between individuals and the community are broken and restored.

A third example of the layers of meaning woven into the narrative comes from the interaction of family members through "joking" or "teasing".14 The narrative describes the events around several situations where Javanese daughter-in-law Mira and niece Valenti are the focus of what appears to be harsh criticism delivered in a joking manner. I was able to observe how Mira and Valenti seemed to be pushed further to the margins of the family. Conversations with Mira revealed how her initiative to try doing things like cooking and cleaning differently or dreaming of running her own business were squashed. It is a strength of literary journalism to include in the narrative the personal impact of elements of culture. Literary

14 Radcliffe-Brown (1952) explores "joking relations" as a mechanism of social control and cultural management.
journalism allows the writer to explore and record the personal impact of this type of action, giving insight into the hidden lives of individuals. Another strength of literary journalism is the focus it gives to personal insight where academic ethnography has a greater focus on structure and the cultural framework within which individuals live their lives (Fox 1991; Abu-Lughod 1991).

Summary

Carolyn Ellis (1996) states exploratory ethnography is dangerous, political, personal, risk taking, but she implores writers to write from the heart as well as the head. Her plea is for authentic ethnography.

Ethnographic writing demands more than biography, memoir or travel writing. Literary approaches can make a useful contribution to ethnographic writing (Ellis 1996; Harrington 1997; Strathern 1990; Tyler 1987). Literary journalism as a writing genre pays attentions to a popular audience as its particular calling. It requires immersion research of a documentable subject (Kramer 2007), incorporation of novelistic writing techniques (Kerrane 1997), giving voice to subjects and encouraging the author to include reflexive information (Gutkind 2005). Literary non-fiction reveals the layers of meaning as the narrative unfolds (Kramer 2005; Ricketson 2004). It has a place as a means of 'writing culture' (Clifford and Marcus 1984), accessible to a general audience.
Chapter 6

Conclusion

1 November 2006

Hi Jill,

... I've made a few revisions to your piece, which I'm attaching at the end of this email. Most of my changes relate to grammar, word choice and sentence clarity/flow. I made some cuts when you were describing the actual wedding day as I felt that some of the details got a bit tedious. In fact, I'm hoping you might be willing to revise the second half of the piece a bit to inject more of "you" into the narrative. The first half of the piece, describing the bus ride and the hand/feet-dyeing ritual is very vivid. But then after that, the story takes on almost an anthropological tone as you describe the wedding day. I don't think any major revision is required, but I'm just wondering if you can add some more personal details to this part of the piece. For example, what conversations did you have with other guests? What did the food taste like? How did the tone of the event compare to weddings you've attended back home?

Also, you'll notice highlighted a few lines that discussed gender roles. I'm wondering if you can at some point during the story provide a general overview of gender roles and how they relate to cultural and religious practices. You threw in hints here and there, but without a more comprehensive understanding of gender roles, I'm worried readers might take away incomplete or inaccurate understandings.

If you take issue with any of my changes, please let me know. Keep in touch!
all the best,
Kerala (Goodkin 2006)

As a journalist and an ethnographer I was keen to submit a section of the experimental writing for this thesis to a publisher. "The Wedding", (Section 7 of Family Strength), was written following a field trip in early 2006. I approached Glimpse Magazine about publishing the article and several photographs. This email (above) from Kerala Goodkin, Editor in Chief at The Glimpse Foundation, offered some telling editorial advice: "...inject more of 'you' into the narrative"; "the first half of the piece...is very vivid. But then after that, the story takes on almost an anthropological tone as you describe the wedding day" and finally "you threw in hints here and there, but without a more comprehensive understanding of gender roles, I'm worried readers might take away incomplete or inaccurate understandings".
Goodkin's editorial comments highlight the tensions of writing ethnography using literary journalism. A factual detailed account of an event in the research situation can be tedious and may not produce engaging narrative for a general readership. Revealing a paradox, developing a character, painting a vivid picture of the situation can all help a reader engage on more than an intellectual level and can produce a narrative a general readership could both connect with and learn from.

Reflecting on Goodkin's comments about requiring sufficient detail to enable a reader to grasp the significance of some specific behaviours, I realized how much I had assumed about the general public's understanding of an Islamic, Indonesian culture. A writer must carefully consider the volume, depth and quality of the background material that is introduced into the narrative, ensuring the reader has sufficient information to build their understanding as the narrative unfolds. Carefully constructed literary journalism of longer works, including books, allows a writer to accomplish this, and the immersion style of research required by the genre provides the quality of information needed to produce such a narrative.

Following two revisions where I addressed the gender issues and added reflexive comments comparing this wedding ceremony with my son's marriage three years previously, Glimpse published the article along with twelve photographs on its web site in November 2006 (http://www.glimpse.org/wedding-Traditions-in Indonesia). Their target audience, young adults interested or involved in cross-cultural living and study, fitted well with my goal to write ethnography for a broader readership than the academic community.

Within academia border-crossing writing continues to develop. Julianne Schultz, Professor of Public Culture at Griffith University and founding editor of the Griffith Review, the University's award-winning topical literary and public affairs quarterly, described in detail how the editorial team developed a framework editorial policy for the magazine prior to the first edition. Schultz remarked at a conference on the topic of First Person Narrative at the Australian National Library in Canberra on May 10, 2008 (Schultz 2008), that the editorial staff wanted a combination of dense academic work and some expression where the academic truth would interconnect with society in general: "the personal resonances and echoes of the issues as they played out in the lives of people" would attract a broader readership than academia. Schultz explained this as "emotional depth in dry academic terrain". While the
Griffith Review attracts a mostly academically educated audience, their editorial policy allows border-readers and writers the opportunity to explore.

There is an unstable penumbral middle ground between academic writing and journalism that focuses on communicating to a more general readership. The academic schools of journalism and anthropology both have proponents who push the boundaries of their fields. Academics including anthropologists Margaret Mead (1943) and Colin Turnbull (1963), made forays into these shadow lands with their academic writing. Journalists, including the anthropologically trained Ted Conover (2001), record culture for readers in this border-stretching territory, a place where the deep thinking and theory of academia, which is grounded in particular research, intersects with the richness of daily life as expressed by individuals and groups in local communities.

Like two over-lapping circles of influence, journalism and anthropology reach out to a wider reading audience by pushing the boundaries of acceptable writing within their schools. The pull from within their own institutional spheres constrains their border-crossing experiments. In the case of literary journalism, the length of time for conducting research and acquiring language expertise and the limited background of the general audience limit possibilities for developing subject matter. For ethnography, the demands of academic rigour and requirements to engage with theoretical questions of the discourse affect style. Tensions around representation, partial truths and persuasive fictions pull at all those who are exploring the writing borderlands.

Considering Schultz’s and Goodkin’s requirements for thoroughly researched, engaging narrative, Family Strength may have a space in the realm of published work for a general readership. Goodkin’s willingness to publish a section of Family Strength confirms the suitability of literary journalism for her target audience of young adults involved in living and learning about other cultures. Schultz’s editorial position, seeking written work that breaks free from the dense theoretical work of academia and helps connect the realities of academic theory with everyday life, also allows a space for literary journalism with its emphasis on writing about the mundane things of life and culture for a more general readership.

Literary journalism takes seriously the identity and voice of those whose stories it tells. It handles their lives carefully, communicates openly and presents their
experience sensitively. It also allows for a variety of positions, from having the writer fully visible and acting in the narrative, to a more transparent position where the writer has an assumed presence. Its stance also accords with ethnography's requirement that the writer be transparent about her engagement within the research culture.

Professor Schultz sees the need for quality narrative that grounds theory in the richness of daily life. Pak Taher, as Head of Cultural Development in Kepahiang, has a strong desire to see Rejang culture revitalized. Systematically researching and writing the life stories of individuals and families within such communities for a general audience adds breadth and depth to the elements of culture and change already on the public record. Literary journalism as a border-crossing genre is a strong contender to contribute to recording these types of narrative.
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Part Two

Family Strength

A Rejang Family in Sumatra
Ibu Upik, Pak Taher’s older sister, collects edible snails from a rice field (sawah) in Kelobak.
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Maps & Diagrams

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Pak Taher slowed the car as a bus going in the opposite direction pulled off the narrow road. Passengers from the Lubuk Linggau bus clambered stiffly to the road. An older man with glasses, a sprightly woman wearing a *jilbab*, a Muslim head covering, and a stocky girl looking pale and upset. Juggling packages they crossed the yard of a pink cement rendered house. The bus ground through its gears escaping the pall of diesel exhaust fumes it left behind.

People came from a two-storey wooden house at the back of the cement house. A wizened grandma, barefoot and stooped, greeted the bus arrivals. The little girl was enveloped in the arms of a young woman amazingly similar to the child. Stocky, high broad cheekbones and short straight black hair.

Taher said nothing. He made a u-turn and stopped outside the pale blue house. The sun was dropping behind the long ridge to the northwest, its low slanting rays highlighting the family reunion on the front verandah.

After greeting his mother, sister and brother-in-law, Taher introduced me, their house guest. Several other people silently materialize to see who the foreigner was and why she was in Kelobak. Surveying the gathering, Taher announced: “This is Ibu Jill. She is our guest. Whatever doors she needs opened, you are to open them. She is here to collect information to help her write our family’s story. Whatever she...”
needs, you are to provide for her.”

Then he was gone and I felt quite vulnerable, alone in a crowd.

I initially met Taher in Bengkulu, Sumatra (see map adjoining page) in January 2002 through a friend who was teaching English in the city. Taher worked with the education department in Bengkulu. I already had an interest in the Rejang of Sumatra through research on the internet and had made trips to the region in 2000 and 2001. Over sweet black coffee at his home we talked about Rejang culture and how it is changing. I scribbled copious notes.

Learning about people and writing their stories had been more than a hobby to me. I had worked closely with nationals in Papua New Guinea, the Philippines and Indonesia over two decades before returning to Australia in 1991. Some of my stories and photographs were published in Melbourne’s Sunday Herald Sun and the Baptist Advocate in Perth. Following a watershed decision I studied full-time as a mature age-student completing a Graduate Diploma in Journalism at Murdoch University in Perth, Western Australia during 2003. For the course unit on literary journalism I wrote the story of Nazira, an Afghan refugee living in Perth. The depth of research required and the power of the narrative form to write more than travel or memoir captured my imagination. Nazira’s story fed my passion for understanding culture and giving marginalized people a voice through writing their stories using the narrative non-fiction writing genre to reach a broader readership. To hone my understanding and skills I enrolled in the Master of Philosophy degree to study the suitability of narrative or creative non-fiction to record ethnography and demonstrate the validity of the genre to write culture (Clifford and Marcus 1986) for a reading audience wider than academia. Taher’s family group would be the slice of life of Rejang culture that I would observe and participate in to collect the data I needed.

In October 2004 after several days reviewing literature at the library of
The Rejang-Lebong Region of Bengkulu Province
the National University of Singapore and the National Archives in Singapore, I travelled to Sumatra again and spent two weeks in the mountain towns of Kepahiang and Curup. Taher had recently moved to Kepahiang to work as the Legal Advisor to the Bupati (Head) of the newly formed Kabupaten (Regency) of Kepahiang. With my husband, Peter, I travelled daily from Curup to Kepahiang (30 – 40 minutes drive) by public transport to spend time with Taher and his family. He was excited about his family being the focus for a study of Rejang culture and an academic work.

As the head of the family group he agreed that I would have access to members of his family, live with them in the village of Kelobak, interview and photograph the extended family, then write the stories of the group looking for key indicators of culture and change. During those weeks I spent many hours interviewing Taher and his wife Miskarnia, recording their story.

Now in February 2005 I was meeting Taher’s family in their village in Sumatra and I was ready for the next stage of the research.

Living in an Indonesian village wasn’t a new experience for me. As a young married couple, Peter and I lived in the Kabupaten of Sanggau in Kalimantan Barat for a decade (1975 – 1985) training leaders among the local Dayak people. Our sons were both born in Kalimantan. The younger one arrived six weeks prematurely while we were living in the remote village of Sungai Kunyit on the banks of the mighty Kapuas River. Living conditions back then in Kalbar were more humble than the situation of the Rejang people I had come to learn from living in Sumatra’s mountains in the early 21st century.

The main road from Bengkulu to Lubuk Linggau at the junction of the Trans-Sumatran Highway, is a life line for trade and travel. It rises steeply from the narrow coastal plain east of Bengkulu twisting and turning up the jungle clad Barisan mountain range to a wide plateau, the Upper Musi valley, that forms the catchment area for the Musi River. Kepahiang (500 metres above sea level) lies at the southern end of a 40 kilometre by 5 – 6 kilometre
The Upper Musi Valley

Not to Scale

Drawn by Jill Birt
wide fertile rift valley between the western and eastern ranges of the Barisan Mountains. The steep slopes of the active volcano, Bukit Kaba (1938 metres), form a natural barrier on the north east edge of the plateau. Parallel to the ranges on the western perimeter of the plateau, the Musi River runs from north of Curup (620 metres a.s.l.) to Kepahiang where it gouges its way through volcanic rock at a geological bottleneck then winds its way south-east to Palembang before emptying into the South China Sea near Bangka Island.

Before the main road was built, the Rejang lived in isolation for centuries. They believe they are descended from one of four princely brothers, Buddhist monks descended from the Majapahit king in Java, who came to the area hundreds of years ago.¹ Each of the brothers founded a line of the Rejang people: the Rejang-

¹
Lebong around Muara Anam in the upper Musi valley, the Pesisir group living on the coastal plain, the group east of Curup and the Kepahiang group. Folklore says a Javanese princess of the Majapahit Kingdom came to the area in the 13th century. British explorers, including Captain Salmond (1818), travelled through the area during the era when the East India Company governed the region from Fort Marlborough at Bencoolen (now Bengkulu) on the coast (1685 – 1825) trading pepper and coffee. When the Dutch took over colonial rule in 1825 they forged inland opening a roadway.

Fort Marlborough, built in the early 1700s in Bengkulu, was the seat of British colonial power until 1825.
It was around this time that Muslim evangelists from the Minangkabau people of Padang, travelled over the mountains north of Muara Aman, deep in the northern reaches of the Upper Musi Valley, intent on converting the animistic Rejang to Islam. These men married Rejang women and were slowly accepted by the community along with the religion they espoused. About seven generations back, the names of Taher’s ancestors on his genealogy changed to include Muslim names as the family began to embrace the Islamic faith. In the early 1920s Taher’s grandfather, Binjar Alam, travelled to an Islamic madrasa (school) connected with a mosque in Bukit Tinggi to be discipled by the Imam. That journey is now a 19-hour bus trip. Eighty years ago we can only imagine how arduous the expedition on foot must have been.

During the Dutch colonial era the Rejang-Musi sub-district encompassed seven marga – a region administered by a pasirah (leader) elected by the people in a popular vote. Kepahiang housed the administration of this sub-district (onderafdeeling). The marga were listed as Padang Wak Tanding, close to Lubuk Linggau, Selupu
Four generations of Taher’s family currently live in Kelobak, a desa (village) of 256 pintu (doors = houses) with a population of about 2000, six kilometres north of Kepahiang and 90 minutes drive from the provincial capital, Bengkulu.

My research included formal and informal interviews in the Indonesian language with more than 60 people, many of whom are closely related to Taher and his wife, Miskarnia. For nine weeks during a 25 month period I was privileged to live with Taher’s family, participating in and observing daily life, learning new skills and some Rejang language, photographing individuals and groups as they worked and socialised. Their hospitality and generous spirit have enriched my life.

This work is part of their story.
Genealogy Chart of the Descendants of Muning Keraing
The crowd spilled into the narrow street. Several Indonesian government workers in uniform milled around a table set up at the side of the road. The majority of the guests were dressed in fine Muslim clothes – men in silk batik shirts and the women, many wearing the tudung (head covering), wore long-line tunics over trousers or long skirts. Taher greeted us warmly as we clambered from the taxi, crumpled, grimy and wind swept, dressed in travel clothes – the type that dry overnight in a hotel room. We were way under-dressed for this event. Three hundred people came to the house over two days. Taher and his wife, Miskarnia, the hosts, spent the entire time with their guests because in Rejang culture teams of relatives and friends prepare and serve food and drinks, monitor security and supervise the entertainment to free the hosts so they can be with their guests.

Guests mingle in the tarop, the temporary shelter constructed for Pak Taher’s family Thanksgiving celebrations in 2005.
We’d come to join the family’s Thanksgiving celebration. This was the first event they had hosted in their new home in Kepahiang, where Taher had recently started work as the Legal Advisor to the newly appointed Bupati in Indonesia’s newest Kabupaten (regency), Kepahiang.

Events started the day before with food preparations, building the temporary stage and roof (tarop) in the front yard of Taher’s home and through into the neighbour’s yard.

During the evening the Imam from the mosque over the road, Mesjid Al Nur, came to lead prayers with Taher’s extended family. Taher was a little upset because Irving, his 15 year-old son, wasn’t with them but out somewhere with friends. The Imam prayed, thanking Allah for the children and asking him to bless and protect the family.

The solemnity of his prayer was broken when the telephone rang. “You’d better come. Irving has been hurt.”

Taher picked his way through the gathered clan sitting on the floor, trying not to let the rising panic racing through his body show. What was Allah doing? They were gathered to acknowledge His goodness and ask his help as a family. How could this happen?

Mohamed Taher was born on 7 November 1960 at the family home in Kelobak. The fourth son - the first one to live longer than a few months, he had a sister, Upik Suriama, seven years older. A sister between him and Upik had also died. Four more brothers followed Taher’s arrival.
Three survived childhood but Kacil died when he was about two years old.

By the age of nine, Taher had moved in with his grandmother, Mracaman, living in the old house at the back of the family property. It was quieter than at home with his parents and brothers and sister. His father, Samsudin, was Kepala Desa (head of the village) which meant many visitors at all times of the day. Grandma’s house was calmer. In the evenings he often sat and read by the light of a Strong King (pressure lamp). After reading a book about President Sukarno, he wanted to be an engineer like the President, his new hero. Bapak Sukarno became a great man from very humble beginnings. He would do that too.

The only road through the village ran past the two-storey wooden family home. It was sealed when Taher was young, making it useable all year round, even during the wet season, opening the way for people and goods from the outside world to enter his secluded valley world. A few wealthy people in Kelobak bought cars. All types of mass-produced plastic wares began to replace articles the Rejang had made for generations from natural fibres found in the jungle. The bamboo griegik used

Almost unknown! Children in Kelobak had never seen a griegik until Pak Azman (left) created a water carrier from a length of bamboo. Ibu Kartini (above left) shows Ibu Upik an intricately woven bakul serih long used in Rejang marriage ceremonies.
for carrying water disappeared when plastic jerry cans arrived. Woven baskets, created by generations of women in varying sizes and shapes for specific tasks were made less frequently. The four-footed bakul serib used in marriage ceremonies became rare. Only Kartini in Kelobak now makes the ornate lidded box.

For Taher the daily rhythm of life meant busy early mornings before school feeding the hens and ducks. By the middle of the day classes were over and he was home again. Sometimes he’d cut grass for the family’s two water buffalo or collect pujuk porong (young fern leaves) for the evening meal from along the banks of the Durian River. It was always more fun doing things like that with a group of friends. Some days he’d fetch the ducks from the sawah (wet rice fields) behind the house over the Durian River. Often he’d play soccer in the rice fields after harvest with his friends. They used a Jeruk Bali (pomelo) for a ball. It hurt their bare feet like mad but was great fun. Many days he gave up games with his friends to study and read. He was always the top of his class at Sekolah Dasar (primary school), driven by his desire to be clever and overcome poverty.

