

# LEFT CURVE

No. 23

Printed in the USA



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Left Curve  
No: 23/1999

# Resettling Bakun:

## *Consultancy, Anthropologists and Development*

by

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**They wanted to send in the army. Mahathir's** troops. Sure, it was only to facilitate the resettlement of the local people to make way for a "necessary" hydro-electric dam project from which they would also benefit, but there were reasons to be suspicious.

Amidst continuing uncertainty born of the economic crisis (despite the up-beat promotional ads from the Malaysian Stock Exchange aired regularly on CNN), as the OECD debates policy that would allow corporations to claim damages from countries in cases where decisions of state limit opportunities for profit, while the world commission on dams meets in Cape Town and confers about the macro politics of large dams, in a remote corner of the tropical jungle — cue rainforest video — the residents of the Upper Balui in Sarawak await "resettlement." Although the clouded future of the economy after the Ringitt crisis has meant "postponement" of the Bakun Hydroelectric Project, work continues. And although the original contractors are now seeking compensation after the Government took over the project — payments guaranteed — the villagers still face the prospect of removal without financial recompense. The possibility of compensation for the soon-to-be resettled villagers has been fraught with problems which disrupt the media perception that the Bakun money drain has been plugged. Although the project now proceeds under conditions amounting to a haze thicker than that produced by the forest fires and... This story seems to drag on and on. It is difficult to contemplate how things could be harder for the people of the region. Without getting sentimental about rainforest folks, and preservation of nature, environment and culture, it is easy to see that something needs to be done. What? In this context, the wisdom and role of well-meaning consultants claiming realpolitik practicality must be questioned. Anthropologist Jérôme Rousseau claims consultancy interventions were motivated by an assessment of what would best help the people of the Upper Balui, and while I have no quarrel with such intentions as stated, it is necessary to question this approach given the wholly predictable, and indeed predicted, consequences of the project.

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**Newsflash 1997:** The Bakun Region People's Committee (BRPC) have rejected the "Resettlement Package" offered to them as compensation for the loss of homes and livelihood as a consequence of the massive RM13.6 Billion Bakun hydro-electric dam project in the Belaga district of Sarawak (*The Star* 26, March 1997). Villagers from 15 effected longhouses, part of the 9,500 people who will have to be relocated from the middle of this year [1997], said the "offer was inadequate" and, in the words of Committee Chairman Bato Bagi: "the villagers will continue to stay in their respective homes and on the land that they have cultivated since the days of their fore-fathers." (*The Star*) The proposed Bakun dam scheme involves the clearing of a massive 70,000 hectares of forest, an astonishing engineering effort to construct a 600 km underwater cable which will carry power across the South China Sea from Sarawak to the Malaysian peninsula, and the flooding of land that will create a lake the size of Singapore, including the creation of an island large enough to house an extensive tourist resort (*The Star*). It is no small initiative, and the Bakun peoples have been asked to make a "sacrifice" for the economic prosperity of the country...

**Newsflash 1998:** MIRI: The 9,500 villagers and longhouse residents in Bakun, [who are to be] involved in a resettlement exercise this July [1988], have appealed for their relocation to be postponed indefinitely. BRPC chairman Bato Bagi said there was no need for the resettlement exercise since the RM13.6bil hydroelectric dam project had been shelved indefinitely. The relocation, he said, should commence only if the Federal Government decides to resume construction work on the dam. Bato said the resettlement exercise would create unnecessary financial problems for the people: "The government is giving us some compensation but taking it back by making us pay for our new homes" and each family must pay between RM2,200 and RM2,500 for the land title of a 1.21 hectare plot allocated to them (*The Star*, March 21, 1998). In a statement released at the beginning of March the BRPC stated that:

The Federal government has announced that the Bakun HEP is postponed indefinitely. The status of the Bakun HEP is now fraught with uncertainties. As such, there is no valid reason for the Sarawak government to compel us, the affected residents, to move out of our present area, our ancestral lands and our source of sustenance and livelihood. (BRPC)

Dr. James Masing, who is Sarawak State Tourism Minister and chairman of the Government committee for the resettlement of the affected People, expressed dissatisfaction at the delays. At a lunch put on by the Sarawak Tourism Board, Masing said the postponement had caused hardship to the people and a great loss to the Government (*New Sunday Times* February 22, 1998). He wants the resettlement to proceed as soon as possible.

