Archival Research
On Hunter-Gatherers’ Religions In Borneo

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INTRODUCTION

This research focuses on religious changes among hunter-gatherers in Borneo. I have carried out a two month archival research that will be used in the understanding of the relationship between traditional beliefs and new religious systems within hunter-gatherer economies. The project pursues two goals. The first goal is to gather information on hunter-gatherers’ traditional cosmology. This includes a compilation of sacred elements, such as myths, rituals, sacred materials and behaviours that may offer information on hunter-gatherers’ religious systems. The second goal is to explore the economic changes that have developed among hunter-gatherer communities throughout the last century. Thus, the economy and the sacred are the variables that will be considered in the understanding of religious changes among hunter-gatherers in tropical areas.

First, the paper describes the object of study and the methods used in the compilation of the material culture. Religion, and especially sacred phenomenon, has been a widely discussed topic through history. In order to define the proposed object of study, I review some of the most important theories of religion. Second, I describe the involved population. Although hunter-gatherers in tropical areas are very diverse, some characteristics are found among them. In this article, I pay special attention to religious issues among hunter-gatherers in Borneo. Finally, I have included the references to documents, photos, and other archival materials found in the main archives of Sarawak, Malaysia.
1. RELIGION: THEORIES, MATERIALS, AND SOURCES.

Reviewing Some Theories

Different theories have developed in order to describe the concept of religion and its components. Guthrie (1993) states that today, theories of religion comprise two broad camps, those of believers and those of nonbelievers. On the one hand, believers’ theories are those primarily concerned with one single religion. They focus on topics such as how people come to specific views and practices, as well as how the truth in question came to be known. These theories may state that people follow their beliefs and practices because God or gods revealed them, or because people have divined them by observing the work of gods in nature.

On the other hand, nonbelievers’ theories focus on the idea of religion as a general concept. They look for the main ideas that all religions might share. In general, the resulting theories are diverse, claiming that gods do not exist and that religion is a human construction. These humanistic theories of religion can be divided in three main groups. The first one, which Guthrie (1993) calls the wishfulfillment group, states that people create religion in order to alleviate unpleasant emotions. In this way, fears, anxieties, and dissatisfaction might be the promoters of popular religious movements such as the nativistic, millennial or revitalization ones. Religions also arise during economic hardships, foreign invasions, genocides or plagues (Guthrie, 1993). Many writers, such as Hume, Freud or Malinowski have suggested that anxiety and insecurity causes, or at least intensifies, religiosity. In this way, religion gives the chance to escape into fantasy and live despite uncertainty. Other writers have criticized the wishfulfillment theories. Radcliffe-Brown (1979), for example, addresses that although magic and religion might give men confidence, it could equally be argued that they give men fears and anxieties. Authors close to the wishfulfillment theories are Benedict de Spinoza, Ludwig Feuerbach, and Karl Marx.

The second group of humanistic theories are the so called social functionalists. These theorists hold that religion is a way to create and maintain social solidarity. They
approach the study of religion from a symbolic point of view; the religious beliefs and practices that surround the social order are formulated and expressed in symbols (Guthrie, 1993). The functionalist interpretation of religion goes back in history to ancient China and Greek societies. Durkheim (1965) states that the religious thought does not describe the world in general, but human social relations. The distinction between the sacred and the profane realms is maintained because they are necessary to society. In this way, the totem is the emblem that represents its members, and through it, Durkheim suggests that the society worships itself. Durkheim also says that religion and science have the same aims (to interpret and influence the world), the same topics (nature, man, and society), and the same logic (connecting, relating, classifying, and systematizing). Doing this, he approaches the third group of theorists.

The last group of humanistic theories, relies on aspects of both the wishfulfillment and the social functionalist theories. They are based on the idea that religion is an interpretation of the world, as well as an attempt to influence it. They emphasize the idea of humans (as animals) perceiving and acting in the world. Many of these theorists refer to this religion as primitive science (Guthrie, 1993). In the seventeenth-century Bernard Fontenelle (1987) wrote that religion started when lightning, wind, and other natural phenomena, made people imagine humanlike agents more powerful than themselves. Fontenelle (1987) recognized that people imagine these agents as like themselves because they think analogically. These ideas strongly developed in the late 19th century, giving birth to the rationalist movement. In 1897, Herbert Spencer proposed the humans’ dualistic worldview, a consequence of natural phenomena and human interpretations. Tylor has been included among these theorists. Tylor (1979) adds the notion of animism and explains it through the distinction between life and death. Also, through the appearance of human shapes in dreams and visions. He understands animism as a form of anthropomorphism. He offers an evolutionary scheme, in which the objects of religious beliefs develop from souls to spirit beings, to gods, to a single God. In general, he states that ideas, not feelings, most distinguish religion (Tylor, 1979).