By the end of his first year at school, Taher was confident using Bahasa Indonesia. Early in the year it had been a bit confusing as they only used Bahasa Rejang at home. On the first day of school the teacher announced to the assembled students: “Mari, ikut Bapak.” (Come, follow me.) Taher was very confused. ‘ikut’ was the Rejang word to cradle a baby (gendong in Bahasa Indonesia). How could the students do that?

Pak Sokidi, a teacher from Java, taught Taher for four years (Yrs 2 – 5). Most days before class finished he read stories of Indonesia’s military and social heroes to his class. These stories inspired Taher, seeding his dreams to be an influential leader.

In Year 6 he was the top student in the district and second in the entire Province of Bengkulu. His friends respected him but often called him a kutu buku (bookworm). That didn’t bother him. There was plenty of time for adventure as well as books. Like the trip he made to Curup to sell two gold
signet rings his mother gave him because he wanted to buy a guitar. Initially the Chinese gold merchant refused to buy the tiny rings which weighed a mere five grams because he thought Taher had stolen them, so Taher found an old man from his home village, Kelobak, who was living in Curup to vouch for him.

And there was the time he and his friend, Ujang Amri, went searching for bamboo to make a birdcage. Eight-year-old Taher wanted to have a tiny swallow, just like the big boys in the village. If he caught one, he’d need a cage to keep the bird. He could make it if he had the special bamboo from the jungle across the river.

One afternoon Taher and his friend quietly defied their parents and slipped out of the village, through the sawah fields and down the slope to the Musi River. With racing hearts they crossed the bamboo bridge over the fast-flowing rocky river and started down the path that wound through the dark jungle to the coffee gardens. They’d never been this far on their own before. It was dangerous and they knew it.

Not far ahead was a thick clump of the special bamboo they needed. Quickly they broke off lengths of the fine grass. The leaves of a nearby tree began rustling. Then the whole tree shuddered.

Something heavy thudded to the ground. Horror transformed the boys’ faces. Taher looked at his friend.

“Run. Quick!”

Chasing each other they scuttled through the tall grass, slip-slid down the bank of the Musi and onto the narrow bamboo footbridge, gasping for breath as they tried to keep their balance. Light rain started falling, even though the sun was shining. They knew they shouldn’t be out in hujan panas (hot rain). Adults always told them it makes
young children sick, but they had no choice. They needed to reach safety. The village was still 500 metres away through the waving green rice. Would they make it?

And then they were there. On the verandah. Safe.

But a clandestine small-boy adventure had implications beyond the obvious. The balance and harmony of the whole village could be jeopardized.

“We never saw the tiger, but we’re sure it was there. We were in serious trouble. The tiger could kill us. Our parents would be angry. We were forbidden to go so far from the village on our own,” Taher said.

The Sumatran tiger (*L. tigris sumatrae*) permeates Rejang culture and mythology. From early records through to current day, Rejang history is peppered with stories of tigers interacting with villagers.

British historian William Marsden recorded statistics of deaths by tigers in his 1811 book *“The History of Sumatra”*. As Governor of the East India Company’s outpost based at Lais on the west coast of Sumatra where the British had been trading coffee and pepper since 1685, Marsden focused his study of Sumatran cultures on the Rejang people of the area. His work records the stories of village people encountering tigers and includes descriptions of tiger traps built by farmers to protect their villages. He says of tigers: “The tigers prove to the inhabitants, both in their journeys and even their domestic occupations, most fatal and destructive”. The East India Company paid a bounty on tiger heads during Marsden’s governorship, but found the Rejang people reluctant to kill the tiger.

Anthropologist Marvin Jaspan says there is more to the tiger’s impact on the lives of the Rejang than simply its powerful and lethal hunting skills. Power and wisdom are attributed to the tiger. Ancestral tigers, recognised by their four-toed paw print (instead of the normal five toes), are known as the ‘guardians of public morality’.

Taher had heard of four-toed tiger prints outside a home in his village. They showed the family had disobeyed village *adat* (customary law) and they
were punished. Like rising early morning mist reveals the mountain ridge across the road from his home, he began to realise that his disobedience might have serious implications for all of Kelobak. The tiger knew he’d been disobedient. Would the whole village have to pay?

Bakel’s research into the place of tigers in communities in Kerinci, north of Bengkulu Province reveals hunter-gatherers perception of the tiger is based on animistic folk perceptions of nature where the tiger is divine and worthy of respect, not an enemy.⁵

Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles arrived in Bengkulu (Bencoolen to the English from 1685 – 1825 during the East India Company’s rule in the region), as Governor of the distant outpost in early 1818. His diary records that the area east of the town “abounded with tigers and elephants; one of the villagers told me that his father and grandfather were carried off by tigers, and there is scarcely a family that has not lost some of its number to them. In many parts the people would seem to have resigned the empire to them, and regarded them as sacred; they believe in transmigration, and call them their nene or grandfather. On the banks of one of the rivers on this coast upwards of a hundred people were carried off by tigers during the last year. When a tiger enters a village, the foolish people frequently prepare rice and fruits, and placing them at the entrance as an offering to the animal, conceive that, by giving him this hospitable reception, he will be pleased with their attention, and pass on without doing them harm”.

Later in the year Raffles wrote of a journey through the jungles south-east of Bengkulu and how his entourage returned from Manna along the beach-front. At times they were forced to divert through the jungle because of rough surf and high tides.

“The coolies, in passing through the forest, came upon a tiger, crouched on the path; they immediately stopped and address him in terms of supplication, assuring him they were poor people carrying the Tuan Besar, great man’s luggage, who would be very angry with them if they did not arrive in time, and therefore they implored permission to pass quietly and without molestation. The tiger, being startled by their appearance, got up and walked quickly into the depths of the forest; and they
came on perfectly satisfied that it was in consequence of their petition that they passed in safety.”

Bakel found farmer villagers have a different relationship with the tiger - one of fear, needing to placate, with the tiger a controlling figure in the village community. 8

For Taher there were no four-toed tiger footprints outside his bedroom window the next morning. Nor was there any retribution from parents or village elders.

Many afternoons of his childhood, when shadows began to stretch across the yard, Nenek Anang appeared on his upstairs verandah over the road from Taher’s house, to weave bubu (a hand-held fishing net). People often ordered bubu, tanggap and jalar nets from this craftsman. The boys knew his appearance meant story time. They left their game of marbles or soccer and trooped up the wooden steps at the side of the old man’s home.

As Nenek Anang deftly wove the threads of fishing nets with his hands he wove stronger threads of hope and dreams into Taher’s life through the stories he told. Stories of the beginnings of the Rejang people, about the
four princes who started the four clans of the Rejang. Stories of the oppressed set free, the story of Ano’ Lumang (The Orphan Boy) who worked hard and succeeded in life beyond expectation. Captivated by the craftsman storyteller, the boys sat entranced through the late afternoon as the clean mountain breeze stirred the coconut palms at the edge of the road.

“Hil, pulang,” his mother called.

Reluctantly Taher left the story group and crossed the road to bathe before magrip (evening prayers).

Children rarely went out after dark. Their parents constantly reminded them of the spiritual beings, semai, who could take on the appearance of a human, even a family member. These spirit beings can act as guardians of family and community harmony or they can inflict punishment. Even this generation has experienced the intervention of semai.

In the 1980s at the back of SMP5 (Junior High School) in Kuterejo near Kepahiang, a teenaged schoolboy on his way home from school carelessly urinated on a spiritually significant old tree known to be the gathering place of semai. He was abducted by the semai who took him to another realm. Only the person ‘attacked’ can see the semai, so people say it is easy for someone to be tricked.

For about 15 years the boy lived as a captive in this parallel universe. When he refused to marry a woman of the realm, which meant he would be trapped there forever, they released him on the remote border of the Kabawetan tea plantation. People found the young man crawling around on all fours, with matted hair and long fingernails, digging in the earth for ant eggs which he was eating. They took him back to his village and someone worked with him for many months to regain the use of his legs and to help him learn to talk again.

Rejang people believe either his parents didn’t keep a promise they made, or his village of Taba Tebelek did something wrong and didn’t right the problem. There is still a pantang (unwritten prohibition) people adhere to in the village. No one may wash a kuali (wok) in
running water. This is a constant reminder of the necessity of maintaining village harmony.

Taher went to junior high school in Kepahiang, then left home in 1978 and lived in a single rented room in Bengkulu for his first year of senior high school. He stayed with his aunt and uncle during his second year in the city and spent his final year boarding with a Javanese family that ran a tobacco business. He worked for the family pumping water and cooking before school then in the tobacco shop after school each day, learning the basics of buying and selling produce. His goal was university in Java, so after holidays at home in Kelobak, he travelled for over 24 hours on the back of a truck to Jakarta to try and enrol at university.

“I have enough”, was all he’d say when his mother asked him if he had money for fees and the journey. Funds were very tight and when he was finally accepted to study anthropology at Gajah Mada University in Yogykarta before changing course to study law at the Indonesian Islamic University in the same city, he lived in a single rented room with several other young men, a kompor (single-burner kerosene stove) to cook on and shared bathroom down the hall. Taher worked at several jobs to feed himself and pay the bills. Living in the university city gave him the opportunity to mix with people from other ethnic groups up close and observe things that continue to impact his life.

While working at a batik factory serving international customers he saw Japanese children regularly refer to their mother, seeking advice, comfort and conversation. Fathers generally stayed quiet, he observed. In Rejang culture, either parent will be the one to talk with their children.

An American family was interested in an elaborate batik wall hanging one day. Father, mother and teenaged child all put forward opinions about the art work. They measured it with their tape measure then discussed the colours, theme, frame and their home setting. Finally, after two hours in the shop, they decided not to buy.

“I wasn’t bitterly disappointed,” Taher
recalled. “It was a learning experience. You need to think, discuss and make rational decisions about things. Not emotional ones.”

Studying law in Jogjakarta meant Taher rarely returned to Kelobak in Sumatra but while living in Java he made a choice about his future wife. He would choose a Rejang bride. The Javanese women he had met seemed to merely follow their husband’s opinion. That would bore him. He saw Javanese culture in general, to be without absolutes, yes and no are changeable. People don’t tend to be transparent but mask their true feelings. And if he had a Javanese wife, when children came along the family would undoubtedly return to his wife’s family more often than his own. And another thing, Rejang women were better cooks!

So a Rejang bride would mean they would share a broad common background and when they “went home” for celebrations and important occasions, they’d be united. There would be plenty of common ground – the values of village life, language, the understanding of heritage and Rejang people were far more willing to share their hearts and minds. The Javanese women he’d met were more inclined not to share their personal insights and preferences. He wanted a life-companion with backbone, character and an opinion.

Taher graduated in 1988 and returned to Sumatra for a family celebration. Miskarnia was part of the formal welcoming committee for the event. A striking young man wearing trendy dark glasses approached the table where she was welcoming the queue of guests.

“Who is this?” she asked herself. “I haven’t seen him around.” There was no pen available to write the guests’ names, so she boldly asked to borrow his pen.

“You need to register. What’s your name?” Miskarnia asked.

“Write Pak Taher,” he replied.

Then he was gone. And she kept his pen.

Several weeks later ‘Pak Taher’ came to Miskarnia’s home. She assumed he had come to talk with her father, Harun, the Village Head of Pelangkian, about community matters. She made sweet
tea and served her father and Taher in the guest sitting room then retreated to the back of the house and didn’t think anymore about the young man she now knew was a member of her wider family.

“Mis, come here,” her father called. Dutifully she returned to the sitting room to see what he needed.

“Sit down, Mis. Taher has come to ask for you in marriage.”

She needed to sit. The shock was physical.

“Well, what do you say?” Harun asked.

Miskarnia’s mind was racing. This would change everything. She was just starting her final year of high school. She’d always dreamed of going on to train as a school teacher, but that wouldn’t happen if she married this man from university in Java.

Confidently she lifted her head and said to him:

“I’ll do it if my parents agree. And I must graduate from high school before we marry.”

Concentrating on her studies was challenging during the next year. Taher began work with the Department of Education in Bengkulu so they wrote long letters every week talking through plans for the future.

“I’ll go wherever with you,” Mis wrote.

“Even if it is difficult.”

And she knew it would be. Some days she was full of joy and confidence as she dreamed of being with Taher. Then floods of doubt banished the happiness and she worried she wouldn’t be able to make the personal adjustments needed to “fit with a husband’. The idea of leaving home was bitter-sweet. All she had known was the calmness of a close-knit family in the small village of Pelangkian, near Kelobak, in the Sumatra mountains, growing up caring for the family’s hens, then graduating to helping with the cooking and washing. Almost always she played with the boys around her home – they chose her on their soccer teams, went fishing and climbed trees with her.

Two days before the wedding ceremony, not long after her graduation, Miskarnia and Taher’s
young friends prepared inai paste and decorated their hands and feet during an evening party. Miskarnia was relieved to see the ball of dye they stuck to the middle of her palms quickly leave a strong dark stain, proving her purity as a bride. Rejang culture didn’t expect the groom to demonstrate his ‘purity’ back then and by 2006, when inay paste was used to celebrate the coming marriage of Yan and Devi in Kelobak, there was no test of the bride’s ‘purity’ either.

The wedding in 1989 followed the Muslim and adat customs for semendo marriage. Taher’s gift to her was not a ring nor money, but a copy of the Koran.

“I could have asked for anything. I didn’t want gold jewellery or expensive clothes. The Koran will be a foundation for our life together,” she said.

The first months in Bengkulu were lonely for Miskarnia but Taher was aware of the cost she was paying so they travelled back to Pelangkian each month to soak up the gentle atmosphere (suasana) of village life in the cooler mountain climate, enjoy Miskarnia’s mother’s cooking and spend time with her brothers and sister.

Their first child, Irving Rio Juliando Marighie was born on 16 July 1990. They decided to space the arrival of their children by several years so that when they are old, their children can share the load of caring for them as they age. Daughter, Cussie Karnita Marighie (Sisi) arrived on 25 August 1997 and a second son, Anggie Ryan Bepriano Marighie, was born on 3 February 2003.

After 14 years in Bengkulu, the family moved back to the mountains in July 2004 where Taher started a job with the...
newly appointed Bupati of Kepahiang. They bought a home in the town so that they were close to their families, but not living right in either family’s village. The decision to hold a Thanksgiving celebration would help the family gain a profile in their local community. Irving missed the celebrations, nursing a badly sprained wrist, cuts and bruises from his clandestine motorbike trip with a friend.

The responsibility of Taher being the oldest son weighs heavy on them. The telephone rings at all hours of the day with requests for help; someone needs advice; there will be a wedding in the village on the weekend; someone has just died. Every month the family spends over Rp100,000 on food to take to community events like marriage, thanksgiving and funeral ceremonies. Then there are the everyday situations where people also need help:

It had been building towards rain for most of the day – hot and the air so heavy you could almost wring out the moisture. Black clouds built up behind the mosque over the road, sharply defining its silver minaret and rusty roof line. Late in the afternoon, sitting in Taher’s dining room, it was so dark you needed the shutter completely open for some fresh air and to let in enough light to read. Everyone was worn by the stifling atmosphere. Taher worked at his computer in the sitting room. Miskarnia was preparing the evening meal in the kitchen, perspiration beading down the sides of her face. Finally it came. Big fat drops, plopping on the tin roof and making puffy pock marks in the dusty clay outside the window. Parched earth
soaked it up quickly then the rain overcame the soil and the excess water pooled then flowed in little rivulets tumbling down the fall of the earth to the front drain. Just as it started to have an impression on the thirsty land it stopped. By magrip the sky was a little brighter having dropped its precious load and the air fragrant with the sweet cleaness of newly wet soil. Relief.

Then the phone rang. The conversation was in Bahasa Rejang, but even the children, who don’t speak much Rejang, knew from their parent’s body language that something had happened.

Two young children from Pelangkian were riding their bicycle on the main road outside their home when they were hit by a car. At least one of them was in hospital now in Kepahiang. Would Taher go and help the family?

Taher closed down the computer and changed from his sarong and t-shirt into smart casual clothes. With hardly a word to Mis he headed out the door. She turned silently and retraced her steps to the kitchen. Another night when the head of the family would not be at the meal table. No wonder she sometimes didn’t talk with him about mundane family issues. He has so much to deal with.

His brothers regularly come to the house for advice on family and farming issues. When he visits the village there are always decisions to talk through.

“They don’t like to make individual decisions,” Taher said. “They take on new ideas slowly.”
During the coffee boom of the late 1980s Taher’s family made huge profits from their crops but by 2006 the market had fallen sharply and they only received Rp8,000 per kilo for sun-dried, hand-picked coffee. Another factor began influencing profits too. International buyers from Singapore came to Kepahiang at the height of the coffee harvest but left empty handed when they heard the local crop was not grown organically. Aware of the global trend for organic product, Taher made a forward-thinking, albeit risky decision in 2005. He purchased new land for an organic garden and using contract labour planted a mixed garden of coffee and cocoa. The cocoa, a new product for the area, which produces fruit all year round currently selling for around Rp20,000 per kilo, should be producing fruit by the time a planned cocoa factory is established in Kepahiang.

Bulyan and Buyng, Taher’s brothers, and his brother-in-law Azman are waiting to see the results of the new garden before they consider changing crops and gardening methods. Risk taking leadership, like Taher’s decision to grow crops organically, is one method of bringing change.

Government interventions through new national laws also impact upon Rejang culture. For many generations the Rejang had elected by popular vote a *Pasirah* (*Kepala Marga* – head of the clan) over several villages that formed the local government region called a *Marga*. The *Pasirah* had responsibility to implement government law and oversaw the processes of customary law too. In 1979 the Java-based national government of President Suharto passed a law cancelling the posi-

Pak Bahrun, Rajo Adat, officiating at a marriage ceremony in Kelobak in 2005.
tion of Pasirah, in an effort to bring uniformity of local government to the entire nation. The demise of this level of community leadership left a gaping hole in Rejang culture with no one in the community able to implement customary law with the same authority. The Rajo Adat (custodian of customary law), like Pak Bahrun in Kelobak, still holds some authority to perform ceremonies and pass on history, but no one in the national government system has replaced the influential Rejang role of Pasirah. This may explain in part why the customary law which promotes and maintains the harmony of village life through its explicit system of fines and ritual for misdemeanours appears to have been watered down over the past three decades.

At the invitation of the Bupati, Bapak Bando Amin, Taher joined the newly formed Badan Musyawarah Adat (BMA) in November 2006. Based in Kepahiang with members from all the Kecamatan that make up the Kabupaten, the group is making plans to record and revitalize Rejang culture including customary law, language—and its distinctive script called Ka Ga Nga, dance, songs and crafts. The committee representatives, young and old, meet monthly to plan ways to record culture and use the information they gather to restore and rejuvenate Rejang people’s acceptance and use of all things Rejang. One of their first projects is to reintroduce Bahasa Rejang to the curriculum of all Sekolah Dasar in the Kabupaten.

As we sat at his dining room table drinking sweet tea before Taher left for work at 6.45am, he acknowledged the life of Rejang people has moved forward (kemajuan) in many ways. His older son for example, uses the internet at school, owns a mobile phone and has freedom to choose his future career with far less personal sacrifice than Taher endured. Sisi, his daughter, plans to go to university, something Taher’s mother, who never went to school, ever dreamed of. But he says Rejang culture needs to maintain strong links between village and city life, between the old days and today, linking old ways, skills and history to today in order to remain vital. If those links disappear, there is no continuity of culture and the old ways and values will disappear entirely.
Almost 30 years ago, teaching Bahasa Rejang in local schools was outlawed by the national government’s “New Order” policies. The committee believes encouraging the use of their own language is a positive step towards unifying the people, forging stronger links between village and city, old and young.
Pak Harun lay on a thin kapok mattress in the corner of the middle room. Family and friends sitting on the mat-covered concrete floor fringed the area. With the shutters closed it was hot and airless.