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The threatened use of troops seemed excessive to many when it was first proposed. The reasons and the threat have not diminished despite the uncertainty of "the crisis". Indeed, the situation has become still more absurd. While there are some 60 Security Police stationed at the site, and work continues in a piecemeal fashion, the Ringitt collapse led to the project's "temporary suspension." Local organisations argue that they need not be resettled since the dam may not eventually be built. The big European developers Asea Brown Boveri (ABB) pulled out amidst controversy, as did the local company, Ekran, some months later.<sup>1</sup> New partners are in negotiations (Seimens is the front-runner, having expressed interest soon after ABB's departure - *The Star* September 22, 1997). The houses built for the people are not yet ready, and prospective residents complain that they will be unable to afford to move into them when finished since the prices they are forced to pay are too high (a British firm run by Steven Gill, Hasmi-Bucknall JV, the project management consultants, continues to build, despite the "suspension"). Logging companies and dam-site clearance, as well as the construction of river diversion tunnels — with South Korean contractors — continues (while elsewhere in Malaysia Indonesian migrant workers brought in for other "construction" projects were subjected to mass deportations and imprisonment, resulting in rebellions in which a number of Acehnese were shot in March 1998). Tourist development planners look set to deliver the first gawky-eyed rubber-necking tourists even before the locals can be moved and before a final decision about the project is made. Hotels are about to be opened...

Something is wrong in the state of Sarawak. The consequences of the slowdown of the so-called Asian Tiger development miracle in Malaysia has multiple brutal consequences. Militarism facilitates the dam building project, opportunist development deals go sour, hi-tech promises turn into empty dreams, "illegal" migrant workers bear the brunt of the "re-adjustments" and

local people are left in a pointless face-off with limited options. Surely some of this could have been foreseen? Surely there were enough experts and studies, reams of paper and projections, rigorous evaluations, calculations, prognoses and concern: even some critical commentaries were available, although largely brushed aside by the planning committees, and denied by Mahathir's ministers. Was it the case that the crisis came out of the blue, and that its local effects are unavoidable? Who should have said what and when?

It can be argued that despite the good intentions of the consultants, the very logic of consultancy, even at its most critical, locked commentary on the projects and developments in Malaysia — particularly with regard to the Bakun Hydroelectric scheme — into a logic that was never able to warn of, or even admit to, the possible consequences. Short term political and economic gain, adventurist capital scheming, quick-fix development, undisguised greed and corruption ensured that even the most sensible evaluations feed into the project of speculative expansion heading towards disaster. The Ringitt crisis cannot be explained simply by reference to individual dodgy deals — such as the nepotism which awarded the major contracts to friends and supporters of the PM, or to the speculative grandeur of "big project" boosterism damn the consequences — but it is necessary to ask who it is that should question this (world's tallest building, worlds longest submarine cable, lake the size of Singapore etc)? At what point was the no-win gamble of participation in competitive global hyper-business going to be recognized as the comprador sell-out of the people that it was? When could the myriad commentators and consultants articulate a possible development that would benefit the people of Malaysia, rather than the elites scrambling to secure favors and contracts? At what stage would the rampant cronyism and recalcitrant opportunism be challenged by proposals and alternatives that would not be caught up within the logic of Mahathir's 2020 vision-hype?<sup>2</sup> A look at some of the critiques of the project and close attention to the consultant reports and anthropological studies in the early stages of the scheme show that the problems of resettlement and the dilemmas of Orang Ulu people today are not independent of the recommendations and participation of even critical scholarship.