Clifford Geertz’s theory might be considered close to the intellectualists’ group. Geertz (1966) understands religion as
Thus, Geertz defines religion by its function, this is: religion is used to motivate people by making them believe in a meaningful and coherent universe. From Geertz’s point of view, humans understand the world through symbols. People need answers in their life; they need a framework in which the gaps and contradictions have a meaning, even if this is not immediately apparent (Guthrie, 1993). In summary, Geertz finds the creation and maintenance of meaning central. Religious symbols are devised by men and “serve to produce […] motivations in men” (Geertz, 1966). Symbolic activities such as religion, art, or ideology, are attempts to provide orientation for an organism which cannot live in a world that it is unable to understand (Geertz 1973: 140:141).

A few scholars have found Horton the most thoroughgoing, explicit, important and controversial intellectualist. Horton (1960) defines religion as “the extension of the field of people’s social relationships beyond the confines of purely human society.” The nonhuman world has a social relationship with humans. This relationship is especially necessary when human society fails to meet their needs. Horton (1960) states that people in small, simple societies look to their deities for technical help (weather, pests and illness) while people in large, complex ones look to deities for personal relationships. Horton’s opinion is that religious models are merely opportune and can readily be supplanted by mechanistic models. Some critics state that this account seems to give too much weight to conscious explanation and too little to unconscious perception and interpretation (Horton, 1982).

At the end of the 1990’s, Guthrie reformulates the intellectualist approach. Guthrie (1993) addresses the idea of anthropomorphism not merely as an idiom for conscious explanation, but as the result of a general, spontaneous, and unconscious interpretative tendency. In summary, humans do not just “see” but “see as.” Every world must be won by interpretation, of which common sense, science, and religion all
are variants. Guthrie (1993) argues that humans assimilate the universe while finding human features where they do not exist. The goal is to guess as much order and meaning as they can.

The theory described by Steward Guthrie is called the cognitive science of religion. For Guthrie (1995), religion is an accidental product of the evolutionary process resulting from the inferential mechanism whereby human beings interpret simultaneously what they see and apply significance to their interpretations. In this way, it is perception that allows changes from an inanimate to an animate category. Religion rests on the evolutionarily evolved strategy of humans to attribute life to nonhuman domains. These anthropomorphic and animistic representations appear not only among children but also among adults all around the world (Pyysiäinen and Anttonen, 2002). Boyer (1994) also states that this is possible because they violate human’s intuitive expectations. The human mind is a combination of ontological categories and specific expectations which constitute our intuitive ontology (Boyer, 1994). In this way, intuitive ontology organizes our experience in order to make sense of it. Although humans’ behavior relies on ontological categories, they also have violations that run against the expectations and forms of natural explanations concerning the properties and behavior of members in the specific category.

In practice, the cognitive science of religion, instead of questioning the existence of gods, spirits or ghosts, or the cultural diversity of myths, beliefs and rituals, focuses on the role that the human mind plays in the construction of supernatural elements. This helps in the understanding of why religious concepts emerge, and what role memory plays in the cultural transmission of beliefs and practices. Currently, there are four interrelated areas that approach religion from a cognitive perspective. These are: the application of psychological theories of mind and of agent causality in explaining the social use of religious beliefs and the representation of ritual structure; epidemiological models of the cultural success of religious representations; the role of the different memory systems in the transmission of religious ideas; and the role of emotions in the adoption and transmission of religious beliefs. In general, the cognitive approach offers new possibilities for scientific work on the way religious ideas are adopted, represented and communicated (Pyysiäinen and Anttonen, 2002).
Material Culture.