Pale and looking strained, Saro’a, Harun’s wife greeted us warmly then excused herself, disappearing to the back of the house to prepare drinks.

Miskarnia, Harun and Saro’a’s eldest daughter, shuffled forward on her knees and gently stroked her father’s hand. She was relieved to see him calm and breathing easily. In the middle of the night she’d been called from Kepahiang, the town six kilometres away where she lives, to come quickly as her father was ill. It looked like heart illness. Taher, Miskarnia’s husband, drove her and their younger son, Angie, to the village of Pelangkian, leaving daughter, Sisi, asleep at home with me.

Miskarnia’s close relationship with her father started early in her life. He often told her the story of her birth.

A strange guttural sound overflowed from Saro’a’s mouth. Alarmed, Harun turned towards his wife in time to see her eyes roll back in her head as she stopped breathing.

Panic gripped Harun. She couldn’t die. Not now. Their baby girl was safe. He’d done all he knew … and much more. She couldn’t leave him now. Distraught, he blindly lunged for the shotgun lying on the floor facing the doorway and pulled the trigger.

Boom.
The raucous sound crashed back and forth off the walls of the pondok then burst out of the room and echoed down the inky-black valley.

An amazing thing happened.

Saro’a’s body jerked once and she started breathing again. Harun presumed the gun blast had evicted evil spirits that can cause problems at this very sensitive stage of life. Now his wife was free to live again.

“I didn’t hear the evil darkness come. Sometimes (you) hear them on the (verandah) steps. The wood creaks. (I) didn’t hear. Maybe there was something there,” he chuckled to himself as he relived the memory.

The drama had started unexpectedly around mid-afternoon. Saro’a sensed her time had come. She stopped weeding the tobacco rows and walked gingerly through the garden to their pondok near the centre of the field.

Gnawing tension radiated from her lower back. Within a short time searing pain gripped her swollen belly. She bit her bottom lip trying to calm her rising anxiety. She would stay calm. Two-year-old Win played quietly, oblivious of the drama.

Harun knew he couldn’t go to their village, Pelangkian. It was four hour’s walk away on the main road. He set off to find help closer.

No one was at their neighbour’s pondok, so he hurried on to find the local dukun beranak.

Pondoks, like the one at left, are built towards the centre of garden areas, and almost always accessed by indirect paths, not in a direct line from the boundary of the land area to the building to distract and confuse malevolent spirits.
(birthing nurse) at the Kabawetan tea plantation.

He must hurry. Sometimes these things happen quickly.

It was easier travelling without little Win. Confidently he strode along the winding dirt path, skirting muddy patches, ducking under over-hanging branches. His parang (jungle knife) tied at his waist in its scabbard, bounced on his hip with each step. He was a man on a mission, challenging time. Thirty minutes later Harun walked into the clearing of the birthing nurse’s home and his heart tensed in his chest. No one was home. Now what?

Leaving the hamlet he began retracing his steps to the tobacco garden. He would have to help Saro’a. There was no one else. On the way, he cut a piece of green bamboo and sharpened it ready to cut the cord.

Baby Miskarnia was born at 7.30pm with her father acting as mid-wife. He washed the baby, wrapped and placed her next to Saro’a on the mattress on the floor. Then he washed and wrapped the placenta in clean cloth ready to bury it in the morning. Some people throw it in the river, but Rejang mythology says a child will always return to their birth area if the placenta is buried close by. If it’s merely thrown away, the child will be a traveller.

Miskarnia was home now, anxious to do all she could for her father.

Pak Harun refused to go to the hospital in Kepahiang, so they called the dukun (village healer) who can deal with heart illness. No one called the imam from the mosque as he deals with the rituals of religion, not the physical needs of the people. By the time we arrived in the early afternoon, the dukun had prayed over a patch, like a temporary tattoo of a calligraphic symbol, and fixed it to Harun’s left breast. Then he’d ordered bed rest for Harun and gone home.

Illness often causes anxiety and fear in the villages. Many people refuse medical assistance from a hospital or clinic, preferring to have the local shaman or dukun treat them using obat kampung (village medicine). Several people in Kelobak and Pelangkian have inherited or trained with a dukun to administer remedies for a variety of illnesses. Pak
Harun himself can administer medication for broken bones, sakit kuning (Hepatitis A) and luka dalam (cido in Bahasa Rejang).

The patient’s family collects the various ingredients required for the healing then they are prayed over by the dukun. The words of the prayer include verses from the Koran as well as words given by the one who trained the dukun. These words have been passed down through the generations and cannot be revealed to the general public or they will lose their effectiveness. Pak Harun memorized the words, but sometimes he needs to look at his book where he’s written the prayers to help his memory.

To heal luka dalam, said to be caused by lifting excessive loads for too long and recognized by the tell-tale symptom of vomiting blood, you need green chilli, Javanese chilli, cloves, pepper, nutmeg and cinnamon. Pound these spices to a fine powder then mix with the juice of a young pineapple. Cook the mixture and leave it to cool overnight. In the morning mix the yolk of a village hen’s egg with the juice, then have the patient drink the whole of the mixture. Repeat this medication for three consecutive days.

For broken bones, glutinous white rice flour is pounded with a two to three day-old black village chicken until it makes a smooth-ish paste. The mixture is prayed over before it is placed on the broken limb. For a broken arm, lengths of narrow bamboo are placed on the arm from elbow to wrist encasing the arm to stabilize the break. The rice and chicken mixture is placed over the bamboo, making a cast (gip Bahasa Rejang). The cast is wrapped in gauze or cloth and left for nine days and nine nights before it is removed. If there are wounds on the broken limb, they will not become infected during the nine days of healing.

Hepatitis A (sakit kuning) requires the patient to eat three pisang emas (gold bananas) that have been prayed over. This must all happen early in the day. Sprains (terkilir) are massaged with green coconut juice that has been prayed over. Some burns can be healed by using the skins of pisang emas (gold banana).

Pak Harun received the knowledge to heal broken bones from his grandfather. The knowledge can be passed to a woman or a man. The knowledge to heal luka dalam and sakit kuning came to
him from his wife’s grandfather. Not many people know he has all this knowledge. He tends to keep the information quiet. If people know they make demands on the healer at all times of the day.

Prospective healers are chosen because of their capacity to cope with the pressures of having the knowledge. They are people who do good to others and are willing to help.

Harun’s son-in-law, Taher, was invited while living in Bengkulu, to receive healing knowledge by his uncle, Matanan. Taher felt the obligation to always be available to anyone who came for help was too much responsibility as he has a demanding job as a lawyer, so he declined the offer.

Other guests arrived to visit the recovering Harun, so Miskarnia and I retreated to the sitting room with her younger brother, Badri. This was the first time I had met him. The deep dimple on his right cheek makes his face smile easily. Miskarnia sat close to him on the vinyl sofa as though she was drawing strength from him, her wise younger brother. Their father’s illness would be one more thing they would face together.

When they were young, they spent long days alone at the house with their older brother Win, while their parents worked at the rice field or the coffee garden. Win used to organize the little ones: “It’s time to mandi (wash). It’s 3.00pm.” “Come, change your clothes. Here, do it like this.”

“One night an animal like a big squirrel (meong Rej. berang-berang Ind.) came in through the partly built house. We were scared because this animal is easily controlled by evil spirits. But Win chased and hit at it with a broom so that it left,” Badri said.

“And remember when the neighbour’s dog bit him at the old pondok when its tail got caught in the door?” Miskarnia interjected.

“We three were alone at the coffee garden at (the village of) Taba Tebelet. Our parents were working at the tobacco garden across the Musi River.

It rained heavily the night before so the
path down to the river was very slippery. Win was carrying Badri and I was holding Win’s hand. We were just little, maybe seven, four, two (years old). When we reached the river it was in flood. High water, flowing very fast through the ravine. Only one piece of bamboo was left of the bridge. The rest had been washed away. There was a handrail too. No one was around. It was about 11.00am so all the women had finished their washing. So we just crossed the river. Win went first, and I followed. Then we walked about 30 minutes to the garden. Our parents were so surprised to see us. “How did you get here?” they asked. We crossed the river. Win was bitten by the dog and we didn’t know what to do. We were too scared to cross on our own going home, so our parents carried us, the little ones, and Win walked. Bak (Dad) held his hand as he crossed the bridge. They were amazed at how brave we were.”

“Win taught me so much about daily living. When he died it was like I had lost something so important. I was lost,” Badri said.

A memory
The whole family gathered to cele-
brate their matriarch’s coming adventure. Siti Nurtijam, Saro’a’s mother would leave in the morning to start her pilgrimage to Mecca, the first person in the family to fulfil Islam’s fifth tenet of visiting the Prophet’s birth place. But tonight they feasted and formally asked Allah’s blessing for safe travel and success. Only Win’s absence brought any sadness to the gathered clan.

Jakarta’s streets were flooded that Tuesday. Rubbish clogged drains, tanks over-flowed. The water in the well in the yard rose with the flood level. Business hadn’t been brisk, so Win closed the wooden shutters of his small business where he sold fuel and car parts as the setting sun rimmed the immense black clouds that hung low in the sky. It was still raining.

He prepared some food and ate alone. With the window shuttered and door closed the smell of oil soon defeated the cooking odours in his workshop-come-house but it was warm and dry. Then the power failed. Win fumbled in the darkness to find the candle he used in such emergencies. He lit the wick, then
brushed the flame of the match under the foot of the candle. Carefully he gummed the candle onto the saucer he used for an ash tray, then set it on the floor beside his bed.

The day’s takings didn’t amount to much, but he counted it then added it to his life savings in the small box he kept hidden on the shelf. With nothing else to do, he stripped down to his trunks then stretched out on his bed to sleep. Candle light flickered around the room making grotesque shadows of even small objects it slid past. The rhythm of the rain on the tin roof soon mesmerized Win and he slept.

Born Wis Amhar, in his maternal grandparent’s home on 24 October, 1967, Win was the oldest child of Harun and Saro’a from Pelangkian. After completing school he worked with his father as a farmer. Although popular throughout the village and openly loved by his family, working on the land didn’t satisfy him. He wanted to travel and learn a trade.

So Win left Pelangkian and headed to the mega-city of Jakarta in 1993 where he started a bengkel (motorbike repair and fuel street stall). Neighbours in Jakarta thought he was Chinese from Palembang because he was so handsome and confident. He didn’t correct their assumption. At 27, he was an eligible bachelor.

The rain continued to drench the city causing major floods. Silently the rising water lapped under the door of Win’s one-room wooden house. He slept deeply. The entire floor was awash but Win didn’t know. Finally the candle weighed anchor and floated across the room.

Win woke to intense heat. The flickering candle was a raging inferno. Flames devoured wood, plastic, rubber, clothing. Win burst through the 3-ply door of his home out into the flooded yard.

What could he do? How could he save his business?

Then he remembered the money. His life savings.
Clad only in his underwear he raced back into the building to retrieve the cash. He headed towards the shelf then felt himself flying backwards through the air, fire engulfing his whole body. His hair crackled and fizzed as it was devoured.

A drum of petrol exploded and destroyed his home and business and almost his whole being. The flames ate at the layers of his flesh. Searing pain confused his thinking but he knew he had to put the flames out quickly. He stumbled to the well like a toppling candelabra then jumped feet first into the deep water as neighbours rushed to help him.

Doctors at the Islamic Hospital in Jakarta found Win’s entire body was burnt except for where his underpants had been and the soles of his feet.

Wednesday morning nik’bei’s (Grandma Siti Nurtijam) phone rang in Pelangkian but she had already left on her journey. Harun took the call.

“You’d better come. There’s been an accident. Win’s very sick,” Harun’s uncle said.

With little knowledge of the accident, Harun, Saro’a and Eva prepared to leave. Son-in-law Taher began the search for the snake oil locals used to heal cuts and burns without leaving scars. The oil came from a type of python in the area. It was scarce and people never kept supplies in their homes or pondok because folklore said this would bring accidents to their families. Taher purchased some oil from Camut who had a small bottle of it buried in his garden not far from his pondok 45 minutes walk from Pelangkian. With the traditional medicine and what money they could access quickly, they left on Thursday morning. It was their first trip to Jakarta.

The bus journey was about 29 hours, first north to Curup, then east to Lubuk Linggau where the road from Bengkulu meets the Trans Sumatran Highway. From there it’s south east along the edge of the Barisan Mountains to Lampung.
Pak Harun bought cooked rice and side dishes of vegetables and meat in Lampung. He didn’t know what to expect in Jakarta and wanted to be prepared. After crossing the Java Straights by ferry, they travelled the last few hours to the bus terminal in Jakarta. A family member met them and escorted them to the hospital.

Win was pleased to see them. He was amazed how big Eva had grown in the year since he’d last seen her. He talked easily about the accident. His parents battled to look at him with large sections of blackened flesh peeling in sheets from his face, torso, arms and legs. Saro’a gently fed him some of the food they’d bought in Lampung.

Win became agitated. He needed to urinate but how could he. There were several young female nurses in the room. Harun asked them to leave, insisting his son needed privacy and Saro’a could help him. It was an unusual situation for a single young man from rural Sumatra.

Calm returned then Harun, Saro’a and Eva left Win and went to the room assigned to them as ‘out of town family of a seriously ill patient’. Harun washed and dressed for Sholat Isa, the Muslim evening prayers.

As he returned to the waiting room after prayer about 8.00 pm, the telephone on the wall rang. A doctor informed him Win had deteriorated and they were taking him to intensive care.

Anxious with fear and feeling totally excluded by the medical staff, Harun and Saro’a spent Saturday in the waiting room. They had no idea where Win was and they were not invited to see him. Finally around 4.00 pm the wall phone rang again and summoned them to the Intensive Care Unit. Harun was concerned when he saw his beloved son connected to several monitors. Win couldn’t breathe properly.

“We need to change his medication,” the doctor said. “Have this prescription filled and bring it back immediately.”

Thankful to have something to do, Harun followed the order quickly and delivered the medication. They were with Win for barely five minutes before they were told to leave.
Back in the waiting room the phone on the wall rang again. Another doctor said they needed to do a tracheotomy, to help Win breathe.

“It’s an expensive procedure,” the doctor said.

“Just do it,” Harun implored them. “I’ll sort out the finances later.”

Still not allowed in the intensive care ward, Harun and Saro’a waited anxiously for news. They couldn’t eat and didn’t know how to pray as their eldest child struggled to survive. Early in the evening Harun phoned Pelangkian and talked with Miskarnia.

“Don’t worry. It can be treated. Just pray lots,” he implored her.

Miskarnia felt sick with fear. Her father was crying as he talked. She hung up the phone and retreated to her parents’ home. The news was so distressing, she didn’t want to face people, so alone with her worry, she went to bed, but couldn’t sleep.

Around 8.00pm the wall phone at the hospital summoned the parents again.

“Come now,” the doctor said. “Win is critical.”

They ran across manicured lawns to ICU and found nurses and doctors frantically working on Win. Harun saw the flat lines on the heart monitor but he didn’t want to believe the machine. A nurse was reaching for the paddles that could shock Win’s life back into this world.

“Don’t do that. Put that down,” Harun instructed her. “He’s gone.”

The nurse turned and looked at him.

“But we can try to get him back,” she said.

“No,” Harun said. “He’s gone.”

Wracked with grief, Saro’a sank to the floor. Her pain filled the cold ward as she wailed uncontrollably for her child. Her first-born.

“Stop that,” a nurse barked. “You must accept this as Allah’s will. Here read these holy words,” she said, thrusting some verses from the *Al Koran* at Harun and Soro’a.

“Don’t speak like that to my wife.
She’s just lost her first-born son. Can’t you imagine what she’s going through?”

“Stop her. Stop her,” the nurse demanded.

“No. Take us to somewhere we can grieve for our son,” Harun said.

The staff disconnected Win from the silent machines then moved his lifeless body to a gurney. An attendant covered him with a white sheet then pushed the trolley through the double doors.

Harun gathered his wife and daughter then followed the disappearing trolley. With Saro’a still crying loudly, the sad little procession negotiated the corridors of the hospital to the cold mortuary. Saro’a hardly remembers the 300 meter journey.

“It felt such a very long way,” Pak Harun said.

Win’s body was washed and prepared for burial.

Later that night Pak Harun telephoned family in Pelangkian with the news. Badri took the call and told Miskarnia. Distraught, she collapsed on the floor in shock for several minutes. The whole night she didn’t sleep.

“It felt like an hour was a whole day, waiting for daylight,” Miskarnia said.

The family decided to fly Win’s body to Bengkulu, then drive to Pelangkian as soon as possible. Without prompting, family members began funeral preparations. Badri and a couple of the uncles left early in the morning to go to Bengkulu to escort the body from the airport. The women prepared food for the travellers and someone else took that to Bengkulu later in the morning.

Taher organised the building of the temporary house extension for the funeral service using the community materials stored at the mosque. Cousins met with the Imam and organised the grave.

Harun, Saro’a and Eva flew with Win’s body from Jakarta to Bengkulu and joined the family entourage following the ambulance carrying
Win’s coffin. They finally arrived at Pelangkian about 4.00pm where everything was ready for the burial before sunset in accordance with Islamic law. Miskarnia fainted when the ambulance door was opened and she saw the coffin. The house was overflowing with family and neighbours expressing their intense grief, wanting to see Win’s broken body.

“No,” Harun said, knowing how disfigured his son’s body was. “Only his siblings will see him at the cemetery.”

He insisted the coffin should not be opened until the burial at the cemetery. He didn’t want the body to be defiled by tear drops falling on it after it had been ceremonially washed.

With dignity Harun led the ritual prayers at the house. He hadn’t yet cried for his son but people around him were distraught with grief. Many fainted. There was wailing and crying. They left the house with men and women following the coffin to the cemetery. Miskarnia felt she wasn’t emotionally strong enough to see the burial, so she stayed at home with some others.

Leading his family, neighbours and friends, Harun walked along Pelangkian’s main road to the cemetery behind his son’s coffin. Win’s distraught brothers lifted his shrouded body from the coffin, seeing his battered face before the burial.

The Rejang don’t bury in a coffin. Usually they carry the shrouded body in a box with handles from the home to the cemetery. Win’s body was in an actual coffin they had bought in Jakarta. After the funeral, Harun sent the coffin back to Bengkulu with the ambulance for it to be used to transport accident victims who died in Bengkulu to their home villages for burial.

Hundreds of people attended the ceremony and many people returned to the house after the burial. People who had to walk to their kebun left. Some stayed on. *Sholat Isa*, the evening prayers, happened. Harun went to the river to bathe where he finally broke down and wept uncontrollably. His children didn’t know what to do. They had no idea how to
comfort and encourage their parents.

“We’ve got to face this,” Miskarnia said. “Come on, let’s comfort them both and plead with them to eat some food.”

“Dad and Mum, we have to receive what has happened,” Miskarnia said to her parents. “You need to eat to be strong and give an example to others.”

“It was a terrible time. It was like I’d lost the balance and meaning of my life. We have a saying: If you lose your parents, you lose your head; if you lose your wife or husband, you lose your feet; if you lose your older sibling, you lose meaning,” Miskarnia said.

“At the graveside I knew this was the last time I’d see my older brother’s face,” Badri said, sitting on the couch, wiping tears from his face with the back of his hand. Miskarnia sat weeping silently, gripping Badri’s forearm.

“It is so painful to talk about,” he said.

So we stopped. Then his deep steady voice broke the heavy silence.

“It’s as clear as if it happened yesterday. But it happened over 12 years ago. My feelings are still close to the surface.”