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There have been many criticisms of the Bakun project, more than can be listed here. Among the most prominent have been that it is a glamour private industry venture of benefit in the main part only to construction companies and engineering firms, as well as loggers and other commercial operations (for example, reports that the world's largest mining company, the notorious RTZ,<sup>3</sup> were considering plans for a Comalco Aluminum smelter that would utilize the electricity of the dam, or that even

if the dam does not succeed, the developers will have opened up the remaining third of Sarawak's primary forest to commercial exploitation). A second level of criticism has been that the contractors for the project are favorites, and in some cases relatives, of the Government leaders who granted the tenders; and additionally, that the electricity needs of Sarawak, and even of Malaysia, are not best served by a dam project that will inevitably suffer from problems of cost, siltation and exhaustion of generating capacity within fifty years, attendant ecological damage, and threat of collapse (for detailed criticism of large dam projects see McCully 1996). In addition, there are questions rightly raised about the benefits of the project to the people of Sarawak itself, and the Belaga District in particular. As with any "development" project, it is of course necessary to attend to the equations of gains and losses, benefits and consequences, possibilities and difficulties. It is often the case that despite some negative consequences, the outcomes of development may be useful. In this case, the people seem determined to ensure they do not lose out in the negotiation, and have done so despite the efforts of the consultants deployed to assist them to "come to terms."

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My interest in writing this commentary is not to romanticize some people's movement against development, nor to glamorize, or overestimate, the prospects of the villagers fighting and winning against the Government/private consortium/international business block/global competition. Whatever the prospects for a progressive outcome to this struggle, which also draws in the aspirations of other Malaysian organisations, and in some cases international NGOs (for better or worse), my interest in this particular discussion is more circumspect. As the people consider the prospects of resettlement in the absurd situation where the dam project is stalled, and yet their "tourism" industry future (and logging of their homelands) requires that they move, it is instructive to look at the history of the resettlement process to date, and to consider the role of those consultant experts, primarily anthropologists, who have informed the discussion. Although the resettlement offer has only been rejected recently, this story goes back nearly ten years...

Some time ago, a European consultancy firm was hired by the Bakun HEP planners. Although the idea for a dam at Bakun was somewhat older, the arrival of these consultants was the first major step towards the development of the dam. In a document prepared by the Sama Consortium for the Sarawak Electricity Supply Commission in 1989 ("Principles and Outline of Resettlement Plan for the Balui Population"), the feasibility of the Bakun Hydroelectric development is said to rest upon the successful resettlement of the Balui area people. This would be a "compulsory" resettlement where the "Balui people are required to relinquish their

ancestral homes and lands for the sake of a project of national development." (Sama 1989:1) On these grounds they could expect to share the benefits of the development and gain some compensation for material losses (of homes etc), as well as maintaining their living standards. The Sama text goes further and suggests that the "odium of compulsion" of their forced removal from their lands "can only be reduced by offering a superior quality of post-resettlement life." (Sama 1989:2)

**Innovation is the key:** It is difficult, however, to see how the Sama consultants expected to achieve these worthy ambitions, given their peculiar view of the people they wanted to resettle. In the various socio-economic reports about Bakun there is much discussion of the merits, or not, of introducing "innovations" into the economic life of the people. There is a sense in which the local people are construed as fragile, to be protected. In this outlook, they are incapable of choosing change, and have to be coaxed, guided, managed. First of all, Sama claims that resettlement populations are "not at all suitable subjects for innovation, let alone experiments." (Sama 1989:2) In this perspective the "marked dependency," "psychological strains," "stress," "moribundity and mortality" of resettlement are considered threatening consequences of change. No doubt Sama could have offered several historical examples here — the fate of the Batang Ai project nearby would be the obvious choice, although a reluctance on Sama's part to compare Bakun with the disastrous resettlement process experienced at Batang Ai is probably understandable. Sama concentrate instead on issues of cultural continuity although this happens with some contradictions. While, for Sama consultants, continuity with "pre-settlement life" is deemed important, admirably this should not be "mistaken for advocacy of restoration of traditionalism." (Sama 1989:3) The dangers to be avoided are the "stereotypes created by more or less antiquated reports of travellers, ethnographers, and the like" which ignore the fact that societies are "not stationary" and that the Balui people "are not the Ulu of yesterday." (Sama 1989:3)