Like the cognitive science of religion, this article understands religion as a cognitive construction. The main goal has been the compilation of ethnographic material for further discussion on religious changes among hunter-gatherers economies in tropical areas; and the object of study has been the concept of the sacred. From a cognitive point of view, “sacred” must be understood as a mental concept. Through history, certain events, objects, places and times, persons and animals have been designated as “sacred” all over the world. Within Western cultural history there are two metarepresentational options that stand out as most common: things with exceptional qualities, showing intuition-violating properties, and things with perfect and ideal qualities (Pyysiäinen and Anttonen, 2002). As Boyer (1998) points out, these religious representations “would probably not be acquired at all, if their counter-intuitive aspects did not make them sufficiently salient and attention-grabbing” (Boyer 1988:881). In general, the sacred can be adopted as a heading for the supramundane and for accounts of the kind of mental representations in which objects and phenomena are perceived and interpreted as mysterious and awesome (Pyysiäinen and Anttonen, 2002). These representations, classified and designated in world ethnography as sacred, are the material culture that I have been looking for during my archival research. Understanding why they have been designated as sacred might let us understand why they have been deleted, modified or discriminated throughout history.

Main Sources

I have used archaeological, linguistic and cultural sources in an attempt to compile ethnographic data referring to the sacred. Archaeological records have helped me in the consideration of the sacred which refers to elements and events of the past. They also have helped me in the organization of historical events. This is the case of documents referring to the Jarang, the Ulu Kakus, and the Niah caves. Other written documents are more specific, dealing with Neolithic burials, megaliths and coffin burials in the island of Borneo.
The linguistic field has been used in the classification of Penan language materials, teknonyms, and terms. Linguistics has also helped me in the compilation of historical writing and oral history references.

Finally, there are a group of cultural references that are important in the consideration of past and present cultural changes among hunter-gatherer communities. Material sources, such as baskets, mats, hats, wood carvings and tattoos express cultural identities and inform about the relationship between people and the environment. Other resources, such as instruments, songs and chants are also important references to consider. As are dances and literature (legends and poems), as expressions of daily life and highlighted events in any society. Cultural materials also provide information on migrations, trade, social and cultural relationships, as well as in the use of memory in the transmission of religious events.

HUNTER-GATHERERS: DEFINING THE POPULATION

Although hunter and gatherer societies are very diverse, there are certain common characteristics that can be identified. Hunter-gatherers are generally people who live in relatively small groups, without centralized authority, standing armies, or bureaucratic systems. The Cambridge encyclopedia on hunters and gatherers (1999) defines foraging as subsistence based on hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants, and no domesticated animals except the dog. Hunter-gatherers have used foraging in different ways. Some of them have lived in degrees of contact with non-hunting societies. In South and Southeast Asia, for example, hunter-gatherers have lived close to settled villagers, trading forest products such as furs, medicinal plants, and rattan, in order to acquire rice, metals and other manufactured products. This patron-client arrangement has also been popular among Central and East African hunter-gatherers, as well as among South American and Siberian populations (Lee and Daly, 1999). Archaeological evidence in the Amazon basin indicates that foraging is a secondary readaptation from a previous farming organization (Roosevelt, 1999). Anne Roosevelt (1999) suggests that European colonization might have put them back in the hunting and gathering mode of
production. As a consequence, almost all tropical South American foragers combine hunting and gathering activities with plant gardens. This could also be the case of other current hunting and gathering societies. But foraging and subsistence is just the starting point in the definition of hunting and gathering societies. Social organization, cosmology and world-view are the other major areas covered by hunter-gatherers studies today.

The basic (but not unique) unit of social organization among hunter-gatherers is the band. Bands are normally small-scale nomadic groups of fifteen to fifty people related by kinship. They are relatively egalitarian (Cormier, 2003). In this way, leadership tends to be based on popular opinion, and leaders can persuade but not command. Freedom seems more accessible than in hierarchical societies. This social system has put them in distinct disadvantage in their encounters with centrally organized colonial authorities (Lee and Daly, 1999). Mobility is another important element of their politics. People in mobile societies tend to move away rather than submit themselves to unpopular leaders. Also, it appears that all band-organized peoples exhibit a seasonal pattern of concentration and dispersion. Social and ecological factors might be responsible for the dispersion into small foraging units, and aggregation into much larger units depending on food availability. The last characteristic common to almost all band societies is a land tenure system based on a common property regime (CPR). These regimes are not based on private property rules, and while movable property is held by individuals, land is held by a kinship-based collective. Reciprocal access makes it possible to draw on the resources of several territories (Lee and Daly, 1999).