Harun retreated from public life to his coffee garden after Win’s death. The noise of constant traffic passing on the road in front of his house upset him. He couldn’t sleep

Miskarnia and her younger brother Badri were deeply impacted by their brother Win’s death in 1994.
properly, didn’t want to be around people and felt a deep sadness through his whole being. A doctor prescribed blood pressure tablets for a month, but they did nothing.

“There was no one in the village I could talk to. I’d been the Kepala Desa for years. If I talked to anyone about my sick heart, the whole village would know almost immediately. I couldn’t talk to the Imam. He doesn’t deal with these things.”

So for months Harun would leave home with his two dogs on Monday morning and walk to his coffee garden over the Musi River, returning on Saturday or Sunday to make sure everything was running smoothly at home, the centre of his family.

One of his dogs was very special. The animal had been hit by a car on the road outside their home when it was young. Harun carried him inside, placed a leaf in its mouth and dripped...
milk onto the leaf every couple of hours to nourish the dog. It took weeks for the treatment to succeed. The deep affinity between man and dog was amazing. The loyal dog guarding the ripening coffee beans at the garden even when Harun returned overnight to the village.

Almost all Rejang farmers throughout the Musi valley follow the Muslim faith which sees dogs as the ‘dirtiest beast and is seen as a likely carrier of a metamorphosed jinni’ (spirit), but these people value their dogs highly. They guard crops and property and hunt wild pigs that are still a menace to mainly un-fenced crops in the mountain regions. Many villages have a panitia (committee) which organizes regular pig hunts with a group of hunters and their dogs to keep the pigs under control.

Harun’s close relationship with his dogs continues. While he was recovering from the late-night heart problems, his current orange-brown hunter paced along the verandah. Boldly he’d take a step inside the kitchen in what looked like an attempt to see his master, only to be ousted.

“Hess,” Saro’a said as she flicked her
hand at him nonchalantly. “Maybe the dog knows Bapa is ill.”

Harun and Saro’a were married in 1965. Initially they lived with her mother while they gathered enough money to build a permanent home on the land next door in Pelangkian. Their life continued like the patchwork of greens and browns in the sawah fields following the planting and harvest seasons. And just as the sawah fields have highlights of gold and red foliage, Harun and Saro’a’s life has had accents of red and highlights of gold over the past forty two years.

The highlights included the births of their children Wis Amhar (Win) in 1967, Malyati (1968), Miskarnia (1970), Yon (1972), Badri (6 April 1974), Jau Hari (1976), Husni (1978) and Eva Juliana on 10 July 1984. Their tiny daughter Malyati died just a few days after she was born and Yon died of tetanus when he was about two years old.

Another accent of red happened early on a Sunday morning when Miskarnia was about 12 years old. Harun and Saro’a were sharpening their parang’s (jungle knives with a blade about 25 centimetres long) before leaving home to work in their gardens. Harun was...
squatting near the outside kitchen, working on the edge of his blade. The tension was palpable between husband and wife. Harun continued to work, the steady swish, swish of steel rubbing on wet stone filling the air.

No one can remember exactly what Harun said to Saro’a but she snapped. Grabbing the parang on the floor at her side she lunged at Harun. Scrambling to his feet he ran through the house, his screaming wife, parang raised intent on causing harm, pursuing him. Harun scuttled into the front bedroom, pulling the door closed behind him, but his fingers got caught. The lethal parang drew blood.

Frightened children ran from the house in all directions. Miskarnia was hysterical and fainted at the neighbour’s house as she pleaded for help. They revived her, then escorted her home.

People from all over the village spilled out of the house. Harun and Saro’a listened conciliatorily to the advice they received from village leaders and senior family members. They were not fined for disturbing the harmony of the village by the leader of customary law (Rajo Adat) and Harun received just one stitch to the wound to his finger.

Showing me the scar Harun sheepishly assured me nothing like this ever happened again.

Daughter Eva (left) married Novi in November 2005 and they set up home with her parents. Their daughter Shakila Sevi Andopa is the youngest member of the clan, born on 12 September 2006.
Her ancient knees protest as she negotiates the steep wooden steps from the verandah to ground level. This is her morning ritual. Straight after coffee, she leaves the house and heads to the front verandah of her daughter’s home next to the main road from Kepahiang to Curup.

It’s only a 30 metre walk, but for her aging arthritic body it’s a marathon shuffle. Barely 150cm tall, her walnut coloured skin is finely tanned leather wrapped around her fragile frame, holding her together. The long-sleeved pink and white cotton blouse used to fit, but now hangs shapelessly from her narrow shoulders. A faded batik sarong knotted around her waist keeps the blouse in place and hangs crookedly halfway between her knees and ankles. Several loops of an elastic band hold some money notes securely yet unobtrusively in place in one corner of her sarong’s folds at her waist. Some days she wears a length of fabric folded around her head. Some days a tudung, a traditional Muslim head scarf, covers her thinning salt and pepper hair. Some days nothing. Her ears and nose seem too big for the rest of her weathered face. Enlarged knuckles on most of her fingers point to decades of hard, physical work. She only ever wears thongs to accommodate her battered wide feet and ingrown toe nails. This pocket dynamo is the family matriarch; opinionated, domineering and powerful, even in her declining years.

She’s often sitting on the verandah by 7.00am. The three metre long bench seat has a back rest of two full length planks each about 15 centimetres wide.
The whole thing is made from timbers of the old two-storey home that stood here for about 90 years. It was demolished in the late 1990s but some of the timber was saved and fashioned into a seat, keeping a link with the family’s old home and their long presence in the village of Kelobak. Marvin Jaspan quotes a Rejang proverb, *bubung megiteui bubung* (a ridgepole replaces a ridgepole) to express how the Rejang reinforce their philosophical theme of organic continuity through replacement of the old by the young. Normally as much material as possible is re-cycled in the current architectural style of a new house, but Amaria’s family’s new home is a timber-frame cement rendered single storey bungalow and the old timbers weren’t suitable. So the bench seat on the verandah is their link with the past. The verandah is barely eight metres from the edge of the road. It’s a perfect location to see and hear what’s happening in the village.

As with many houses, parts of the family’s genealogy were written on a wall of the front room of the house. Marvin Jaspan refers to a similar practice in villages around Tapos further up the Musi valley. Thankfully, Taher, Amaria’s oldest son, copied the notes outlining eight generations to help ground future generations of this section of the *Marigi Marga* (clan) before the house was demolished.

While conducting research into Rejang farming methods in the late 1980s, Jürg Schneider confirmed how important timber and houses are to Rejang in the Lebong area. “Farmers often empha-
Amaria’s family living at the compound in Kelobak

Amaria (right) lives surrounded by three generations of her family in Kelobak. Top right: Son Alamudin, his wife Sri and children Valenti and Firdaus; Top left: Grandson Budi, his wife Mira and great-grand-daughter Julien; Below left: Daughter Upik, son-in-law Azman and their grand-daughter Keke and bottom right: Grand-daughter Elpiana with her husband Amin and their children Rindo (13) and Keke (8)
size three standard objectives one should achieve during his or her lifetime: Founding a family, building a house and eventually doing the pilgrimage to Mecca.” In 2006, the Rejang of Kelobak, in the Musi Valley, still have a strong desire to build their own homes too. Amaria’s grandchildren, Elpiana and her husband Amin, and Budi and his Javanese wife Mira, have life goals to build their own homes. Elpiana and Amin already have a large pile of hand hewn timber at the front of Amaria’s house where they live on the ground floor. They expect to continue collecting materials (bahan-bahan) for several years before they are able to build at the rear of the family property. Budi and Mira live in the new house with their baby daughter, Julien, his parents Azman Zakuri and Upik, and his 18-year-old sister, Mirna. They dream of the day they’ll live in relative independence in their own home.

In her late 70s, Amaria, or Nik’bei, meaning grandmother in Bahasa Rejang, spends much of the day sitting on the bench. She can no longer walk the 45 minutes to her fruit tree and coffee gardens (kebun) to the south-east of the village.

I haven’t been to the kebun for two years. I can’t endure the heat now. I have 16 large mangosteen trees and ten small ones, three durian trees and coffee (trees) planted underneath.
When he died (her husband Samsudin) I got the two gardens and two sawah, (wet rice fields). One’s close, near the Musi (River north of the village). Upik works it now.

Sucking on toothless gums she squints through blurry eyes past the mosque on the opposite side of the road, towards Curup. Amaria silently withdraws into her fragile frame.

Most of Kelobak’s 256 houses fringe the two-lane asphalt strip connecting Bengkulu, 90 minutes away on the coast with Curup, 30 minutes away and three hours further on to Lubuk Linggau, at the terminus of the South Sumatran Railway and a busy provisioning point on the Trans Sumatran Highway. Coaches from Jakarta, Palembang, Padang and Medan, microbuses from Bengkulu, Lubuk Linggau, Curup and Kepahiang, motorbikes, cars and bicycles all vie for road space. No-one slows down through the sprawling villages that have mushroomed along the edge of the road over the past century. At the turn of the 20th century, Kelobak was a small huddle of timber houses 500 metres west of the present location, on the banks of the Musi River. A devastating river flood destroyed much of the village in 1901, so the people re-built their homes on higher ground. As the road developed on the edge of the village, new homes were built along the road. As in all the villages that skirt the road, the only quiet time of the day is around 2.00 to 3.00am when there is little traffic.

The Dutch built the road from Bengkulu to Kepahiang, the centre of power in the Rejang-Lebong region, in 1868. By the early 1870s there was a wagon track to Curup. Locals say the road from Kepahiang to Curup which runs roughly north was finally sealed about 1955. Kelobak is on a section of the road that runs almost north-south, parallel to a long spur on the north of the road, about six kilometres from the major coffee trading centre of Kepahiang. Amaria remembers this as a young woman in the 1940s:

We’d get up early and walk in a single line in the dark to the market at Kepahiang. We’d carry long bamboo torches in our hands. The vegetables or tobacco to sell in a berunang.
The Village of Kelobak
Bengkulu Province
Sumatra
Indonesia

VILLAGE HOUSEHOLDS

100: Unrelated household
101: Household - Taher relation
102: Household - Miskarnia relation
103: Household - related to both
104: Public building

See key on page 155 for head of household names

Drawn by Jill Brit
Heads of Households of Kelobak Village - November 2006

1. Pak Akup
2. Pak Jon
3. Haji Sidir
4. Pak Wan
5. Pak Yusup
6. Pak Aki
7. Pak Asin
8. Pak Jaya
9. Pak Handan
10. Pak Imam Awalih
11. Pak Yanto
12. Haji Kulin
13. Pak Suhardi
14. Pak Heri
15. Pak Buyung
16. Pak Din
17. Pak A'Suman
18. Pak Sidin
19. Pak Ain
20. Pak Ram
21. Pak Mat
22. Pak Buyung
23. Pak A'Suman
24. Pak Sam
25. Pak Yusuf
26. Pak Amin
27. Pak Hamid
28. Pak C'Nudin
29. Pak Hasairin
30. Pak Oja
31. Pak Ku
32. Pak Bonan
33. Pak Hasairin
34. Pak Udin
35. Pak Buyung
36. Pak Pudin
37. Pak Nuar
38. Pak Kondar
39. Pak Aswandi
40. Pak Yanto
41. Pak Kairi
42. Pak Adbulah
43. Pak Buyung
44. Pak Heri
45. Pak Aminuddin
46. Pak Acis
47. Pak Dall
48. Pak Tiwa
49. Pak Hania
50. Pak Ayup
51. Pak Salim
52. Pak Ujang
53. Pak Mariati
54. Haji Rumliah
55. Pak Akup
56. Pak Marsuki
57. Pak C'ola
58. Pak Mansar
59. Pak Talibun
60. Pak Sai
61. Pak Badar
62. Pak Rusli
63. Pak Rasip
64. Pak Toni

65. Pak Hermansa
66. Pak Ibu
67. Ibu Tijung
68. Ibu Rabe
69. Pak Djeng
70. Pak Bulyan
71. Pak Amin
72. Pak Sulai
73. Pak E'en
74. Pak Amer
75. Ibu Cintu
76. Ibu Ratna
77. Pak Sai
78. Pak Salim
79. Pak Rais
80. Pak Om
81. Pak Sa'din
82. Pak Saidina Aksa KD
83. Pak Kadir
84. Pak Mali
85. Pak Riduan
86. Pak Bambang
87. Pak Toto
88. Ibu Umi
89. Pak Sadir
90. Haji Mont
91. Pak Miril
92. Pak Dudun
93. Pak Rabe
94. Pak Sahot
95. Pak Ruhan
96. Pak Ujang
97. Pak Muslimin
98. Ibu Ratna
99. Ibu Hadiah
100. Pak Arpan
101. Pak Bahar
102. Haji Jumaria
103. Pak Fia
104. Pak Pont
105. empty
106. Pak Detuk
107. Pak A'an
108. Pak Lan
109. Pak Rustam
110. Pak Nangcil
111. Pak Yan
112. Ibu Imet
113. Fa'adil
114. Pak Imon
115. Pak Hazairin
116. Pak Nurdin
117. Ibu Ros
118. Haji Haris
119. Pak Sider
120. Pak Asmawin
121. Pak Mahyudin
122. Pak Razak
123. Pak Suhardi
124. Haji Romli
125. Pak Azman
126. Pak Talibun
127. Ibu Roni
128. Ibu Eng
129. Pak Em'ba (Jawah)
130. Pak Waki'din
131. Pak Bidin
132. Ibu Haila
133. Pak Usman
134. Pak Yunus
135. Ibu Hayni
136. Pak Cun
137. Pak Jaya
138. Pak Junus
139. Pak Dulana
140. Pak Akim
141. Pak Manap
142. empty
143. Pak Herman
144. Pak Jljena
145. Pak Usman
146. Pak Hanapi
147. Pak Mawin
148. Ibu Ci Ama
149. Pak Muset
150. Pak Dahlhan
151. Pak Ridu
152. Pak Arni
153. Pak Ci Rian
154. Pak Tunglin
155. Ibu Ta'a
156. Pak Caneng
157. Pak Rasidin
158. Pak Ugnag Kasit
159. Pak Wandi
160. Pak Nuur
161. Pak Sai'd
162. Pak Ling
163. Pak Samrin
164. Pak Mraisun
165. Pak Mansur
166. Pak Lung
167. Pak Cayok
168. Pak Sule
169. Pak Nudin
170. Haji Unit
171. Haji Nur
172. Pak Eko
173. Ibu Sara
174. Pak Jalani
175. Pak Am
176. Pak Tanmi
177. Pak Yoyon
178. Pak Yoyon
179. Pak Kim
180. Pak Bing
181. Pak Resat
182. Pak Ujang
183. Pak Bulyan
184. Pak Sa'idul
185. Ibu Dar
186. Pak Sapuan
187. Ibu Sma
188. Pak Adil
189. Pak Jan
190. Ibu Rita
191. Pak Gadis
192. Pak Du'ua
193. Pak Weni
194. Pak Sukipli
195. Pak Saparudin
196. Pak Mar Johan
197. Pak Amat
198. Pak Haris
199. Pak Eng
200. Pak Herman
202. Pak Sinar
203. Pak Ukje
204. Pak Sapar
205. Pak Pin
206. Pak Amer
207. Pak Piak
208. Pak Saluna
209. Ibu Bida
210. Pak Samsudin
211. Pak Sanu
212. Pak Johan
213. Pak Lahar
214. Pak Muhamed
215. Pak Jamal
216. Pak Udai
217. Pak Ludin
218. Pak Mitr
219. Pak Jalani
220. Pak Ibu
221. Pak Tujing
222. Pak Sopan
223. Pak Mu'min
224. Pak Ulij
225. Pak Yan Bot
226. Pak Ning
227. Pak Nasir
228. Pak Min
229. Pak Rodi
230. Pak Sakar
231. Pak Japri
232. Ibu Rahuna
233. Pak Parap
234. Pak Mu'min
235. Pak Wahid
236. Pak Jalil
237. Pak Ujeng
238. Pak Ude
239. Pak Ning
240. Ibu Munia
241. Ibu Sum
242. Pak Maw
243. Pak Nuar
244. Pak Akub
245. Pak Jamal
246. Pak Amin
247. Pak So
248. Pak Atul
249. Pak Man
250. Ibu Eme
251. Pak Usme
252. Pak Manto
253. Pak Sider
254. Pak Munap
255. Pak Dintini
(basket) on our back. We’d walk for two hours. It was a mouse-track. We walked one behind the other. It was cold and damp with tall grass at the edges of the track. We’d worry about tigers. It was daylight when we got there.

World War II dramatically affected the isolated community. Japanese occupation forces marched through the area taking harvested crops, timber and their goats and water buffalo. All able-bodied men from 20 – 50 years of age were taken away to work as coolies. Samsudin spent eight months doing forced labour for the Japanese building an airstrip at Palembang. The men endured horrific physical suffering and had to wear clothes made from flour bags.

Kepahiang was bombed on several occasions during the war. Amaria hid in the irrigation channel at the rear of her home during one air raid.

The people of Kelobak decided to evacuate to the jungle when the Japanese commandeered houses in the village. Leaving only the least mobile old people at home, the women and children silently disappeared into the jungle for about four months, living off leaves and fruit during the worst of the cruel Japanese occupation. Although history records many of the brutalities of the Japanese army, Amaria considers them to be a better occupying power than the Dutch. She was a teenager during the war years, but insists that the Japanese were better “because they would be polite and talk with the village leaders before doing what they wanted to do; the Dutch didn’t treat us with respect, they just did what they wanted”.

When the men returned from doing forced labour, they brought more than a broader worldview. Unknowingly they brought disease to their homes and small pox and measles decimated the village population in the months after their return.

Immediately following World War II, the Musi Valley was in turmoil through more than sickness and suffering. Civil war (Perang Saudara) engulfed the area. One group wanted the Dutch to return, others were
called out one evening to visit a home between the villages of Despatah and Pagar Gunung where his niece had just died in childbirth. It was a dangerous mission to go at night because of the Black Army operatives in the area, but his leadership responsibilities meant he had to go.

Late that night a gang of the Black Army called Grombolan abducted Sunan from the grieving family's home.

For two days people from Kelobak searched for him, fearing he'd been murdered. Finally they found him at Air Bulak, near Pagar Gunung,

Pak Sunan, second cousin of Pak Sam-sudin, had been the Village Head of Kelobak for several years and had made some significant enemies during the war years because he dialogued with the Japanese. People saw him as a traitor to the Rejang people, but his family maintains this was in an effort to keep the village people safe.

In 2005, Sunan’s sister, Haji Romla, now 87 years old, partially deaf but mentally alert, talked with me late one afternoon as we sat at a small table in her home with her great niece, Andrei, acting as an interpreter when Haji Romla ran out of Indonesian language. Andrei had only ever heard that her grandfather was murdered. Our afternoon conversation filled in new details for her.

As leader of the village, Sunan was
stretched out and tied hands and feet to a long board. He had been shot through the throat.

They carried Sunan’s body back to Kelobak and the men of the family prepared him for burial.

“I was hysterical. I fought with them to see him dead. He was my family. I had the right to see him,” Haji Romla recalled with passion.

Sunan was buried that day in the small cemetery near the Kelobak mosque.

“Until now we don’t know who or why (he was killed). There was no investigation. It’s best to just leave it alone,” Haji Romla said to Andrei.

Prior to 1948 Kepahiang was the political centre of the mountain Rejang areas. During the battle for Independence from the Dutch following World War II, the people of Kepahiang burnt most of the town to the ground, including a Dutch-built munitions factory. Power and influence were transferred to Curup, 30 kilometres further up the Musi Valley.