Yet, at the same time that Sama dismisses the "antiquated" views of ethnographers (rightly so, cynics might say), they also deploy a notion of Orang Ulu as people who, so recently as yesterday, were in a state of "traditionalism and anachronism" (Sama 1989:3). From this anachronism, development saves. It is this development as a transition from "yesterday" and from anachronism and traditional stereotypes "admired" by ethnographers that is at question. For Sama, change encompasses continuities in ways that are quite confused. However, it should not be thought that the contradictions of Sama's rhetoric automatically mean we must be against development; only that it is important to ask who this development will serve, whose interests are enhanced, and whose benefits are promoted. The benefits here are those of

proximity to new economic opportunities. Although, according to Sama, there should be no “experiments,” the “severance of existing economic and social ties” will be mitigated by in the first place the possibility of bypassing trading middlemen by utilizing “new timber tracks and adequate roads and transport” that will come alongside the dam (Sama 1989:23), and in the second place, by means of emphasis on the market in the nearby township of Belaga. Clearly, the market, the timber merchants, road construction and transportation industries matter here. The experiment is one of transition to the market. Perhaps “anachronistically” (but perhaps not) there is considerable opposition to this on the part of those who do not wish to change from a mixed subsistence economy to cash-crop farming and service tourism.

The story has to do with “new” economic opportunities in Sarawak — and for this local ways must make way. While admitting that “little can be done” about the fact that “The Balui area is deeply connected with and reminiscent of people’s tribal history and as such a support for their identity and feeling of belonging” and that the resettlement area will “mean nothing to them,” Sama also declare that “The most essential problem of the resettlement is the provision of a sound and durable new foundation for the future economic and social development of the resettlers.” (Sama 1989:25) Some comments which recognize that the Balui area peoples cultivate “Hill Rice” and that this would not be possible in the resettlement area are set aside as it is considered possible “to design a system which is broad enough for people to allocate labour and time according to their values without endangering their subsistence.” (Sama 1989:29). Confidence that Balui people will not be drawn further and further into a wage-labour economy is not widely held, the “experiment” with entry into (resettlement) the market is inevitable (or must be). Even Sama Consortium notes that “If people suspect that the promised development is no more than a ruse to force more work on them at the expense of their quality of life” (Sama 1989:31) then the resettlement will not be successful.

**What anthropologists say (five years on):** There are two significant anthropological reviews that refer to the resettlement of the peoples to be effected by the Bakun Hydroelectric Project. They are by Jérôme Rousseau and by Tan Chee-Beng and there is considerable overlap. In this section I concentrate predominantly, but not exclusively, upon that prepared by Tan. The reasons for doing so will be explained. On a “field trip” between 21st and 31st August 1994, Tan Chee-Beng spent ten days in Belaga District interviewing Orang Ulu peoples. The interviews provided background to a report that was largely, and intentionally — as determined by the set parameters of the consultancy — a “Review of Socio-Economic Studies on Bakun HEP.” In this particular

review, Tan shows that the Sama-Consortium report of 1989 (discussed above) had underestimated the number of people in need of resettlement should the HEP go ahead by approximately 4000 (total figure 10,000 rather than 5,865).

Reviewing the literature in this way is a useful exercise, showing that more studies had been devoted to the Kayan people (e.g. Rousseau, Tsugami), who are the largest “ethnic” grouping, than others. Yet, in general, there are a number of diverse anthropological efforts along the river system, taking in the Lahanan, Kenyah and Kajang peoples, who have been studied by Alexander (1987), Armstrong (1987), Nicolaisen, Guerreiro and Strickland among others (see Tan 1994:13-15 for specific long houses and communities referred to in these studies, Rousseau 1994 for more detailed summaries under author names). Though there is little that Tan draws out from the extant studies that is not already collected together in the Sama Consortium review, the perspective is perhaps a little more informative, and less guided by the operational parameters of a prospecting business. But what I want to draw out is the way in which subsequent reports like this continue to build upon, and not radically question, the parameters first set up by the Sama consultants and their proposed economic “innovations.” This is a constraint born, inevitably, of accepting appointment as a consultant within the terms of reference of corporate consultancy itself.