Hunter-gatherers’ world view is based on sharing and reciprocity activities. Reciprocity is the economic form in which actions and things are performed and given without an immediate expectation of return. Sahlins (1965) states that reciprocity is almost universal in hunting and gathering societies.

In their current transition into globalization, many hunter-gatherer communities have become agriculturalist. However, status, prestige and respect for men and women might still be determined by such ability to use the forest knowledgeably and productively. Hunter and gatherer societies have been
marginalized and considered deculturated. In recent times they have become a threat to the nation’s plans for development (Lee and Daly, 1999).

In Borneo, the current hunter-gatherer communities live under state polices that consider cultural issues such as the national integration, the common identity, the promotion of an acceptable religion and the modern lifestyle (Winzeler, 1997). Government has taken part in moving and settling nomadic hunter-gatherers, and also has sought to move villagers to new, more accessible locations. Sometimes this has improved the status of indigenous peoples; however in some cases, it has worsened it. The values of hunter-gatherers’ have been affected by settlement. Bornean hunter-gatherers are not the only case. As an example, when the Huaorani adapted to live in sedentary communities along major rivers, their hunting and fishing activities changes, and they abandoned their “demonic” system of food taboos (Kimerling, 1995). Large fish and a wide variety of previously taboo animals became increasingly important in their diet. SIL introduced firearms for hunting. The settlements were overpopulated by Huaorani standards, and most wild fruit trees and other important forest resources near the settlements were exhausted. Hunters had to travel greater distances —two to three days away—to find food. Increasingly, the Huaorani traded their game for external goods, or sold it to oil workers and the Ecuadorian military, substituting carbohydrates for proteins in their diet. Many studies show that poor nutrition is a serious problem today in these communities. The Huaorani have also begun to sell live animals to oil workers and soldiers, including threatened and endangered species (Kimerling, 1995). In summary, settlement, together with the introduction of firearms, has promoted the elimination of taboos among hunter-gatherers communities. They have found new reasons and beliefs adapted to their everyday decision making processes.

HUNTER-GATHERERS AND RELIGION IN TROPICAL AREAS.

Some cosmological characteristics appear to be common in many but not all hunter-gatherers’ societies. There is a general conception that the land around them is their spiritual home and the source of all good things (Bird-David 1990; Turnbull 1965).
Hunter-gatherers live immersed in nature. Nature is animated with moral and mystical forces, and both anthropocentrism and anthropomorphism appear to be common among them. Guenther (1993) states that the world of hunter-gatherers is a multi-layered world, composed of two or more planes: the above/beyond zone, and the underworld. These planes surround the present world inhabited by humans. There is a central figure found in the myth worlds of many hunting and gathering societies. This is a divine but very human figure. Shamanism is also commonly found among these societies. In order to heal the sick and provide spiritual protection shamans meditate between the human world and the dangerous and unpredictable world of the supernatural. Shamanism is defined as a mix of theatre and instrumental acts in order to approach the plane of the sacred. These performances vary widely (Lee and Daly, 1999).

Missionarization has taken part in hunter-gatherers’ spiritual life all over the world. As an example, the Yuquí case shows how Christianity should not be understood as the transmission of new values, but as an example of “technological development.” MacLean (1989) argues that modern missionaries, aware of many of the criticisms of anthropologists and others, insist that they are not “forcing” the doctrine of Christianity but simply “making it available” to native people. She also says that what they fail to recognize is that Christianity is the ideology of a more technologically sophisticated culture and that it is this advantage that unfairly sets the stage for the dominant-subordinate roles that inevitably follow. Also, the Huaorani case in Ecuador shows how oil companies have been working together with missionaries to “pacify” the Huaorani as well as other communities. Kimberling (1995) states that there is a clear concurrence of interests not only between the oil companies and the missionaries, but also with the Ecuadorian government, which has permitted and sometimes assisted the pacification activities. These institutions are consistent with its general view that the Amazon is a frontier to be conquered and indigenous peoples should be assimilated into the dominant national culture. In general, missionarization has developed in different ways and following very different goals.