This move has been an issue with members of the Marigi Marga (clan) who live in Kelobak and in the wider Kepahiang area. Curup’s fame and fortune have increased while Kepahiang has struggled to develop. Kepahiang made a significant sacrifice by burning its infrastructure to halt the Dutch in their bid to re-claim the Rejang area of South Sumatra during the struggle for independence between 1946 – 1949. That sacrifice has not been acknowledged and this feeds some competitiveness, verging on animosity, between the towns. Curup has become known as the centre of Rejang culture and education. Some recognition for Kepahiang came in January 2004 when it was designated a Kabupaten (Regency). Currently there are 91 villages with a population of 128,000 under the local government of the Bupati, Bapak Bando Amin. As well as promoting the produce of the area, especially coffee and tea, and promoting new crops and farming methods, Bapak Bando Amin has plans to revitalise many aspects of Rejang culture including customary law throughout the area.

An early goal is to re-introduce Bahasa Rejang to Sekolah Dasar (Primary School) to stimulate the use of the Re-
Amaria’s younger sister, Hadima, still lives in Kelobak village. It was difficult, very difficult. We were very poor. We’d often only have rice and corn to eat. We had to wear bark cloth as a sarong up to the waist. I hated it. It was stiff and itched. You couldn’t wash it. We got scabies from the insects living in the bark. Then that would really itch and we’d get sores where we scratched. No-one makes it now. No one has to wear it.

British historian William Marsden was stationed at East India Company’s outpost at Lais on the coast when he wrote of bark clothing used by Rejang. The original clothing of the Sumatrans is the same with that found by navigators among the inhabitants of the South Sea islands, and now generally called by the name of Otaheitean cloth. It is still used among the Rejang for their working dress, and I

Amaria never went to school. Her mother, Alam Mina, died when Amaria was very young, maybe following the birth of Amaria’s younger sister, Hadima. She was the middle of three daughters. They lived just north of the graveyard in Kelobak.

It was difficult, very difficult.
We were very poor. We’d often only have rice and corn to eat.
We had to wear bark cloth as a sarong up to the waist. I hated it. It was stiff and itched. You
have one in my possession, procured from these people, consisting of a jacket, short drawers, and a cap for the head. This is the inner bark of a certain species of tree, beaten out to the degree of fineness required, as it resembles the softer kind of leather, some being nearly equal to the most delicate kid-skin; in which character it somewhat differs from the South Sea cloth, as that bears a resemblance rather to paper, or to the manufacture of the loom. The country people now conform in a great measure to the dress of the Malays...  

Jaspan also encountered the fabric during the early 1960s. “Adults formerly wore bark-cloth (te’ep) shirts, trousers and sarongs, but this material has now largely been replaced by cotton and occasionally wool.”  

Schneider refers to the fabric as latung (rej), made from the bark of the pukut (rej.) tree. His research says wearing the fabric has strong connotations of abject poverty.  

No-one living in Kelobak makes the cloth any longer. Amaria last remembers it in daily use is during the oppressive era of the Japanese occupation in 1942 – 1945.

During a visit to Bengkulu in 2002, I met a craftsman making hats and writing cases from the bark fabric. He was intent on revitalising the unique craft as he believed the art was only practised in the South Pacific Islands, Bali, Kalimantan Barat and the area around
Bengkulu. I was unable to find his business during later visits to Bengkulu. The fabric must still be made somewhere in the city as footpath merchants sell ornaments and replicas of the famous *Rafflesia Arnoldi*, the biggest flower in the world named by Arnold, botanist to the Governor of Bengkulu, Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles in 1819, made from the fabric.\textsuperscript{11}

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\end{center}

Samsudin married Amaria when she was 15 according to the *semendo adat* traditional laws and Muslim religion. The cooking fires to steam the bamboo tubes filled with glutinous rice and coconut milk stretched for about 30 metres in the front yard of the old house. Keeping the fires burning, the tubes full of liquid as the cooking rice absorbed the coconut milk and rotating the tubes regularly so that the rice cooked evenly was a full-time job for a team of volunteers for more than 24

\begin{center}
\includegraphics[width=0.45\textwidth]{bamboo.jpg}
\end{center}

Four of Amaria’s children live within a kilometre of their mother, (left to right) Bulyan, Buyng, Upik and Alamudin. Taher lives about 6 kms away.
hours.

Amaria walked to Samsudin’s home for the ceremony, accompanied by her family. As well as a feast after the formal ceremonies there was folk dancing and the next morning the village’s zikir (drum) band played for several hours and people recited passages from the Koran. Finally the lemang (steamed glutinous rice) was distributed among the guest and helpers.

Amaria had difficulty falling pregnant, so after about three years she visited the local dukun taking rice, sugar, salt and garlic as a gift. He said a goat sacrifice may right the problems.

Her first two pregnancies produced stillborn full-term babies. A boy and a girl. Upik, born in November 1953, was the first child to live. Two more babies died at birth, then Taher arrived safely in 1960. Bulyan was born in 1961 and Ahmad Sohar (Buyng) in 1964. Kacil was born in 1966 but died when he was two years old. Alamudin was born about 1968. He was very sick as a baby, and grew to adulthood with profound deafness and weak muscle tone the inhibits how he walks. He can’t do heavy physical work.

Amaria describes her children: “There are ten, but five have already gone home.”

When her first child was born they sacrificed a goat and sent the head, the most highly prized section, to the dukun. He instructed Amaria to dry small pieces of the ubi kayu stalk, then thread tiny sections on to cotton and tie them on the baby’s wrist and ankle. Many people followed this practice to protect their child from evil and illness. Amaria’s great granddaughter, Julien (born July 2005) has a similar amulet on her right wrist and
left ankle because Amaria insisted. Her son Taher’s children were born in the coastal city of Bengkulu and never wore the amulet. Amaria protested but Taher and Miskarnia refused. “You don’t do it because you don’t believe,” the matriarch declared.

The traumatic loss of babies is not uncommon among the older women of Kelobak. Poor nutrition, especially in the years following the war when they ate mostly rice and corn with some seasonal fruit, and no medical vaccinations, caused infant mortality to remain high until a government program introduced mobile baby clinics to the region in the 1990s. Today a bus with qualified medical staff visits the village every month to weigh, measure and vaccinate the new generation, promote breastfeeding and advise young mothers about nutrition and health. Few babies are born at the regional hospitals. Women prefer a local mid-wife to help them during their confinement at home.

Islam allows a man to have up to four wives. However among the Rejang, any more than one wife is extremely rare.

“To take another wife would be highly disrespectful (to the first wife). The man would be ostracised,” Amaria’s
son-in-law Azman told me. “If there is a problem having children, you can have one from a family member (anak angkat ind.) We’re all family anyway.”

Amaria has relatives living in half of Kelobak’s 256 houses. Other families have similar close relationships within the village. This strong physical link to the community and the deeply held premise that maintaining community harmony is a top priority demonstrates how an individual’s personal behaviour can be influenced by the community. Customary law (hukum adat) describes and defines a wide range of wrong doing and the fines and punishments to be applied to the individuals or groups that do wrong.

Couples involved in sex outside of marriage can be fined through the customary law system. If they are discovered in the act they are taken before the Rego Adat (head of customary law) in the village and fined for disrupting the pattern and balance of relationships in the village. They must sacrifice a goat with the Rego Adat slaughtering the beast, then collect part of the blood from the animal in a bowl and mix it with some water. The boy and girl go to every home in the village with the bowl of blood and leaves of the stawar sedingin (rej) tree painting the...
blood on the steps or door post of every house.

Families line up on their verandahs to watch the highly embarrassed couple acknowledge their wrong to the entire village.

“Kami sudah berbuat salah. 
Kami minta maaf.”
We have done wrong.
We ask forgiveness.

Public humiliation such as this has been a strong deterrent to what the Rejang perceive to be anti-social behaviour. The oral law states that anyone who fulfils the demands of the law must be totally accepted back into village community life with no sense of guilt. But one young man who fulfilled the demands of the customary law for his indiscretion in the 1970s left his village in shame and has never returned.

The last 30 years have brought many changes to the remote Rejang Musi valleys. Roads, television and telephones have all contributed to a loosening of the tight controls of village life. Many young people now travel to Bengkulu and other cities and towns for education. Workers in the Bengkulu library told stories of university students from the mountains studying in the city with very liberal views on sexual intimacy. The Rajo Adat of city villages face huge problems in trying to implement Hukum Adat. In 2006 the fine for sex outside of marriage is less impacting, having been truncated to appearing before the Rajo Adat and buying a goat as an offering.
Amaria’s son, Ahmed Sohar (Buyng) sets up a bird snare his father bought in the early 1950s. Amaria reminisced about the ‘delicious meals’ the family enjoyed because of Samsudin’s success with the snare. Elpiana rakes coffee as the midday sun dries out the beans ready for roasting in a few days time.
“Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar,” wailed the speakers from the mosque.¹

Azman was awake but feigned sleep. It was 5.00am. Upik rolled over to the edge of the bed and gingerly swung her feet to the cool cement floor. Another day.

Clutching her sarong around her middle-aged frame she stumbled to the bathroom to wash. Every time she prayed she had to be ritually clean – hands, face, feet, ear lobes. Carefully she stepped into the long white skirt of her prayer clothes then gathered the hooded top and nuzzled her head into the crown of the caped garment. It fell to below her knees. Years of constant practice guaranteed her head fitted easily into the crown. She flicked her arms free from the folds and felt for the elasticized strap on her head. Deftly she pulled it backwards, down the back of her head, to stabilise the voluminous folds of white. Like a white cone with just her eyes showing through a gap near the apex, Upik shuffled to the kitchen to find her prayer mat.

No-one else stirred in the house as she unrolled the carpet and placed it on the kitchen floor facing Mecca. Rough aging joints complained as she knelt on the mat, then rocked forward until her face touched the ground.

Azman reached back over his head for his glasses hanging on a nail in the wall. The world stayed cloudy and out of focus until he had his glasses on. Three years ago he’d been diagnosed with permanent eye damage from the fumes
of his single furrow diesel engine cultivator. The glasses helped, but he’d never see clearly again.

He yanked his sarong firmly around his waist and headed to the bathroom. A single low-wattage light globe chased the pre-dawn darkness from the room that is open to the elements from under the eaves to about shoulder height – Azman’s shoulder, not the diminutive Upik. No water in the bucket angered him slightly.

“Why can’t people just turn the switch?”

He did so and almost miraculously the tap flowed. Cold, clear water pumped automatically from the family well at the back of the property ran into the plastic tubs lined up on the narrow bathroom floor next to the pink-tiles squat toilet. Azman stripped off, ladled water with a plastic scoop from the tub and shuddered as it accosted his warmth. Now he was awake.

Almost silently Upik intoned the words of ritual. “Allah Maha Besar lagi Sempurna Kebesaran-Nya dan Maha Suci Allah sepanjang pagi dan sore.”

Mirna (18) rubbed sleep from her eyes on her way to the kitchen. She had boiled drinking water last night before she went to bed, so filled the small kettle with some of it then lit the gas burner. Four thick glass mugs hung from a mug tree on the wooden bench. She lined up three of them and spooned coffee from their own trees and sugar into each. One heaped teaspoon of coffee. Two of sugar.

“Belanyo eb.”

Still dressed in her sleeping clothes of
cotton pedal pushers and a short sleeved top, she went to the front of the house.

A lithe little boy in shorts and tee shirt perched on the bench on the front verandah hugging his knees to keep warm, waiting patiently while Mirna unlocked the shop front.

“[W]e need cooking oil,” he said.

“Rp1500,” Mirna replied, passing over a small plastic bag of golden vegetable oil the size of a mandarin.

The child disappeared silently and Mirna opened the front windows of the store, hung the bags of kerupuk (prawn crackers) from their nails then swept the floor and the sun baked earth at the front of the store with a lidi (reed) broom.

She looked up the road towards Curup. Mist enveloped the scene giving the street lights an aura and hiding the view. You couldn’t see Bukit Panjang, the long ridge to the north, at all. You could barely see Pak Sicit’s house, four doors up.

“Na – uko lak kawo,” (‘Na, I want to drink coffee) Azman called, teasing his teenaged daughter.

Mirna scuttled back to the kitchen and poured boiling water onto the breakfast ingredients. She stirred the coffee until the rich powder absorbed the water and dropped to the bottom of the mugs like sludge.

Azman took his mug, and squatted on the front verandah bench. He lit a cigarette and sat shrouded in smoke sipping his coffee. His long-sleeved shirt was a faded murky cream colour, nothing like its original hue. Brown cot-

Upik’s younger daughter, Mirna, was married in August 2007 and moved to her husband’s home in Kelobak.
ton trousers cut off and hemmed just below the knee stayed up with the aid of a black nylon bum bag fastened around his waist. The bag stored his cigarettes and lighter. Years ago he would have worn a small finely woven bamboo bag made specifically for a man’s tobacco and flint but such bags are very rare today. He smokes a packet or cigarettes a day and had done so since his late teens. A new ‘fedora’ style hat made from palm leaves came down and almost touched his glasses in the front. He bought it recently on a trip to Lubuk Linggau where Javanese transmigrants were making in-roads in the local market with their vegetables and crafts.

The street lights blinked off as the mist began to rise.

“Sayur (vegetables).”

From his perch Azman exhaled a plume of smoke heavy with the scent of cloves.

“What have you got,” he asked.

“Bean sprouts, cauliflower, sawi, long beans, tahu, tempe. Lots more,” the Javanese woman replied as she battled to lower the heavy basket from her head.

“Oh ‘Na,” Azman called. “Sayur.” Mirna appeared and carefully examined the day’s product.

Vendors bring fresh vegetables and fish to the village every day. The closest market is at the town of Kepahiang, 6 km from Kelobak.
“You make this?” she asked, pointing to several squares of silky cream tahu.

“My friend,” the woman said.

Mirna chose a small bunch of long beans, some fiery red chillies and two bundles of warm tempe (fermented soy beans) still wrapped in banana leaves. She sifted through her coin purse and paid the women for her family’s food for the day. Rp1900.

“Sampai besok (Until tomorrow).”

Mirna helped re-position the basket on the woman’s head then returned to the kitchen.

Azman finished his cigarette in solitude and flicked the butt into the garden at the edge of the verandah. He went into the shop via the side door and returned with a small ornate domed bird cage. Gently he hung the cage from a hook under the eaves of the house and returned seconds later with another dove in a smaller cage. He placed fresh seed and clean water in both cages in silence.

His wide leathery feet glided into a pair of well-worn thongs at the front step then without a word, Azman stepped silently across the front yard, over the

Azman contracts to prepare sawah (wet rice fields) for planting using a diesel cultivator. He pays three labourers a daily wage to help with the heavy manual labour.
cement slab that covers the storm water drain and out onto the road. He headed towards Kepahiang, walking down the middle of the bitumen.

Rejang farmers grew rice in dry fields called ladang using the slash and burn method (swidden) and in wet fields through the swampy areas (sawah rawang) of the wide valleys of the Barisan mountains for centuries. Javanese transmigrants who came to the Bengkulu province early in the 20th century began refining the irrigation channels and expanding the area that could be planted for sawah irrigasi then the Dutch authorities ran public works projects to survey and build finely calibrated irrigation channels that remain intact today.

Azman says it takes 100 days to grow rice in the valley. His work of preparing the flooded ground for planting is early on the agenda. Fallow fields are flooded for several days then ploughed (pajak) and raked with a steel beam (garu) in preparation for planting. The owner then drains the field and waits two days before planting the rice seedlings in orderly rows 10 centimetres apart. Ten kilos of seed rice produces sufficient seedlings for a quarter hectare.

A pondok (rest house) in sawah fields in Kelobak.
of sawah. Soak the seed overnight then plant in a nursery, a thick block, at the edge of the rice field. Open the irrigation channels to add sufficient water to the field so that the centre of the patch of seedlings is moist. After 28 days, the seedlings are ready to plant out in the sawah that has been drained.

Generations ago farmers growing rice in ladang made sacrifices before planting began. Schneider studied the ladang rice growers in the Musi Valley during the early 1990s and discovered that farmers went to the dukun padi for virile seed to mix with their own seed rice. Later they marked out a square metre of land in the middle of the field with bamboo poles and made offerings called penei (rej) before the dukun padi planted the first seeds of the crop in this special area. The farmer paid the dukun with a chicken, a goat or money. Prior to harvest the farmer chose seven ripe ears of rice, tied them together with coloured threads, wrapped them in white cloth then hung them in a small basket form the roof of the pondok at the ladang. The harvest started the next day.5

Today none of the rice farmers in Kelobak follow these rituals. Often land owners employ contract workers to do the back-breaking work of marking out the field and planting the seedlings in the wet muddy ground. The sawah remains dry and the crop is fertilized two days later. Once the seedlings are standing firmly, after 15 days, the field is flooded to a depth of 10 centimetres. At 60 days the sawah is drained again and fertilized. Once again the crop is flooded and over the next weeks the owner weeds the entire area by hand, pushing any weeds deep into the mud between the plants. Workers spray insecticide on the entire crop using a back-pack spray, once or twice during the growing period, depending on the presence of insect pests like the

Women often do the back-breaking work of harvesting rice.
piangan that attacks the forming heads of rice. At this stage the irrigation channel is blocked, stopping the flow of water and the ground dries out as the crop ripens ready for harvest. The old method of using an ani-ani (hand-held cutting blade) has gone and crops are now harvested using an arit, a hook shaped hand-held scythe introduced to the region by Javanese transmigrants.

Often women work as contractors to harvest the crop. Like contract planters and cultivators, they receive a percentage of the harvested grain as payment – about 20 percent. Sometimes they receive a cash payment. Like planting, harvest is back-breaking work in the heat of the day. Workers wait for the sun to burn off overnight dampness before they start cutting the dry stalks of rice (padi tangkai).

Handfuls of golden stems with the ears of grain are cut about 20 centimetres long then placed in a circle about two metres in diameter, with all the stems pointing inside the circle. A temporary slatted threshing board called a gebuk is set up in the harvested sawab on a huge ground sheet then handfuls of the stalks of grain are beaten on the board, releasing the rice which falls through the slats and is collected. Upik’s
mother used to thresh the grain by rubbing the ears of grain with her feet (*ngirik rej.*) to free them from the stalks. After winnowing (*menampi rej.*) the women carry about 45 kilograms of grain in a woven basket (*berunang rej.*) on their backs to their homes. Past generations took the harvested rice still attached to the stalks and stored them in a circular pattern in a *lumbung*, a stilted storage house at the rear of their homes. Many villages had a water-powered *kincir air* (stamp mill) where people could pay to have their rice husked. Today Kelobak has a public electricity-powered rice mill. There is no *kincir air* and only one *lumbung* in the village, an unused deteriorating structure, overgrown by creepers and shrubs. *Lumbung* were predominantly used when rice took longer to grow, was harvested just once or twice a year and stored on the stalk until required as food.7 With crops growing to maturity in 100 days a farmer can now grow three crops a year, alleviating the need for long-term storage. The Indonesian government opened an experimental farm about four kilometres from Kelobak in 1972 where they are constantly developing new strains of rice and other crops they encourage local farmers to plant.

Azman accepts change slowly, shying away from being a front-runner for new ideas and techniques, he prefers to see someone succeeding with something new before he will put
his lot in with the change. He said he has to be very careful about doing things differently. His contracting business of preparing sawah for planting brings in a steady income that provides for household electricity, gas to cook with and fresh food for his family. He can’t jeopardise that by flitting from one new thing to another.