What can be seen here, I think, is the creation of a people “fitted up” to seem in need of a certain kind of development, described and detailed in ways that suit the project of those from outside who already know what development will be. The process here must incorporate all observed characteristics of the situation, even those that do not conveniently fit, into the planned development process. Tan’s review is oriented towards commerce less explicitly, but clearly with an inevitable view of the situation as one of impending transition to capitalist relations of social organisation, work and a commodity production lifestyle. The points at which commercial considerations do impact upon the style of presentation are several; for example in a rapid survey of subsistence and income, the role of rattan matting and handicrafts — sun hats, baby carriers, mats etc. — dovetails into the Sama style of presenting souvenir production as a potential source of income for a post-resettlement population. This kind of future projection of photogenic indigenes producing souvenirs for tourists and Oxfam-type catalogues is a common enough essentialism even in the most well-meaning anthropological assessments. And here supporting the prospect of tourist trade development might even be excused in Tan’s report — and in that by Rousseau — as an attempt to place before the Planners reasons for not resettling the local population away from the site of the dam (since this is what the people themselves have said they want). But, given that this

“choice” might indeed be a better option, in accepting the realpolitik of the dam project as inescapable, the people are still “fitted up” for a form of commercial “development” that does not really offer great prospects. Are these people to be condemned to tourist service in a backwater of the international market? The complexity of the economic transformation of people’s lives is a point of discussion for the anthropologist, but one which easily slides into simplicity for the Planners. Tan acknowledges that there has been “increasing commercialization in the longhouse communities” with cash needed to meet “children’s educational needs,” basic household purchases, such as sugar, petrol, oil etc., as well as outboard engines, radios, televisions and video recorders, but he does not consider the distance between an ethic of souvenir-production and a level of economic and commercial articulation with a commodity economy that includes outboard motors and telecommunications.

In what amounts to a condemnation to tourism as glorious working future, the insertion of Orang Ulu into a cash economy is treated as a negative consequence in some senses, but as an inevitable and necessary outcome of development in others. By all means it would be churlish to deny the people opportunities to turn a profit from those tourists who might come to look at the Bakun lake, but just how great an opportunity can this be? Compared to other commercial options, there might be reasons to already be suspicious. Tan writes:

The people to be settled have [been] involved in different levels of commercial economy. Cash income is earned mainly from selling fish, meat of animals (especially wild pigs) from the jungle, rattan and rattan handicrafts, as well as working at logging camps. There is an increasing need for cash. This will be even more so if people in the resettlement areas have easier access to towns. Thus the economy planned for the resettlement should take this into account. (Tan 1994:57)

In the discussions about the future economy of the resettled people their expressed desire to continue a mixed mode of shifting cultivation with hunting and other productive activities (this is including some elements of wage labour, for example stints in logging projects) contrasts with the emphasis on promotion of tourism and handicrafts as a resource that will be made available to Orang Ulu. Prime minister Datuk Seri Mahathir Mohamad was particularly keen to stress an “alternative tourism” dimension of development as an opportunity when he announced that from the resort alongside the Bakun HEP “the Government’s effort to promote eco-tourism in Sarawak will be successful.” (in McCully 1996:157 from *BBC Wildlife*, O. Ticknell, “Sarawak Set Up for Deluge,” June 1995). There should be little doubt that souvenir sales by indigenous people would fit without too much trouble within the parameters of this eco-tourism. Tan’s discussion of souvenirs locates their

production within the context of a range of economic options, although for strategic reasons tourism perhaps is emphasized more than it might otherwise have been.

Tan, however, is nowhere critical of this ethnicization of indigenous people as those most suited for the tourism industry, commenting only that the handicrafts industry in Belaga — the nearest market — could be better organised (Tan 1994:85). The point is that without providing a more substantial analysis of the ways the future of the local people is constructed by Sama it becomes possible for this complex prior, and partial, participation in a commercial economy to then be lost in the journalistic soundbites of ministers and propagandists who favour the gloss of souvenir tourism and present this as the only future for the local “native” peoples. Examples abound — from the comments of the Prime Minister, to the justifications offered for construction of an airport and purchase of aircraft (RM562,5 Million for five A320s) as part of “opening up the Bakun reservoir as a major tourist destination.” (Ting, *The Star* 13 May 1997).