All of the world’s major religions have substantial representation in Malasia. The variety of religions found in Malaysia is a direct reflection of its cultural diversity.
Although Islam is the state religion of Malaysia, freedom of religion is guaranteed by law. The Malays are almost all Muslims. The Chinese embrace an eclectic brew of Taoism, Buddhism and ancestor worship, although some are Christians. Christianity has had not as much impact in Peninsular Malaysia, as in East Malaysia, where many indigenous people have converted to Christianity; although others still follow their animist traditions. It is possible to find statistical information about the main religious groupings from a complete census undertaken in 1960 in the three “British” territories – Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei (Harrison, 1965); Table 1.

**TABLE 1: RELIGIONS IN 1960 AS PERCENTAGES OF ALL FAITHS GIVEN**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State/Religion</th>
<th>MUSLIM</th>
<th>CHRISTIAN</th>
<th>ANIMIST</th>
<th>Muslim Increase/Decrease since last Census</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SARAWAK</td>
<td>23.4%</td>
<td>15.8%</td>
<td>60.8%</td>
<td>-1.2 (since 1947)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SABAH</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
<td>16.6%</td>
<td>45.5%</td>
<td>+3.96 (since 1951)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BRUNEI</td>
<td>60.2%</td>
<td>8.1%</td>
<td>31.7%</td>
<td>-6.9 (since 1947)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Harrison, 1965)

Western Borneo was the last and farthest place to receive the message of Islam (about 1440 AD). Since then, it has grown slowly but relatively undisturbed (Harrison, 1965). The unaccessible geography of the interior was largely impenetrable and has made conversion difficult; the inland population remained animist pagan. It has only been after the Japanese War (1941-45) and under British Colonial Office rule that missionaries reached the interior, and the elaborate systems of interior animism were suddenly influenced by Christian missionaries (Harrison, 1965).

It is worthy to mention the several Christian sects that were competitive over the same interiors. Harrison (1965) points out that in the early 1950s, intersectarian competition was so intense that it was possible for three independent services to be in a large long-house on the same Saturday and a fourth the following Sunday. These activities produced interesting reactions such as the mix of both Christian and animist traditions.
religions into the Bungan Malan cult (from the Kenyahs’ benevolent goddess of that name).

Today, non-Malay indigenous groups make up more than half of the Borneo population in Sarawak and about 66% of the Borneo population in Sabah. As described, until the 20th century, most people practiced traditional beliefs, but many have become Christian or Muslim. Indigenous communities have changed their beliefs, and today, animism reflects just 0.8% of the total population.

Joseph B. Tamney (1998) defines animism as the form of religion centered or related to spiritual powers or beings that permeate the world. These unseen powers may be conceived as friendly, tricksters, or dangerous. Humans and spirits are part of a single cosmos. Animists have no elaborate religious organization and no required creed. Individuals may communicate directly with spirits by shamans or spirit-mediums. These religious specialists also may be recognized as healers or diviners. Fasting is common as a way of preparing the body for the sacred reception. Rituals tend to be magical and to control spiritual powers or beings for the benefit of oneself or the group with whom one is identified.

The cosmology of the island emphasizes that at the beginning only male and female godly beings inhabited the skies and the original waters. For many Bornean, the myth of the creation shows the sky god and the sea water copulating, and generating a son and a daughter, half human and half divine. The brother and sister commit the original incest, giving birth to mankind (Sellato, 1989).

Many groups also divide the cosmos into three parts: the upperworld, the underworld, and a middleworld where mankind lives. Others only consider an upperworld for the gods and a lowerworld for the humans. Sellato (1989) presents the origins of the world as described by many groups on the island: “After creation was completed, the skies and the seas parted and the upperworld god (the supreme deity) retreated to his now remote realm and no longer interferes much, at least directly, with current human affairs.” Gods and humans are separated, but Bornean people have found many ways to communicate with their deities. In general, animals and plants have played a central role in this task. Normally, hornbill or hawks represent the upperworld god while the underworld god is represented by the water-dragon.
Believers rely on messengers (such as the divine birds), or in human mediums (the priests), and seek messages through omens and augury.

The underworld goddess has remained close to humans. It is associated with the earth, agriculture and fertility in general. The dragon goddess is considered the most powerful protector of the humans; she is widely invoked in everyday life and represented in traditional arts (Sellato, 1989).