Born in 1950 at the Kabawetan tea plantation near Kepahiang, where his father was a labourer (kuli), Azman is the oldest of five children. He did five years of education at Sekolah Dasar in Kepahiang before joining his father as a farmer. During 1972, when he was 21, he came to Kelobak with two water buffalo and a contract through his father’s connections to plough sawah on the west side of Kelobak. Each day as he worked he noticed a petite young woman with long black hair who washed clothes and bathed in the irrigation channel close to where he was working. It didn’t take him long to con-
tact his uncle (*wawa rej.*) to act as his representative with the petite black haired beauty’s father, Samsudin. With family approval Azman and Upik were engaged and married shortly after. They lived in the old family home on the edge of the main road in the middle of Kelobak initially, then moved to the *pondok* at Samsudin’s coffee garden for 10 years. In 1993 they moved back to the village to help care for Upik’s mother, Amaria. Azman sold his two water buffalo in 1994 and bought a diesel powered single furrow cultivator. The machine does the work in half the time his animals took. Today his grandson, Rindo (13), works alongside him and his two assistants. After paying them, Azman clears about Rp100,000 a day and also receives cigarettes, a meal and coffee from the land owner. Some weeks if he’s far from home he stays with his machine overnight at the *pondok* of the land owner to guard the cultivator.

U

pik leaves the house around 7.30am carrying her parang and cooked food for the morning meal in her *berunang* and joins the exodus to gardens and *sawah*. On fine days the village is deserted by 8.00am with only old people and young mothers with babies left at home. Children walk to primary school or catch public transport to high school at Kepahiang or the smaller town of Ujanmas about eight kilometres towards Curup.

Mirna follows her mother up the main road then they turn down the newly surfaced road towards the rice mill. The road soon peters out and becomes an unsealed single track, sometimes used by motorbikes but more regularly by people heading to their gardens. A bubbly tributary of the Durian River runs along the edge of the path for the first section then crosses under a small bridge and flows further down the valley supplying the *sawah* with crucial water to grow rice.

The path goes through a section of long grass where it’s very muddy and then across the walls of picturesque *padi* (rice) fields before heading through coffee gardens where overnight rain makes the clay slippery. Upik wears rubber pull-on shoes with built-in sprigs, like football boots, to help climb the slippery slopes. The last garden they walk through on their 45 minute
trek belongs to Sunan, the Kepala Desa (village leader). His orderly rows of newly planted chilli plants promise a valuable cash crop in several months.

The Dutch introduced plantation crops to the upper Musi area in 1896 when coffee and tobacco were first planted in the Kepahiang region on the slopes of Bukit Kaba but by 1912 tobacco crops had been replaced totally by coffee. As well as coffee the region provided pepper, ginger, nutmeg, chillies, cinnamon and cloves for the Dutch East Indies Company from 1825 when they gained control of the Bengkulu region from the British. In 1916 the first truck of vegetables left the mountains for Bengkulu’s market. Today spices and vegetables grown in the region are exported through co-operatives to the coastal city and as far as Jakarta.

Just over the ridge is the garden Upik inherited from her parents. As well as almost 2000 coffee trees there are mangosteen, durian and jackfruit trees and pepper vines. What appears to be just a mass of rampant jungle growth encroaching on any open land is
actually highly organised and carefully planned. The pepper vines are planted on four metre stakes as an understorey throughout the garden and close to the pondok on the lower side of the steep garden there’s a small selection of vegetables that supplement the family’s menu. Upik’s family doesn’t care for any animals – no ducks, no hens, no goats, no water buffalo. She says they are too much work and goats smell.

The pondok is sturdy, made from several types of bamboo and built on two metre poles. The ground floor has a clay hearth at the back and space for storing tools. One whole wall is stacked with firewood for cooking. A large earthenware water jar sits near the entrance. Massive black mosquitoes materialize from the dank darkness and pursue us as we climb the bamboo ladder to the upper floor. A narrow verandah catches any breeze drifting up the valley and gives panoramic views of the green patchwork down the valley. Off the verandah is a single room, the family’s sleeping quarters. There are no windows in the woven bamboo walls, just a door, and more hungry mosquitoes hiding in the darkness.

Azman and Upik lived here for 10 years. Their middle child, Budi Yurnalis, was born in the pondok in December 1979. Upik’s father, Samsudin, had a fatal heart attack at the pondok of another of the family’s coffee gardens close by in 1988. As usual, he left home early in the morning. When he didn’t return to the village in the late afternoon family and friends came looking for him, then carried him home for burial.

A red-leaved shrub (andong rej.) marks the boundaries of the garden. Some gardens have a line of the red shrub as fencing. An under-handed way to obtain more land is to plant a crop-
producing creeper or vine, like cucumber or pumpkin, near the edge of your property. Any land the creeper covers becomes your land. Upik’s mother, Amaria, tells stories of the Dutch using such land-grabbing methods during their occupation of the Rejang region. The coffee trees are planted about three metres apart in an orderly pattern, allowing pepper vines to be positioned in the open space between four coffee trees. It takes three years for new coffee trees to bear fruit. A good harvest comes at the fifth year. Upik’s trees produce about one tonne of coffee beans each year. Over several weeks the family carries the entire crop in woven baskets to the village where it is sun-dried in lots of about 50 kilograms on a tarpaulin and turned almost hourly with a wooden rake on a clear hot day, for up to 15 days in the front yard. You know the coffee is ready for husking then roasting when you can hear the coffee bean rattle inside the dried fruit.

Using a parang (jungle knife), Upik prunes the coffee trees every three months, removing any old or diseased branches, retaining the new healthy branches that will produce good fruit and keeping the orchard at a height that allows her to reach the ripe red fruit. During June and July the valley air is heady with the sweet fragrance of coffee blooms. They weed the entire garden every three months, cutting the weeds at ground level then burning them. Each season Upik sprays for disease and pests but she never fertilizes the trees and the tropical rainfall means there is no need to hand-water. By April the coffee beans are turning red and if the family is desperate for cash, sometimes they harvest half-ripe fruit and sell it un-dried for a reduced price. The best prices in 2006 were Rp40,000 for 10 cupak (approx 15 kilo) paid for fully ripe sun-dried beans. Each bean is hand-picked with the fruit closest to the trunk being harvested on the first pass through the garden. Fifteen days later the ripe fruit in the middle of the branch is picked and finally the fruit at the ends of the branches during the last harvest another 15 days later. Because of a growing problem with thieves stealing ripe fruit from unguarded coffee gardens at night, someone from the family usually stays at the garden during the entire harvest season of April and May.

Upik loaded her berunang with firewood around mid-afternoon and started
home. Bent forward from the waist to balance, the woven strap of the berunang cut into her forehead as about 35 kilos of wood pulled her head backwards. She plodded up through the garden then on through Sunan’s chilli garden. Quickly she established a walking rhythm, covering the journey back to the village without stopping to greet friends on the way. Crossing the neighbour’s yard she called to Mira, her daughter-in-law who stays home during the day with baby Julien. Mira emerged from the kitchen door then stood behind Upik and took the weight of the load as Upik released the forehead strap of the berunang and lowered it to the ground. Mira disappeared back to her kitchen work leaving Upik to stack the firewood on the wood pile under the corrugated iron lean-to.

Refreshed after bathing Upik joined the group on the front verandah bench. She played with Julien, her 15 month-old grand-daughter, distracting her from her busy mother by showing her some ants climbing up the wall. Azman joined the group when he arrived home from ploughing then two neighbours arrived, dressed the same as Upik. Grand-daughter Keke, complete with lipstick, appeared in a miniature version of the women’s clothes – a mauve long dress over dark leggings. Julien willingly transferred to her grandfather’s knee when Upik’s entourage left for the Kaum Ibu (Women’s group) meeting at the mosque.

The sun’s rays were low, beating in on the narrow verandah. Mira stood in the doorway out of her daughter’s line-of-sight waiting for the distinctive horn of the fish seller announcing his arrival in the village. She wanted fresh fish for the family’s evening meal.

Later as the speakers of the mosque crackled into life announcing evening prayers the gathering broke up. Azman ushered me in doors saying it was getting late and we needed to close the front door. He rarely attends prayers at the mosque, even on Fridays, because he says he’s too busy.

Upik and Keke returned in time for evening prayers at home, around 6.30pm. Mira had cooked the fish with tempoyak (fermented durian flesh) and chilli and set out the meal on a mat on the kitchen floor. El, Upik’s older daughter came to take Keke home for dinner but Keke was not keen to go. She whinged and whined, cried and
pouted for several minutes about the poor quality of food at home and how she wanted to stay with her grandparents. Finally Upik acquiesced and added another plate to the pile on the mat. Anger flashed across El’s face as she left the house. Her own mother had publicly undermined her authority.

*Manja* is the term used for spoilt children. Boys and girls cry, whine, verbally abuse and even hit and kick their parents to try to get their own way. Taher believes many children are not learning self-discipline or the reality of financial limitations. They see images of children on television who have everything they want – toys, clothes, food from shops, not attending school – and can’t understand why they can’t have these luxuries too. This is one of the first generations to be exposed to national and international television shows every day of their lives. Taher says some parents appear to be afraid of their children, wanting to please them rather than being committed to training them for adult life. Upik remembers her grandmother accusing Upik’s mother, Amaria, of being harsh with Upik as a young girl. This was during the late 1950s and early 1960s when television had not even come to Kelo-bak. The grandmother wanted freedom for Upik to play after school rather than work in the kitchen. Amaria argued that Upik needed to learn to carry the heavy load of leading her fu-

Family members plant fruit tree saplings for a neighbour for Rp100 (1.5 cents) per tree - a valuable source of cash. November 2006
ture family. Today Upik’s family jokes that she is not a good cook because she was spoilt as a child. By giving in to Keke, could she be contributing to a problem in the next generation?

Mira took baby Julien to the lounge room while the rest of the household sat around the edge of the mat and ate rice, left over sayur from the morning meal and the fish dish with our right hands. Conversation ebbed and flowed as the family discussed work loads for the next day. Upik has strong input about who does what work, enlisting the help of her son, Budi, teenaged Mirna and daughter El and her husband Amin, who live next door. Rice fields, coffee gardens and pepper vines all require intensive cultivation.

Rajang culture uses a variety of labour forms. Azman works contract for wages. El and Amin work “day exchange” (mak bili) when they work in Upik’s garden or rice field. At a later date Upik and one of her household reciprocate the amount of time El and Amin worked for them. Another form of labour, communal work (nyanyo), includes an obligation to reciprocate, but not necessarily in the same form. A fourth form of labour division includes cooperation without obligation as when Azman represents the family and helps erect the stage for a neighbourhood wedding (tegak tamp). The Indonesian national term “gotong royong” (working together) is now commonly used to describe this type of labour as well as the situation when the Kepala Desa announces a community working day to repair bridges or clear

Upik’s cat enjoys the afternoon sun perched on the kitchen window sill.
walking tracks when each family sends a representative to work for the day. In both situations no wages are paid.

Unlike the national understanding of working together, Rejang culture differentiates between these forms.

Until the late 1970s the village community used *Gotong Royong* to help plant garden crops. Budi and Amin prepared a new garden for growing ginger in early 2006. Taher financed the crop, buying one tonne of ginger roots for the young men to plant. He would take 50% of the profit with Budi and Amin having 25% each. One rainy afternoon in February when the garden was almost ready to plant, conversation on the front verandah moved to the ginger crop.

Thirty years ago the family would have invited some close friends and several members of the extended family, like Taher’s brothers Bulyan and Buyng and their wives, to help so that the entire garden was planted in one day.

It was a real community experience with the women cooking special food like Cendol the day before. Early on the day of planting the men left the village about 6.30am to walk to the garden and start cooking rice and boiling drinking water before they started planting the crop.

When the women arrived mid-morning, carrying all the food they’d cooked at home everyone ate together before completing the planting. Few children came with their parents, happy to stay at home because they knew their parents would bring some of the bright green Cendol in a bamboo tube for them. There was a whimsical air to Budi’s telling the story of his childhood memories of waiting for his parents to return from someone’s garden with Cendol.

“But we won’t be doing that,” he said firmly. “It’s too expensive. Could cost Rp100,000,- to cook enough Cendol and other food and buy sugar for drinks. Sometimes people aren’t careful how they plant. The garden gets damaged. You can’t say to someone who is helping, ‘Be careful!’ or ‘Don’t plant it like that’.”

The family expected the one tonne of *bibil* (seed) to produce up to 20 tonne of ginger. Unfortunately because of an unusually long *kemarau* (dry season),
seven months instead of the normal three to four months, all their hard work and planning produced just one and a half tonne of ginger. The price of Rp10,000 per kilo did not cover the cost of buying the bibit. Budi returned to driving a van for a local contractor between Kelobak and Kepahiang.

Upik tipped some food scraps from her plate onto the floor for the neighbourhood cat that sits just off the edge of the mat watching us eat during every meal. The feline pounced, not needing a formal invitation. Mira handed Julien to Budi then took a plate to serve her own meal. Upik berated her for some short coming with the food and Mira’s face and shoulders fell. It seems she can never please her mother-in-law. With very little cash income and afraid to ask for extra money to help with food costs, Mira and Budi struggle to contribute to the family’s food budget. Mira has dreams and plans, but initiative to do things differently is frowned upon, so she shrinks further into isolation as an outsider within the family group. Her dream of living in her own home and running a business seems impossible. She would need a loan for capital expenses and she knows of no-one who would lend to a village woman with no collateral.
Irving and Valenti

He emerged from the bathroom, a cotton sarong hitched at his slim hips, lithe sinewy torso glistening with un-towelled beads of water. Skip-stepping through the dining room, he stooped his gangly frame to ruffle his little brother Anggjie’s hair as he watched English cartoons in the TV room, then scuttled through the visitors sitting room and slid into his domain at the front of the house.

Irving’s room overlooks the front yard. A high double bed butts up against the sitting room wall. In the far corner a Ludwig drum kit tempts him to “come and play”. There’s not much evidence of study – no text books, no note books on his writing desk, but a badminton racket leans against the wall. The odour of pubescent male hangs in the closed room air, not over-powering, but enough to confirm this is a 16-year-old boy racing towards manhood.

Hair slicked back, grey long trousers and white short-sleeved shirt, mark him as a senior high school student (SMA). He grabs his motorbike keys and mobile phone on his way to the dining room, where he rummages through the shoe rack at the door to the garage for his joggers.
“‘Ving, eat something before you go,’” his mother calls from the kitchen.
Irving slurps at a glass of sweet black tea, wolfs down a couple of pieces of fried sweet potato and takes another piece with him as he goes to the kitchen.

“Ma, can you give me money?”
“What for?”
“Food and stuff.”
Miskarnia, his mother, takes $1.30 from a small purse in the kitchen dresser and reluctantly hands it to him.

“It’s too much, ‘Ving. Your father...”
The money disappears into his trousers pocket as he turns for the door.

“Jalan, Ma,” he calls over his shoulder.

Black duco gleaming from its daily early morning wash and polish the family’s 100 cc motorbike bursts into life. With helmet still unstrapped and throttle wailing he zooms down the street towards town.

It’s 6.35 am. He’s late, as usual.

“Allahu Akbar, Allahu Akbar,”
The Imam’s harsh voice shattered the black stillness of pre-dawn.
Valenti lay very still on the outside edge of the bed she shares with her father, mother, and baby brother.

“Get up, get up.” Her mother prodded her arm. She stumbled from the bedroom to the kitchen (dapur), a lean-to at the back of the house.

Soon the fire on the clay hearth threw dancing shadows on the wall. She filled the kettle with well water and set it on the small steel tripod over the fire, then turned to find the plastic bowl where the washing had soaked overnight. She poured off the excess water down the open drain along the back edge of the kitchen then hoisted the bowl onto her hip, grabbed the faded towel her family used for bathing, then quietly shuffled through the house, past her sleeping grandmother in the front room and out the door. Her light frame struggled under the weight of the washing as she negotiated the steep wooden steps at the side of the front verandah. At ground level she carefully felt her way over the open clay drain to the landing at the side of the house. Last night’s rain meant the uneven clay steps down to the irrigation channel (siring) were quite slippery but 12 year-old Valenti hardly noticed. This was her morning ritual. She could just about do it with
her eyes closed.

The irrigation channel, a constrained tributary of the Durian River, was almost overflowing, there had been so much rain lately. She placed the washing bowl on the cement wall of the irrigation channel, and then looked up.

Dawn had come but the rice fields were still dark shadowy forms. She could make out the coconut palms that fringed their neighbour’s sawah and the bend in the river. Except for the occasional traffic on the main road and the bubbling water in the siring, it was silent. No bird sounds, no frogs croaking.

Valenti squatted next to the bowl and started soaping each piece of washing, then rubbed it with a scrubbing brush. A couple of dips in the cold water of the siring, a deft twist of her wrists to wring out the excess water, then she tossed it into the plastic bowl.

With the washing done, it was her turn for a dip in the cold water. She washed her hair with soap she used for the clothes, and then erased the stale night smells from her body. Confidently she wriggled out of her wet night clothes while she held a dry sarong like a tent, around her young body then rinsed her clothes – three-quarter length cotton pants and a round neck top with elbow length sleeves. Perched precariously on the siring bank she cleaned her teeth, spat the frothy toothpaste into the siring, and watched the bubbling water devour it.

The silent sawah was deep blue-green grey now as the rising sun began to impact the day. Valenti gathered the bowl of washing, toiletries and the towel, stood gracefully then negotiated the slippery clay steps before heading to the front yard. A hen with nine new chicks on their first outdoor adventure crossed her path clucking gently to call her brood to a morsel she’d discovered near the hedge. Valenti’s older cousins had already hung their washing, filling the clothesline, so she spread her wet garments economically on the hedge just a couple of metres from the road.

“Cepat!” Her mother Sri called her to hurry. There was no cup of sweet black coffee for her.
in the kitchen so she drank a glass of water for breakfast.

Her school uniform barely fitted because she’d grown taller recently. She tugged at the faded pleated red skirt but that didn’t improve the situation. She knew there was no possibility of a new uniform. This was Year 6, her final year of Sekolah Dasar (Primary School). She had four months to go before she’d no longer need the skirt and white shirt. She dragged a wide-toothed comb through her hair, parted it over her left eye, then pulled it back into a ponytail with an elastic band. That way although she had no pretty ribbons or clips like the other girls at school, at least people could see she had small gold hoop earrings.

Pierced ears for girls are almost the same in Rejang culture as circumcision is for boys. Islamic law requires circumcision for all males. Rejang custom requires parents to have their daughters’ ears pierced while they are still babies. In the old days parents did the procedure with a needle. Today their local bidan (midwife) has a sanitized tool she uses when baby girls are brought for their 6-week check-up at her house-clinic. To leave a girl’s ears un-pierced shows no concern for her future or commitment to her suitability as a bride. Some families cannot afford gold or silver earrings, so girls wear a loop of cotton threaded through the piercing.

Keke, Valenti’s 8-year-old niece, lost an ear-
ring and the hole in her ear lobe closed over. Elpiana, her mother, noticed this one afternoon while the women were sitting on the front verandah of the main family home. Elpiana picked a stem of lemon grass and pulled back the fronds until she had the strong fine inner reed. She cut a short firm section, then pulled the protesting Keke to her and held the child’s head firmly on her knees. Lining up the stem and the indentation of the piercing on the back of Keke’s earlobe, Elpiana jabbed the stem through the lobe where the hole had been, pushing out a tiny plug of flesh without causing any bleeding. Grabbing her ear, Keke squealed and pushed away from her mother protesting loudly at how cruel her mother was. Elpiana ignored the outburst and cut a half-centimetre length of the stem on the bench seat with an ancient knife.

“You want people to think we don’t care? Come here!” Elpiana barked grabbing for her daughter’s arm. Keke wanted to run but knew this time her determined mother was unbeatable.

Crying with anticipation of coming pain, she acquiesced and allowed her head to be placed back on her mother’s knee. With care, Elpiana forced the tiny length of stem through the earlobe, berating her daughter for careless behaviour and imploring her to leave the stem there until they could find some cotton to thread through the hole.