**Politicization:** At the same time, the people are drawn more and more into forms of taxation, government service dependency, State surveillance and the complexities of commodity culture. How this proceeds is not addressed in detail, although Tan recommends it be extended: “For security reasons and for the convenience of the people (such as for children’s education and employment), the people which are yet to have identity cards, should be provided with cards as soon as possible.” (Tan 1994:85) There may be good reasons to encourage further participation in some forms of organised collective, even national, development, but the characterization of the Balui area peoples as “traditional” and in need of modernization, is too general. These people, surely, are not simply the victims of what the Sama consortium called “tendencies of ‘fission and fusion,’” using a category known to anthropological investigators. Sama continues to characterize the people in terms of presumed ethnic irrationalities, noting that “tensions which are suppressed as long as there is no alternative to living together erupt as soon as an alternative appears in the form of resettlement.” (Sama 1989:9) Wouldn’t the people be best able to decide their own futures? Indeed, this also becomes part of (at least the rhetoric of) recommendation in Tan’s document. Importantly, though, it will of course be effectively ignored by the project planners, Tan warns that it would be a good idea to recognize that there is considerable opposition to moving the affected peoples far away from their current homes, and not, as has been requested by the people themselves, allowing them to move slightly further up the same river. A closer placement is seen as a good idea because it “will make resettlement easier in that the people will agree.” The eminent sense of doing this is stressed as “It will avoid

unpleasant confrontation between the government and the people who are already very politicized from their experience of dealing with the logging companies." (Tan 1994:65) No one wants an unpleasant confrontation. The Sama Consortium also notes that "it is very probable that people, except their chiefs and some progressive individuals, have never been asked before to take a responsible part in a decision-making process in a public matter." To this end they recommend "basic civic training within the framework of the Malaysian constitution." (Sama 1989:16) [Anxieties on the part of those arrested and threatened with detention under the Internal Security Act for speaking critically of the Government would not be without relevance here]. The stress is on helping the Balui peoples to make "realistic decisions," and in this Sama suggests that a "senior officer" with a "sociological or anthropological" background should be retained to communicate between the Project Authorities/Planners and the resettlement population (Sama 1989:18). The Canadian anthropologist Rousseau seconded this particular recommendation in no uncertain terms and added also the idea of the Bakun Development Committee to appoint an "Ombudsman" to "help resolve conflicts." (Rousseau 1994:36)

**Who speaks?:** There are various issues of representation that arise, and the forms of intermediary alongside anthropologists and ombudsmen are many. There will be the workers that come to clear the dam site (largely loggers who perhaps may sometimes be Orang Ulu themselves), the contract workers who will build the dam (including the Korean workers), its service facilities, the tourist hotel alongside (built by Thai workers - communication from J.Rousseau), and other infrastructure such as the proposed airport (accommodation for 5,000 workers is being built - source: Sahabat Alam Malaysia [SAM] Memorandum to YB Datuk Leo Moggie Anak irok, 29 May 1997). There will also be a number of cultural workers — including, for example, archaeologists, historians and ethnologists (not ethnographers?) to do the work of the Sama Consortium recommendation which suggested that the project authorities take "responsibility for salvaging as much of the people's cultural heritage" as possible. This by means of "identifying and rescuing objects of cultural and historical interest" and "recording the tribal history of the Balui people." (Sama 1989:54) By April 1997 a Sarawak Museum project assistant, Mais secretary Jayl Langub, claimed that by June 1997, at least 90 per cent of the oral history of the Kayans, Kenyahs and Penans would have been recorded (*The Star* 24 April 1997). By any standards of oral history this is a truly incredible statistic.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to the obvious attendants, the "cultural" attaches are to play an "important" role. This collected history and ethnology is considered by Sama to be "compensation to the Balui people for the loss of 'intangibles' ... a contribution towards maintaining the rich cultural

heritage of Sarawak ... [and] ... and a contribution to national and international science." (Sama 1989:54). This, by any evaluation, must be largely gestural — even at 90 per cent. If it is for real, the contradictions are too glaring to deserve extended comment — how does maintenance of rich cultural heritage square with compulsory resettlement causing loss of 'intangibles'? In any case, these are adjuncts to the brokerages that will be performed by the anthropologist as mediator between the people and the planners. Will these meetings take place in the new hotel foyer, or in the Museum (to be located where? who will run it? how much will the entry fee be?)

**Longhouses for sale:** With regard to building accommodations for the resettlement, Tan recommends that longhouse construction reflect current uses.