The godly laws were reveled in mythical times and transmitted through the generations. They form a set a rules called *adat* that touch every aspect of individual and social life, including religious aspects. Gods are worshiped and assuaged with offerings to assure their attention. Gods make their announcements through animals—whose behavior is carefully observed-- and through signs in sacrificial animals that the augurs read. Dreams also reveal god’s omens. The transgression of taboos incurs supernatural punishment, and negligence can conclude in disaster for the community (Sellato, 1989).

Many animals and plants, both wild and domesticated, are connected to the animistic beliefs of Bornean people.

By far, the animal that has influenced mostly Borneans’ conduct are the omen-birds. Among them, the carrion-hawk is the most important one. Many groups on the island observe the movements of this bird and interpret them through a code of accurate rules. The hawk works as a sign by which they must be guided in many matters of moment, especially concerning warlike or dangerous expeditions (Hose and McDougall, 1966). The Kong or the hornbill could be considered the second most important bird. Some species of hornbill, such as *Anorrhinus conatus*, gives omes of minor importance by its strange deep cry. The handsome feathers of another species, such as the *Buceros rhinoceros* are worn on war-coats, and the substance of the beak of the helmeted hornbill *Rhinoflax vigil* is sometimes carved into the form of the canine tooth of the tiger-cat (Hose and McDougall, 1966).

There are other birds that peoples of Borneo use to obtain omens of less importance. The three species of the spider-hunter (*Arachnothera Chrysogenys*, *A. modesta* and *A. Longirostris*), known as “sit” or “Isit”, give Kenyahs long life, help them in undertaking, help them to find what they are seeking, and make their enemies
feeble. Still in the 1960s, they used to stop their canoes, make a small fire and ask these species for help or good luck (Hose and McDougall, 1966).

Other omen birds include the three varieties of the trogan (Harpace dicorio, H. Duvucelii, and H. Kasumba), the kieng or woodpecker (Lepoce tes porphyromelas), the Asi (Carcineutes melanops), the Ukang (Sasia abnormis), and the Telajan or crested rain-bird (Platylophus coronatus). They can forecast good luck or difficulties for people or their path (Hose and McDougall, 1966).

Pigs have also been a reference in Bornean cosmology. Settled or semi-settled people keep numerous domestic pigs around their houses; pigs that pick up garbage, rice-dust and chaff given them by the women. They are treated as members of the community and take part in almost all religious ceremonies. Pigs are sacrificed to know about the future course of events, such as when war is proposed or when two parties are about to go through a peace-making ceremony. The more important the event, the larger and better the pigs captured (Hose and McDougall, 1966). One or more chief addresses special prayers and the pig is immediately open to be consulted. The underside of the liver will express fortune or misfortune. On many occasions, if the answer obtained in this way from one pig is unsatisfactory, chiefs will often sacrifice a second or even a third or fourth pig. The wild pig, in contrast to the domestic one, is eaten without ceremony and never used as messenger to the gods. Its liver is never consulted (Hose and McDougall, 1966).

Finally, the crocodiles that infest Borneo’s rivers are considered friendly creatures. However, people fear them and do not like to mention them by name. This is considered more a superstition than fear. When somebody is seized by a crocodile it is believed either that the person taken has in some way offended one or all of the crocodiles, or that he has been taken by a stranger crocodile that has come from a distant part of the river, and therefore did not share in the friendly understanding usually existing between the people and the local crocodiles. Members of the community will take long poles and look for the guilty crocodile. If this does not appear, another crocodile will be captured just to revenge the loss (Hose and McDougall, 1966).
Present and past hunter-gatherer communities from the island, such as the Penan and Punan, had made use of all the omen-birds that have been described above. However, they seem not to be so constant in their cult of the omen-birds, and Punan of different districts have differed a good deal from one another in this respect. As Hose and McDougall (1966) state, with the exception of these birds there is probably no wild animal of the jungle that the Punans do not kill and eat. People that have not been settled do not seem to practice the rite of sacrifice in any form. One of the reasons may be found in the lack of domestic pigs and fowls. The crocodile is recognized as the Bali Penyalong god. They sometimes make a wooden image of it before leaving a camp or refer to it when somebody is sick (Hose and McDougall, 1966).

Concerning plants, it seems that the only plant regarded as be-souled (Punans and Malanaus excepted), is the rice. As examples of peoples relationship with spirits, the jungle palm decorates Kayans’ heads in rites and beliefs; the Long species of Caladium is used upon the door of the rooms to mark special circumstances; and the Orobong is gathered by the female friends of any woman passing a childbirth (Hose and McDougall, 1966).