Irving was born in suburban Bengkulu, the provincial capital on the west coast, with a population of about 300,000. At the age of 40 days the extended family descended on the family’s home for the Potong Rambut (hair cutting) ceremony, a purification ritual and the family’s presentation of their new child to the community. The local Imam sacrificed a goat at dawn then later in the day, senior members of the family took turns to cut off a lock of Irving’s hair. Taher presented his son resting on seven layers of fine fabrics. Grandfathers, uncles and close male family friends carried candles, incense, flowers and the scissors and a bowl of water, symbols for a healthy and financially secure future. The hair cutting is symbolic of cleansing the baby after passing through the birth canal. After group photos and guests presenting gifts of money to Taher and Miskarnia, Irving’s parents, the celebration continued with an elaborate meal using the sacrificed goat, rice, fish and vegetables.

Growing up, Irving often played with
older children in his street, learning by osmosis the tricks of how to catch, tie to a length of cotton, then feed and exercise a ‘pet’ *capung* (dragonfly) for several days until it died. Working alongside his Father, he learned through trial and error how to use a *parang* (jungle knife) to clear weeds from the family’s yard before he was old enough to go to school. By age four he had his first school uniform to attend kindergarten (*Taman kanak-kenak*). When he was older he had several chickens in the back yard to care for. His parents provided the money for food and Irving got to sell the chickens when they matured.

Valenti sat on the front verandah of her Aunt Upik’s home, bouncing her little brother Firdaus (3), on her knee as the van pulled away. Grandma Amaria, Rindo (13) and Keke (8), sat in the back of the van with her aunt and Uncle Azman heading off to see the new hydro-power station. Budi (27), his wife Mira (23) and baby daughter, Julien, were in the front with Budi driving.

Valenti rarely leaves the confines of Kelobak village. Some years at Lebaran, the end of Ramadan, the month of fasting, she has visited her maternal grandmother’s village north of Curup. She and Firdaus were not going anywhere today either. Aunt Upik had clearly excluded them from the adventure.

“They can’t come. ‘Daus will just cry all the time because he hasn’t been that far in a vehicle,” Upik announced as we climbed into the van.

Aunt Upik and Grandma Amaria often make critical comments about Valenti, and Upik’s daughter-in-law, Mira. They are criticized for being lazy, for working too slowly, for not cooking food well and not caring properly for ‘Daus and baby Julien. Others in the family regularly criticise and make jokes about Valenti and Mira, often focusing attention on the children they care for. “Julien, you’re so ugly.” “Julien you’re so dirty, you haven’t had a bath. Your mother is useless.” “‘Daus, you’re such a problem, always crying.”

Like some other cultures, the Rejang use joking and criticism between certain members of family groups to modify the behaviour of some members of their community. The anthropologist Radcliffe-Brown, writes about joking activity. One form he calls symmetrical, where two people make fun of each other. An-
other type is asymmetrical where an individual is teased by another person but does not respond. Radcliffe-Brown says “the joking relationship which constitutes an alliance between clans or tribes, and that between relatives by marriage, are modes of organising so that a definite and stable system of social behaviour are maintained and combined”. This type of joking can be used to keep young people from getting too ‘big headed’ about their skills or their changing status in the community as they move into adulthood or to keep a new bride aware of her tenuous standing within the family she has married into. Radcliffe-Brown’s research pointed out that the one who is belittled should not take offence at the jokes as this is merely a mode of maintaining stability in the family. The impact of joking on Valenti and her cousin’s young Javanese wife, Mira, showed something different. Valenti sometimes responds by withdrawing from the group when the joking happens.

Sitting on the lounge room floor one evening with Keke and Rindo, she worked on a jigsaw puzzle, a game none of the group had seen before. Valenti quickly completed the picture, then offered advice to the other two. Adults in the room criticised her for her lateral thinking to find corner and straight edged pieces first, and her speed in finishing the puzzle. Within a short time she left the group, the jokes and criticism modifying her behaviour by limiting her public success and isolating her from the wider family.

One day when we were together in the kitchen, Mira tearfully spoke of her personal pain when she is criticised for her care of baby Julien or the food she cooks for the family. Her confidence is eroded and she says she is not bold to act with initiative within the family because she will probably be criticised and made a joke of by her mother-in-law and other members of the family. These responses make sure she stays “an outsider”, even though she has been part of the family for over three years and has produced a grandchild for Upik and Azman.

Could this effort to maintain the status-quo impact upon the Rejang’s openness to change? Could people be reticent to experiment with Daughter-in-law Mira is criticised for the way she cares for her baby, Julien.
new ideas and ways of doing things because of an innate fear of being singled out and made fun of?

Home from school by mid-afternoon, Irving changes out of school uniform into casual clothes then eats on his own at the dining room table. Over the months I’ve talked with him his dreams for the future have changed. Initially he wanted to be an artist, painting in oils, now he wants to be in a rock band, playing guitar or drums. Most afternoons Irving and two friends’ shut themselves in his bedroom to rehearse. Their pulsating guitars and drums dominate the household for a couple of hours. By early evening, usually before the call to prayer from the mosque over the road, Irving leaves home to visit a friend until late in the evening. Recently he started smoking cigarettes with his high school peers resulting in a heated exchange with his father, Taher, who does not smoke. Irving does not go to the mosque and doesn’t pray regularly during the day. During Ramadan in 2006 he rarely joined his family to eat at 3.00am before fasting for the day. Taher says he was lazy. At school Irving has weekly religious education classes and a class covering community and cultural values. He believes a person must do good towards other people, but doesn’t see much need to fast and pray five times a day.

Sitting on the front verandah in Kelobak one afternoon Keke announced that the previous year during Ramadan she had fasted every one of the thirty days required to fulfill one of the pillars of Islam. “Valenti only fasted for 28 days,” she crowed. When Keke returns from school for the day around 11.00am, she is free to play until late in the afternoon when she sometimes does homework for class the next day. Once a week she goes to a special class, run by a family friend in the village, to develop her writing and comprehension skills. Keke also joins her grandmother at the monthly Kaum Ibu (women’s) meeting at the mosque. Valenti is home from school about 1.00pm. After eating a meal of rice and vegetables, she walks about 40 minutes to the family’s coffee garden to work with her mother. Many days she has to care for Firdaus until his bedtime, and then sometimes she visits her aunt’s home to socialize with her cousins and aunts and uncles. One evening
while I was living at Aunt Upik’s home, Valenti came to visit with cousin Diab (10) and her parents, Bulyan and Nur Mail. While Uncle Azman and Uncle Bulyan explained to me in fine detail how to grow rice, pepper and coffee, Valenti and the other young ones sat on the floor drawing pictures of the village. Later I sat on the cool cement floor with them and asked what their life dreams were. Diab quickly articulated her desire to go to university and become a teacher. Initially Valenti could think of nothing she would like to do in life. No dreams for further education, no plans for a profession. Then she tentatively mentioned she had thought of becoming a school teacher.

“She’ll be a farmer,” her mother chimed loudly over my shoulder.

Taher says Valenti is the “hope of her family” and an education is important for her.

I visited Kepahiang briefly in October 2007 with a group of Australian friends. Irving walked into the familiar surrounds of his home to find eight foreigners talking and laughing with his father. I was surprised to see how engaged and relaxed he was as he greeted people politely then headed to the

Evening entertainment: Valenti and other females of the family play jacks with a ball and shells on the front verandah of her Aunt Upik’s home.
kitchen where his mother was preparing refreshments.

Later in the evening Miskarnia and I talked.

By late May, the end of the 2006-2007 school year, Taher and Miskarnia were desperate to engage Irving seriously in life rather than his ‘everything will be OK’ attitude. Exam results proved he was not focusing on his studies. The new school year would be his last before university. He would not be an acceptable candidate for tertiary study if he continued as he had been.

Towards the end of the long school break, Taher escorted his son to Jakarta. For a week they visited plush hotels, expansive suburban homes, slums and a group of families living in shelters made from cardboard boxes under the bridges of a free-way intersection. They met people his father knew, traveled on public transport, ate at restaurants and road-side stalls. The disparity of Jakarta’s wealth and poverty was dramatically demonstrated.

Irving’s life was deeply affected by this journey. He’d always thought his family was very wealthy. Not so. His father worked hard, saved regularly, took calculated risks and made sacrifices where needed. But their financial situation was nothing compared with the wealthy people of his nation’s capital city.

The community under the bridge affected him too. Raw poverty was frightening. There seemed no way out for these second and third generation families. There were so few options.

Taher and Miskarnia’s wisdom and sacrifice appears to have been repaid. Irving faces his final high school exams in early 2008. He’s planning to study music at university in Jogyakarta if his marks allow that.
“Y ou’ll need two tickets,” the driver barked at me.

Maybe he wasn’t happy with the size of the boxed gift I intended to balance on my knee during the trip to Kelobak. I had been in Bengkulu to do some research at the library and buy a gift for the village wedding our household was invited to attend at the weekend.

Late morning sun drove me to the shade of a concrete column on the corner shop’s veranda. Sweat streamed down my face and pooled at the bottom of my glasses lenses. Silently I prayed for people to come and buy the last tickets for the journey. I thought the mini bus would take twelve passengers, but this driver was going nowhere until 16 tickets were sold. No wonder I needed two seats. He was worried about my size, not the gift!

Almost an hour later, music blaring, we headed east, across the brown green patchwork of wet rice fields. Stilted timber houses fringe the only road that connects isolated Bengkulu with the Trans Sumatran Highway at Lubuk Linggau, three hours away. Kelobak, where I’m conducting ethnographic research is halfway to the junction.

Windows open, we travelled in silence – except for the music. Everyone was intent on keeping their balance as we weaved through traffic, around errant goats and water buffalo on the road and the first hairpin bends of our mountain climb. A teenager behind me slept, her head nestled on her Mother’s knee.

After 40 minutes, we stopped at Tabapananjung in front of a house shop sell-
ing granite mortar and pestle sets. Our driver unfolded himself from behind the steering wheel then disappeared into the deep shadows of the shop. Some passengers climbed out and stretched cramped limbs. I was still trying to decide if I'd follow suite when the driver emerged, clutching a fresh pack of cigarettes and a small bottle of water. Within seconds we were moving again.

“She’s not going to be sick, is she?” he asked.
“No, no,” her mother replied. “She’ll sleep.”
“What about you?” His dark eyes glared at me. “Will you be sick too?”
“Actually, I have been sick on this road before, but I don’t think I will be today. You’re a very careful driver,” I replied in fluent Indonesian.

That did it. The shroud of silence was shredded. He smiled and asked how many times I’d climbed the mountain.
“This is number eleven.”
“So, you’re not a stranger to Bengkulu.”
“I’m staying with friends in Kelobak, learning about Rejang culture.”

Conversation ebbed and flowed as we zigzagged up the face of the jungle clad Barisan Mountains. My family, health, income and spirituality all became public knowledge. And I learnt about my fellow commuters: their work, families, language and education.

Near the top of one fold in the mountains, we crossed under the arch marking the border of the Kabupaten of Kepahiang. Twenty minutes later, the final hairpin bends and steep grades behind us, we glimpsed Kepahiang, the

*Children heading to school in Kelobak in February 2006.*
coffee marketing centre of the mountains. During the main harvest season in April and May, the air enveloping the town is infused with intoxicating aromas of roasting coffee.

Several passengers left the mini-bus and others joined our adventure through the widening valleys heading north from town. It’s almost continual housing for the six kilometres from town to Kelobak. Villages merge into one another. A stranger needs inside knowledge to know where one village ends and the next starts.

We swept down a steep little hill to cross the Musi River then accelerated out of the valley. Pak Harun’s house slid past my window view, then Haji Romli’s home.

“Stop here, Sir.”

The driver scurried to the rear of the bus to retrieve my decorated box. I was surprised when he shook my hand warmly, then touched his hand gently to the centre of his chest in the Muslim fashion. Strict followers of Islam would never shake hands with a woman.

Amaria, the matriarch of my host family, greeted me from the bench seat on the front veranda. Toothless and wizened like a walnut shell, she spends hours every day perched here, surveying the road and village. At 78 she can no longer walk to her fruit gardens, 45 minutes east of the village, but most days she visits her rice field, ten minutes away.
The gift box was prodded and shaken by several family members before they announced that the water cooler I'd bought was a suitable gift.

Preparations for the wedding had been happening for days. On Tuesday evening I attended a ceremony where the bride and groom’s hands and feet were decorated with a paste of *inai* leaves that stained them orange like the *benna* used in India and Africa.\(^1\)

Each finger is caked in the thick green paste of *inai* leaves down to the first knuckle, colouring the nail and skin. Small balls of the mixture are pressed onto the second and third joints of each digit.

The bride’s friends cake her toe nails with paste and stick small balls of the mixture in a line around the edge of her feet, from her little toe, around her heel to her big toe. The groom’s male friends decorated his hands and feet.

“We do this for fun,” 18 year-old Mirna from our household told me. “Then everyone knows they’ve just been married.”

Several young women surreptitiously covered one or two fingers with the paste – for a taste of what might be in the future.

Fresh tobacco leaves soak in the water used to drip on the paste keeping it moist for a couple of hours, enhancing the hue of the dye. Late in the evening the dry shell is broken off the fingers revealing a rich orange-red symbol of pending change of status in the community.

Devi and Yan wait for the caked-on *inai* paste to dry on their hands and feet leaving an orange-red stain easily marking them as newly-weds. The dye lasts for about 3 months.
Throughout Friday, the day I returned, family and friends worked at the bride’s home preparing the feast for Saturday’s celebrations. The village Imam and his assistant, slaughtered around 200 chickens for the feasts. Rejang culture says meat slaughtered by women cannot be served to men.

Usually a bride’s parents host the day, but 18 year-old Devi’s parents divorced when she was young because of her mother’s untreated mental illness. Her mother remained locked in a room in the house where she had been for several years. Devi’s grandparents had raised her so they hosted the celebrations.

Well before dawn on Saturday the bride’s household was busy. A group of men started erecting the temporary shelter at the front of the house for the ceremony. Well practiced, the 30 x 10 metre roof and timber floor was complete by 8.00am. Materials for the shelter are stored at the village mosque. Everyone has access to them, just as they do to the plates and cutlery stored there for village hospitality.
In the back yard huge metal steamers and woks a metre wide balanced on rocks over open wood fires under a temporary awning among the jackfruit trees. Lazy smoke wisps, heavy with rich cooking smells, toured the back-yard announcing to neighbours the feast would be delicious.

Each village has two or three women who are known for their ability to cater for large community functions. These women organise the menu, order the food, supervise the teams of helpers who look after things like sweet refreshments to be served as the guests arrive, drinking water, rice, meat and vegetable preparation and cooking then they oversee the presentation of the feasts and finally the clean-up.

Teams of men cooked drinking water for the 300 guests and served the food. Women prepared and cooked the food, then did the washing-up.

Dressed in traditional dress, Devi remained cloistered in the front bedroom with her attendant and a local girl who was applying Devi’s makeup.

The sitting room was transformed from ceiling to floor with lengths of red fabric embroidered with gold filigree. The

Early on Saturday morning the men take about an hour to erect the temporary shelter for the wedding celebrations.
only furniture was a single door wardrobe with a full length mirror so dusty reflections looked like an out-of-focus photo, and a low table in blue haberdashery. It groaned under plates of sweet delicacies, fruit and non-alcoholic punch. Grandma sat on the floor near the table, ready to receive the guests. 

Like many other guests our household brought a live chicken, 1.5 kilos of dry rice, a coconut, ginger and turmeric. Grandma recorded each family’s gift in an exercise book. Her family refers to this book if they are invited by our household to a major celebration and responds with the same quantities we gave. This keeps balance in reciprocating so there is no worry of being over generous or stingy. 

“H e’s here. He’s here.” The backyard helpers buzzed excitedly. Devi’s aunt met Yan, the groom, at the front of their property. She dropped a sarong like a hoop over his head and Yan stepped through it, acknowledging his entry into Devi’s

Teams of friends and family help prepare the huge quantities of food for the celebration feasts on Saturday and Sunday.
The bride’s grandmother (above) helped by younger members of the family, records the gifts of food brought by invited guests, family and friends (left). Some people bring cash, roughly equivalent to the cost of the produce.

Decorative drapes, hired from a wedding specialist, transform the sitting room of the bride’s family home into an opulent venue to receive guest.
Devi, followed by her attendant, moved gracefully through the chatting throng of male guests sitting on the lower level of the shelter. Without even looking at the groom, she sat demurely with the women.

The leader of customary law in the village led the verbal confessions of commitment by men from both families and Yan and Devi were married. After kneeling to greet the senior members of both families, Yan returned to his seat and the celebration meal began.

Men filed out of the house with large...
bowls of rice and trays of small serving plates of beef, chicken, fish and vegetables for the guests who ate with their right hands, using strategically placed bowls of water for finger washing. Afterwards the male guests the pavilion to smoke and chat while the women guests were served. Finally the workers from the back yard emerged for the last sitting of the feast.

A Muslim religious ceremony led by the men of both families followed. Yan and Devi sat side by side in front of his father and her uncle. Yan made verbal commitments to stay with Devi for their whole lives, but if they divorced he promised to return to his family with no wealth from the relationship. Yan’s uncle prayed the mystical bijab kabul, prayer of joining, while he held hands with his nephew wrapped in a length of songket fabric. If their hands come apart during the prayer, it must be repeated. The nervous 18 year-old groom clasped his uncle’s hand firmly for the duration of the prayer.

Finally the government official conducted the civil ceremony when bride and groom signed their marriage cards.

That evening a dangdut band from nearby Kepahiang came to entertain everyone. By 8.00pm the band was
pumping. Two four meter banks of speakers throbbed rhythms through the night. Hundreds of people appeared, flooding out of the house yard, choking the two-lane main road, creating traffic chaos.

The newlyweds, now in western style wedding clothes, sat stoically on a gold lounge behind a small pile of wrapped presents. Our wedding gift was delivered to the house earlier, but I still had to stand and greet the groom and bride. Gifts are not very common at village weddings so each family that presents a gift is formally introduced.

Devi’s father appeared unexpectedly during the evening. Her eyes sparkled, although she didn’t smile. Without warning he took a microphone on stage and sang a love song for his daughter. Intense emotions burst through and Devi sobbed uncontrollably. The hapless groom in his too-big black suit and white cotton gloves looked bewildered, suddenly realising he was way out of his depth.

After a big night, the village woke slowly on Sunday. Pak Azman escorted me to the wedding house early to see the zikhir band of about 20 men playing shallow open-backed drums while singing gentle Koranic

Members of Kelobak’s prize-winning Zikhir band entertain invited guests during Sunday morning celebrations.
songs.
While they rehearsed, Devi, now wearing a rich black and gold woven coat over a batik sarong, perched on a plastic chair in the sitting room and picked half-heartedly at a plate of rice and vegetables to placate her insistent Grandmother. Yan padded up in a too-big black and gold suit to greet their guests.

The drum band entertained guests for over an hour then about 100 people enjoyed the final feast. The bride and groom’s families presented gifts of sticky rice cooked in bamboo tubes decorated with folded banana leaves to each guest as they left the celebrations.

Left-over food is divided between all the volunteer helpers to take home to share with their families as a way of thanking them for their help.

Walking past the house mid-afternoon, I noticed Devi washing the last few serving dishes in the front yard. The temporary shelter was gone along with the guests. Yan lounged on the front veranda, smoking. Was the pattern for married life already emerging?
She paces relentlessly. Majestic and exuding power, she doesn’t look like her line is endangered. The pampering she receives shows as her short hair ripples over taut muscles. Exquisitely marked, she is unique in creation – the colour of her hair is mimicked by the colour of her skin. Born and raised in captivity she will never roam freely in her own land.

Too much has changed.