In Malaysia, in recent years, politicization of religion and ethnic identity have dealt with the preservation or abandonmen t of native traditions (Winzeler, 1997). As religion has been a major dimension of externalized self-identity, the ultimate act of cultural accommodation has been the conversion to Islam, the dominant non-Dayak religion in the region. The process of becoming Islam had been done most commonly in coastal regions during precolonial, colonial and postcolonial times. In the interior, people have either adhered to adat ritual and belief, have converted to some form of Christianity, have developed new native religious movements based on local prophecy, or have reorganized the traditional beliefs and practices so as to conform to state values or government requirements (Winzeler, 1997).

The influence of external religions on the island is a consequence of international trade activities. Trade brought Persian traders and the Nestorian Christians to Borneo. In the middle ages, Catholic diplomats, travellers and priests travelled around the Island enroute to China. Churches were established in the area with the coming of the Portuguese in 1511, the Dutch in 1641 and the British in 1786.
However, in this early period, the Christian community was still largely an expatriate community. Chinese Christians sometimes migrated as communities as in the case of Basel Mission Hakkas to Sabah and Methodist Foochows to Sibu, Sarawak.

Islam came to Malaysia with the Indian traders from South India. It was not of the more orthodox Islamic tradition of Arabia. Islam was adopted peacefully by the people of the coastal trading ports of Malaysia and Indonesia, absorbing rather than conquering existing beliefs. As in many Muslim countries, Islam in Malaysia has seen a significant revival over the past 10 years or so. Malay ceremonies and beliefs still exhibit pre-Islamic traditions, but most Malays are ardent Muslims.

HUNTER-GATHERERS IN SARAWAK: ARCHIVAL RESEARCH.

In order to explore the religious changes among hunter-gatherers in Borneo, I carried out two months archival research in Sarawak. The references have been taken from the Sarawak Museum Library, the Majlis Adat Istiadat, the Sarawak Museum, and UNIMAS. These references respond to the following criteria:

A. Unpublished and published sources (articles, books, journals, newspapers, official documents), conferences, photos, and theses.

B. Mostly published in Southeast Asia.

C. In English.

D. And compiled into these eleven categories:

1. People:
   - Penan, Punan, Sihan, Bhuket
   - Orang Ulu, nomads, indigenous peoples
   - Kajang, Kajaman, Bukitan, Kayan
2. Places:
   • Belaga, Kapit, Miri, Upper Baram
   • Usun Apau, Lio Mato
   • Mulu N.P., Mount Murud
   • West + East Kalimantan
   • Brunei

3. Religious issues:
   • Adat Bungan, missionaries
   • Death names, mortuary beliefs, spirits
   • Shamanism, curing rituals, misfortune
   • Religious conflicts

4. Health:
   • Malaria, cholera, HIV/AIDS
   • Medicine & meals
   • Medicine & plants
   • Hygiene

5. Environmental issues:
   • El Niño effect, erosion, sedimentation
   • Deforestation, reafforestation
   • Natural resource management, land tenure

6. Economy:
   • Hunting patterns, sago extraction
   • Birds’ nests, bearded pig
   • Migrations, settlement, resettlement
   • Rural life, rural development
7. Archaeology:
   • Caves: Jarang, Ulu Kakus, Niah caves
   • Neolithic burials, megaliths, coffin burials
   • Archaeozoological and human evidences

8. Linguistics:
   • Language classification
   • Teknonyms, terms
   • Historical writing, oral history
   • Penan language

9. Cultural topics:
   • Handicrafts: Baskets, mats, hats
   • Wood carving
   • Music: instruments, songs and chants
   • Literature: Oral literature, legends, poems
   • Dances
   • Tattoos and ornaments.
   • Legacy and heritage

10. By law:
    • Native Customary Law, Land Rights
    • National Parks, wildlife, Bakun HP
    • Penan Development Program
    • Constitution, Women’s Rights


Making use of these keywords, I have compiled around 500 references that comprise articles (54), books (10), conferences (8), journals (+/- 250), newspapers (+/- 150), photos (+/- 15 files), and theses (15). It is my desire to add more references in the future. At the moment, I hope this bibliography will help in future research projects on hunter-gatherers and religions in tropical forests.

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