In the old days her ancestors domi-
nated their homeland – impacting the culture of the Rejang people living in the mountains because of their spiritual power to monitor and maintain community harmony throughout the scattered villages. But roads infiltrated the isolation shrinking their jungle habitat and bringing farmers, industry and guns. Then the Rejang hunted and killed them and their power and influence over the people drastically diminished.

Finally there were so few in the jungles that scientists who knew nothing of their impact on culture came and took some of the remaining few away, far from the steamy tropical jungle. Now they live thousands of kilometres away in pseudo-jungle homes hidden in big cities.

Soaking in the autumn sun in Perth Zoo, Setia, now seven years old and ready to breed, is safe – but no longer free to impact people as her forebears did. Her secure domain is next to Dumai, a newly-arrived three-year-old bred in Germany. Setia stops padding silently on her perimeter track, looks into Dumai’s empty pen and growls deeply, intently, bone-chillingly. She’s ready to continue her line but he’s still having breakfast. Their numbers may be stabilized, but their wider influence has been dramatically reduced.

The predicament of these Sumatran tigers is a picture of what is happening to Rejang culture. Rapid changes in technology, education, farming methods and population growth have impacted the tight-knit isolated villages scattered throughout Bengkulu Province in Sumatra. Their animistic beliefs moved to receive the worldview of Islamic faith in the 1860s. In some places syncretistic beliefs continue with Islamic beliefs layered over the magic connected with tigers. In other areas people now follow Islamic beliefs purely.¹ Now the younger generation is exposed to secular scientific thought.

Setia, impatient for her mate’s attention.
through the national education system. All these elements of change are impacting Rejang culture. Skills, methods of community discipline and the use of Rejang language are being challenged.

My research, far from being an exhaustive monograph, demonstrates some of these challenges to culture. With changes to culture happening so quickly and thoroughly collecting and recording first-hand data is useful for future reference.

Academics including Marsden, Jaspan, Schneider and Siddik have recorded valuable information about the Rejang. Researching the daily lives of ordinary people records another layer of the culture, adding to analytical information and giving insight into the people’s inner lives, not just what they do and how they do it. The photographs of people at work, relaxing or celebrating contributes to the vital record of Rejang culture.

The time I spent among Taher’s family in Kelobak and Kepahiang was invaluable as I lived with them as a learner – not merely of Rejang culture, but of people. Being a student of life and people opens many doors to understanding. Although Taher had instructed the family to open “whatever doors she needs opened”, coming to Kelobak with humility and an attitude of eagerly wanting to learn, I believe, impacted the quality of the research material I was able to gather. This attitude helps ensure that the family and the researcher be “known” rather than merely “viewed” as an expression of “otherness” or “difference”.

It takes the valuable mundaneness of daily life and willingly examines it carefully, recording it with texture, colour and sensitivity so that this often missed expression of culture is retained. With confidence the learner attitude says the everyday experiences are worthy of being recorded and explored rather than discarded in favour of some faddish activity that may pique an academic’s interest or excite a copy editor. The heart response of people has intrinsic value and is worthy of being recorded.

The learner needs to cultivate ears and eyes that see, hear and can unravel the layers of meaning in everyday activity. Like the day 13 year-old Rindo sat with me for several hours on the front verandah while it poured with rain. Conversation ebbed and flowed as people
stopped by to chat from time to time. After about four hours I was squirming inside and battled to sit still and just “be”. I was anxious to “do”, to get on and visit people, try some new skill or unravel some obscure fact. But Rindo just sat. He was content. As we talked about his life he told me he wasn’t bored at all watching the rain. He was just relieved that he had a valid reprieve from his normal hard physical work as a labourer ploughing wet rice fields with his grandfather.

The longer I stayed in the village the more accepted I was. During my first two visits (July 2005 and February 2006), people stopped at the house merely to see the “white woman”.

Subtle changes impacted me during my November 2006 visit. I was no longer a curiosity in the village. People were used to me. They knew I was a married woman with strong connections to Taher’s family. Most people spoke Rejang all the time, expecting me to understand by now. I still had to ask questions in Indonesian regularly to confirm I had understood conversations and instructions accurately.

My previous experience living for years in Kalimantan Barat and working with the Dayak people prepared me well for hot chilli rice meals eaten with hands on a mat on the kitchen floor. I also knew the feeling of being an outsider because of limited understanding of my hosts’ heart language and their daily routines.

Rejang language flowed freely in the household and on the communal front verandah. Often someone would help me to understand what was being said by translating the main points of a conversation into Indonesian. Every day I learnt new Rejang words.

Rindo left school at 12 years old to work with his grandfather, Azman, preparing sawah for planting.
During my second visit in February 2006, there seemed to be some expectation that I could understand Rejang, or at least I should be able to understand the language but I was still at the point of only being competent enough to tell people I liked to drink coffee, enjoyed rice and chilli or needed transport to go home from town to the village.

One morning a group of women was sitting on Ibu Romli’s shaded front verandah, telling stories in Rejang language about the joys and challenges of married life. They described the conversation as “an opportunity for the young women to learn from the older women about marriage”. I sat with them for over an hour, listening to the rhythm and inflections of Rejang language, catching a phrase or word of meaning, feeling like a rock obstructing the flow of the bubbling Musi River, the flow of life bumped up against me and was deflected around me making complete engagement difficult. Elpiana (aged 32), Upik’s oldest child, saw my discomfort and offered me some insightful advice: “Just laugh when we laugh. That will be enough.” No-one offered any translation into Indonesian, and I gave up asking questions as they seemed to interrupt the flow of the conversation. Being with them, laughing with them was enough for the moment.

The longer I stayed, the more accepted I was and the deeper our communication, verbal and non-verbal.

On my third visit I was allowed to walk to rice fields, fruit and coffee gardens with family members. The wet season was late so that meant the jungle paths were mostly dry. In February 2006, Upik and her adult son, Budi, said I couldn’t go to the new ginger garden because it was too far and the path too difficult for me. Upik had graciously escorted me around and through wet rice fields on the October 2005 trip. She was aware of my battle with tropical heat and limited aptitude on single pole bamboo bridges, slippery mud walls of ‘sawah’ lots and how pathetic I am at walking on wet clay paths. We had laughed a lot on those excursions and could have laughed more travelling to the ginger garden, but not wanting to impede their progress and work, I agreed to stay at
In November 2006 we walked for several hours along jungle paths and through wet rice fields visiting coffee gardens, fruit gardens and an amazing garden owned by the Rego Adat, Pak Bahrun, where the tallest flower in the world was ready to burst from bud to flower. The dry season made the paths much easier to negotiate. The heat meant I still sweated profusely and needed to drink water every hour or so. Upik didn’t sweat much and she didn’t need to drink either.

The wealth of information collected during the three field trips far exceeds what is included in these stories. Future work to understand more about Rejang culture could use this as a foundation to further explore belief systems, inter-generational communication, marginalization and power. A particular area of interest is how Rejang folk Islam has absorbed the animistic worldview of this family’s ancestors.

A blacksmith (left) fashions a parang blade at his road-side foundry in Kepahiang. The tubular bellows in another forge stand unused since electricity was connected to power an air pump. 2006
On an early visit to Kepahiang (2004) I watched a blacksmith making steel knives at his roadside factory stall. A diligent assistant pumped the upright bellows keeping the fire hot for the craftsman. In November 2006 the ancient bellows lay discarded near the little stall. The blacksmith flicked a switch and almost miraculously the fire glowed white hot.

Children like Taher’s great-niece, Julien, born in 2005, may never see or understand how craftsmen formed iron into tools for generations of Rejang people before electricity came to their roadside foundries.

What other changes in Rejang culture will pass Julien by un-noticed and unrecorded?

These issues have not gone un-noticed by Taher:

“The Rejang people must have a sense of ownership of their own culture. The Rejang culture must become the personal identity for every Rejang person wherever they are, but particularly for those Rejang people who live in their homeland. Understanding the customary law and judgements of the Rejang culture must become the guide book and everyday lifestyle for Rejang people. The good values like helping on another, working together, welcoming guests, the strong feeling of being part of a family, and other values have to be guarded and nurtured with care. Because of these things, Rejang culture needs to become a subject at school for children and to be reinforced as the well of wisdom for ethics and manners in everyday life for all levels of the community. I also desire to see Rejang Culture be made a foundational research issue at university level in education and also within other non-government organisations.

If the Rejang community is no longer rooted in or no longer cares about their culture, our identity as Rejang people will become weak and may even be lost all together.”
The terms listed were collected during research in the village of Kelobak and the town of Kepahiang in the Kabupaten of Kepahiang, Province of Bengkulu, Sumatra, Indonesia. Throughout this work Rejang terms appear with rej. after the term. Indonesian terms appear with ind. after them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>REJANG</th>
<th>ENGLISH</th>
<th>INDONESIAN</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>thumb print</td>
<td>cap jempol</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>open backed flat drum</td>
<td>zikir</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hepatitis A</td>
<td>sakit kuning</td>
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<tr>
<td>betel nut</td>
<td>pinang</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>eel</td>
<td>(ikan) belut</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>horse drawn cart</td>
<td>pedati</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>flour bag</td>
<td>karung gani</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>abducted, kidnapped</td>
<td>culik</td>
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<tr>
<td>acuan</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>andong</td>
<td>red leafed shrub planted as land boundary marker in Kelobak rice and coffee gardens</td>
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<tr>
<td>tu'ai</td>
<td>hand held cutting blade used to harvest rice</td>
<td>ani-ani</td>
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<tr>
<td>asoa</td>
<td>younger sibling (male?)</td>
<td>adik</td>
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<tr>
<td>bakul sirih</td>
<td>small woven container with lid that holds ritual items for marriage ceremonies</td>
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<tr>
<td>belanyo</td>
<td>to shop</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>beledu</td>
<td>velvet</td>
<td>bladru</td>
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<tr>
<td>REJANG</td>
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<tr>
<td>berunang</td>
<td>large woven basket with head strap used to carry rice, coffee, fire wood, pepper</td>
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<tr>
<td>bioya</td>
<td>drink</td>
<td>minum</td>
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<tr>
<td>bluking</td>
<td>small containers used to store betel nut and lime</td>
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<tr>
<td>bubu</td>
<td>type of fishing net</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>bukeu</td>
<td>nodes on bamboo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cendol</td>
<td>green noodle in coconut milk sauce served during gotong royong</td>
<td>cendol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cepalu</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>cido</td>
<td>illness caused by carrying loads that are too heavy</td>
<td>luka dalam</td>
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<tr>
<td>cilukba</td>
<td>word used when playing hide and seek with a young baby - adult hiding their face behind their hands</td>
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<tr>
<td>cupak</td>
<td>volume of measure the size of a condensed milk tin approx 300ml</td>
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<tr>
<td>daun tlutuk</td>
<td>leaves used to tie food parcels</td>
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<tr>
<td>didit-ditit</td>
<td>little by little</td>
<td>sedikit-sedikit</td>
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<tr>
<td>gebuk</td>
<td>slatted slanting board used in rice fields for threshing grain.</td>
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<tr>
<td>gensana / ayut</td>
<td>older sister</td>
<td>kakak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gerigik</td>
<td>bamboo water holder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gip</td>
<td>bamboo cast used by village healers to splint broken bones in the arm before wrapping in paste of young black chicken.</td>
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<tr>
<td>gondok</td>
<td>thyroid deficiency causing goitre</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Grombolan</td>
<td>factional group made up of local and Bengkulu Rejang people during Indonesian Independence War. Part of the Black Army</td>
<td>Pihak dari Tentara Hitam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ikan balur</td>
<td>type of fish from mountain streams</td>
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<tr>
<td>ikut</td>
<td>to carry a child on the hip or tied to the adult with a cloth</td>
<td>gendong</td>
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<tr>
<td>REJANG</td>
<td>ENGLISH</td>
<td>INDONESIAN</td>
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<tr>
<td>ikut</td>
<td>to carry a child on the hip or tied to the adult with a cloth</td>
<td>gendong</td>
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<tr>
<td>inai</td>
<td>dye used in pre-marriage marking of bride and grooms hands and feet</td>
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<tr>
<td>jalar</td>
<td>type of fishing net on oval frame</td>
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<tr>
<td>jampi</td>
<td>to pray over elements like oil used in village healing rituals</td>
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<tr>
<td>jenano kabar</td>
<td>how are you?</td>
<td>apa kabar</td>
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<tr>
<td>kancir air</td>
<td>water powered rice mill</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kawo</td>
<td>coffee</td>
<td>kopi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kelitang</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>ketua batin</td>
<td>leader of the committee that builds the tarop for family celebrations and ceremonies</td>
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<tr>
<td>ketua bujang</td>
<td>leader of committee that prepares drinks for guests at celebrations like weddings</td>
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<tr>
<td>ketua gadis</td>
<td>leader of the committee that prepares cakes and other sweet food for weddings</td>
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<tr>
<td>ketua gulai</td>
<td>cooking team for community celebrations like weddings</td>
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<tr>
<td>kipang</td>
<td>window</td>
<td>jendela</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kudisan</td>
<td>scabies</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kue tat</td>
<td>Rejang specialty cake</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>kuntil anak</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lak</td>
<td>want</td>
<td>mau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lemang</td>
<td>glutinous rice in coconut milk cooked in lengths of bamboo</td>
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<tr>
<td>lutung</td>
<td>type of monkey with black fur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>meniam</td>
<td>drink</td>
<td>minum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>menuoi</td>
<td>bathe</td>
<td>mandi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>muning</td>
<td>great grand parent</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>muning kerahi</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Naduhak</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nik’biea / te’ak</td>
<td>grandmother</td>
<td>nenek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REJANG</td>
<td>ENGLISH</td>
<td>INDONESIAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nik'bong</td>
<td>grandfather</td>
<td>kakek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>orak</td>
<td>hollow tube used to pound betel nut and lime that older women chew</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>owa'</td>
<td>aunty</td>
<td>bibi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pacat</td>
<td>leech</td>
<td>lintah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>panggal gulai</td>
<td>one of up to three people in each village who can plan and prepare cooking for celebrations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>piangan</td>
<td>tiny insect that eats the forming rice heads</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pohon pukut</td>
<td>Tree from which bark is taken to make fabric for clothing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potong rambut</td>
<td>ceremony for 40 day old baby</td>
<td>potong rambut</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pujuk porong</td>
<td>type of fern used as vegetables</td>
<td>pakis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>pusaka</td>
<td>heirlooms</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>puyang</td>
<td>great grand mother</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>racit</td>
<td>snare to trap roosters in the jungle</td>
<td>mata jerat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roja Adat (Rejo Adat)</td>
<td>head of customary law in a village</td>
<td>Kepala Adat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ruas</td>
<td>node of bamboo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sarat</td>
<td>bark used to make head strap for carrying basket (berunang)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sebak-sebak</td>
<td>large black beetle found in wet rice fields</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>seguuguk</td>
<td>pain connected with menstruation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sekuyir</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>selpeak</td>
<td>small container that holds betel nut and leaves</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>siamang</td>
<td>black monkey clever at walking on thin tree branches</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sipai</td>
<td>monkey with yellow fur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>REJANG</td>
<td>ENGLISH</td>
<td>INDONESIAN</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sorok</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stawar sedingin</td>
<td>leaves used for cuci kampung ceremony</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stokot</td>
<td>dried ubi stem tied to wrist and ankle of baby to protect from evil</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sumai</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tangburu</td>
<td>old style rice sweet like dodol</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tanggup</td>
<td>type of fishing net</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tapung</td>
<td>wedding hair decoration for bride</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tarop</td>
<td>temporary shelter erected at the front of a home for wedding or funeral</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tepung aren</td>
<td>sago</td>
<td>tepung aren</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tidoa</td>
<td>sleep</td>
<td>tidur</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tinik</td>
<td>to pierce ear</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ubi rambat</td>
<td>tuberous plant whose leaves are used to dye ratan black for weaving. Does not fade</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uko</td>
<td>personal pronoun, I</td>
<td>aku</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>uko lak</td>
<td>I wish / want</td>
<td>aku mau</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>umbut pedas</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>utuk</td>
<td>wooden tool for pounding rice by hand in a lesung</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>walo</td>
<td>pumpkin</td>
<td>peringgi, labu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>wawa</td>
<td>uncle</td>
<td>paman</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
End Notes

Section 1 - Introduction: A Learning Journey (page 103)
1. Jaspan, M. A. (1964). From patriliny to matriliny: structural change among the
Redjang of Southwest Sumatra, Australian National University. Page 24 Djang
Pat Petulai (the four princes)
2. Taher’s oral history refers to a princess from Majapahit kingdom giving the fam-
ily certain items including a metal canon that have become part of the family’s
heirlooms.
4. Jaspan records the road through to Curup was asphalted in 1955. The Rejang
called it “brushed with asphalt” Jaspan, M. A. 1964:55.

Section 2 - Taher (page 113)
1. The road from Bengkulu, through Kepahiang and Curup to Muara Aman was
established by 1908. Siddik, Prof. Dr Haji Abdullah. 1977. Hukum Adat Rejang.
Asia Historical Reprints, Oxford University Press. Page 184.
3. Ibid page 118
Framing Indonesian Realities: Essays in symbolic anthropology in honour of Reimar Schefold,
edited by P. Nas, Gerard Persoon and Rivke Jaffe. Leiden, Netherlands: KITLV
Press.
7. Ibid.
10. Dra S.D.B. Aman Other Folk Tales from Indonesia includes a number of folk
tales where someone suffering makes good through perseverance and hard
work.
11. Siddik refers to this decoration as inai curi as it was performed in secret. Siddik
Section 3 - Miskarnia’s Family (page 131)


Section 4 - Amaria (page 149)

1. Jaspan, M.A. 1964:204
2. Jaspan, M.A. 1964:43
4. Jaspan, M.A. 1964:56
5. Amaria refers to this General as General Hei Ho but Sister Nesta James, an Australian nurse prisoner of war held by the Japanese at Palembang and Lubuklinggau from 1942 – 45 by the Japanese gives another explanation of the name heihos. They were a military youth movement based, I think, on the German youth movement” http://www.awm.gov.au/journal/j32/nelson.htm. Siddik notes *heiho* as the name given to helpers of the Japanese forces. He says romusha were the forced labour young men. Siddik, A. 1977:64.
7. Jaspan, M.A. 1964:12
8. Marsden 1811:49
10. Schneider, J. 1995:149
13. Field research during 2006 confirmed Amaria’s relatives live in 124 of the 256 houses in Kelobak village.

Section 5 - Upik and Azman (page 167)

1. Call to prayer as recorded on 30 days website: http://www.30-days.net/shop/download/07_30Days_sample.pdf
   "Allah is the greatest"
I bear witness that there is no god except Allah
I bear witness that Mohammed is the Messenger of God
Come to prayer
Come to prosperity
Allah is the greatest
There is no god except Allah”


4. Schneider, J. 1995:49, 50. Transmigration began in July 1907 after initial planning was commenced in 1905. The settlements came under the marga land system, giving the Pasirah control over the new settlements.

5. Schneider, J. 1995:63, 73. In 1928 in the Kepahiang area the majority of irrigation systems called bevolking-sawah (ned.) were originally built by local communities. The BOW-areas were constructed and run by the department of public works. quoting Tengbergen 1928:4,5.


7. Schneider, J. 1995:133,134 from research in the Upper Musi area.

8. Schneider, J. 1995:39. Plantation development in Rejang-Musi was slower than other areas of Dutch influence. The coffee company Soeban Ayam is reported to be the first to plant coffee on the slopes of Mt Kaba, east of Curup with a small plantation of 355 hectares recorded in 1896.


Section 6 - Irving and Valenti (page 186)


Section 7 - The Wedding (page 194)


Section 9 - Conclusion: Vanishing Acts (page 208)