If the houses are built by contractors, it is important that the people be consulted about the pattern. A plan should be drawn based on the existing homes as well as modifications suggested by the people ... Planners and contractors should also be sensitive to ethnic diversity in the region, hence some differences in design between communities. It is therefore important to draw a plan after consulting the people of each community. (Tan 1994:69)

To what degree this is plausible when the contract for building the longhouses has subsequently been offered to a company based in Birmingham, England, is not at all clear (despite presentations to the Bucknall Group from concerned NGOs in the UK [*Guardian*, 28th December 1996], and the insistence of residents that the, "have not agreed to purchase" Bucknall's "inadequate" houses [Sama Memorandum, 29 May 1997], the company has pursued its commission with alacrity). It can be observed that the Sama Consortium had "noted in passing that the opinion of the resettlers on what constitutes a 'model' [village] may differ from the opinion of the planners" and "cautioned that this model is essentially abstract ... neither a mirror for reality nor a blueprint for it." (Sama 1989:32) Later they went so far as to underplay the idea of longhouse settlement: "The traditional housing of the Balui people is characterised by the longhouse. But this is just a stereotype which singles out the most conspicuous feature of housing while it neglects the particulars which render a set of structures more than houses, namely homes." (Sama 1989:38). What can be seen here is that Tan has elaborated the Sama Consortium comment to show that there may be various regional and other differences in housing preference among the peoples of the Upper Balui. Sama had recommended that "Planners and contractors will have to sit together with the people in each settlement to plan their housing in detail." (Sama 1989:39). All this is very fine, except that the requirement that the resettlers will have to pay for their replacement houses makes a mockery of any compensation process.

**Finally— Resettlement under fire as the ultimate threat:** Remembering that Tan has noted that the people are already politicized through experience with logging companies, the trouble with an investment in communication, anthropological brokerage, participation and providing the local people with civic training for responsible and realistic decision making is that the Sama Consortium recommends that it be the armed forces that supervise resettlement. It was surely not Tan's intention to give any credence to such heavy handed "planning" as the stationing of 60 security police at the Bakun site (Schultz 1997), but the slippage from good intentions to military solutions should have been anticipated and condemned in the strongest terms. Could the Sama proposal to bring in the army be more inappropriate? They recommend:

The technically most competent agency for planning and carrying out the relocation is probably the army. [They do seek to stave off any suggestion that this would be provocative with the proviso that the] deployment of the army, however, requires a thorough briefing of its officers as to the nature of the task: Its purpose is not a security measure or an act of public order ... relocation plans should not be communicated to people in the manner of peremptory military orders ... the impression of last-minute emergency evacuation must be avoided. (Sama 1989:47)

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**Reflexivity:** In the above section I have concentrated almost exclusively on the work of Tan and the Sama Consortium document and have in large part ignored Rousseau. It is necessary to attend to this omission, but I think it is plausible to do so with a brief aside. There are reasons to recognize certain constraints that limit Tan's work, and these also effect Rousseau's report, but he has commented extensively on these limits and I wish briefly to discuss these and other general implications of anthropological consultancies, as an example of the double dilemma of anthropological reflexivity. As such, this is a critique of good intentions co-opted to business-as-usual, and need not detain us long. Rousseau's work seems indeed to be very useful for critics of the project, with the added interest of him having said, in his own words: "the socio-economic report of the Sama Consortium is totally useless" (Rousseau 1996: 103) and "In the face of the overwhelming evidence, authorities must be aware of the suffering they will cause. The sad reality is that they do not care." (Rousseau 1996:102) These sharp and fine words, of course, do not get him completely off the hook, given that Rousseau did accept the consultancy contract and should have been more alert to the inevitable predicament in which all such consultancy is caught. The double bind is one of either producing what the Planners want to hear, or being suppressed for saying something they don't want to hear — and in either case

enabling the Planners to point out that they did at least contract out to an "independent" socio-economic consultant and so deflect criticisms that they are not concerned with local welfare. In Rousseau's case, unlike Tan's "confidential" report, the circumstances are unusually revealing, and public. In lieu of a more detailed discussion of the pitfalls of consultancy, I reproduce an excerpt from Rousseau that may explain why I have chosen to focus on Tan and exclude Rousseau here:

Rousseau writes in a conference paper reporting on his few weeks in Belaga:

Towards the end of my stay, a contract was sprung on me which included a confidentiality clause according to which I 'would not make public any information to the recommendations, assessments and opinions formulated in the course of or as a result of the provision and performance of the said Services, nor shall the Consultant and the Personnel make or cause to be made any press statement or otherwise relating to the Project nor publish or cause to be published any material whatsoever relating to the Services without prior approval of the Government.' (Rousseau 1995:9)

The clause was only deleted when Rousseau convinced his employers that he would leave without being paid and without giving them the report. What this illustrates is the constraints under which anthropological and consultancy work go on, and how, unless you are a professor of relatively independent means, the contractual fashioning of a "people" and a development project carries a great weight.<sup>5</sup> It seems clear that escape from the constraint of a clause like this does not mean that anthropological work in the service of development planning necessarily avoids co-option and alibi.

**Coda:** What certainly isn't available in Rousseau's reflections, or in Tan's report, or in Sama, is any anticipation of the ways future events — the "crisis" being the contingent one used — or any other such "warnings" — would exonerate getting involved in "insider consultancy" work. The convolutions of Government rhetoric now claim the crisis and "the interests of the people" as reasons to continue with parts of the project, as Deputy Prime Minister Datuk Seri Anwar Ibrahim has said the Government would only continue works where the environment or public safety in Bakun needed to be protected. As an example, he cited a river diversion project and the relocation of affected villagers as ancillary works that would proceed.<sup>6</sup> Anwar confirmed that the Government would compensate companies such as ABB and Ekran<sup>7</sup> for the amount they had spent so far on the project (*The Star*, January 23, 1998). Even amidst the crisis, for some the prospects seem good, even for failed development. The consultants are all paid, the speculations pay off, the contracts proceed, and only the people are left wondering where they shall live and how. The consideration of



developers and profiteers does not extend to the boredom, at best, and the deprivation, most evident, of the people forced to endure the waiting game of an uncertain resettlement. Sitting around their homes as the haze descends, gardens untended because of the imminent move, futures mortgaged to Bucknall and Co, and mediated through the calculated minimums of the tourism minister's compensation calculus, there is not much prospect here at the receivership end of globalisation. Possibly a small percentage can get jobs with the dam construction if it continues, a few will get to spend their compensation wisely on something that lasts, one or two may turn out to be competent carvers of knick-nack souvenirs, and of course there's always the chance for the young to turn a buck trading sex for dollars with tourists. Yet these concerns, predictable from the start, do not appear in the consultancy prognoses. Possibly the haze and the lack of options for the Orang Ulu are agenda items for the big NGOs convened in their international conferences, but it is certainly not clear how there is any gain to be made in the realism which claims that agitation for the rights of people requires participation within the structures of business. Such an orientation accepts the good intention rhetoric of business as readily as it deludes itself as to its own justifications. At the very same time that business profits from low wages, ununionised labour, deregulated employment practices etc, people like the President of the American Chamber of Commerce can say in Washington speeches: "While it might not always be the case that trade and business are good for human rights, it is the case that a good human rights environment is good for business."<sup>8</sup> How very admirable.

In the end the role of consultancy in business is less significant than the capacity of the people to organize — in Belaga, throughout Sarawak state, across the Malayan peninsula, and in the international solidarity movement — in ways that are adequate to a defeat of the opportunist interests behind the Bakun HEP, to ensure that after the "temporary postponement" a reasoned settlement (which may or may not mean resettlement) can be worked out, that during the period of postponement the rights and livelihood of the people of the Balui area are activated, and that any subsequent project initiative proceeds in favour of the future development of prosperity and self-determined livelihood, and redistributive justice, for all. A very different kind of anthropology of development would play a part here.

## Notes:

1. Kuala Lumpur, Nov 20 1997: "The Malaysian government will take over the Bakun hydroelectric dam project as the main developer, Ekran Bhd, is no longer interested in the project, Deputy Prime Minister and Finance Minister Anwar Ibrahim announced today." (transcript of a TV3 broadcast, November 20, 1997)

2. Debbie Stothard, co-ordinator of Altsean-Burma (the Alternative

Asian Network on Burma), described the Asian Vision 2020 statement issued by Malaysian Prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamad can only be described as being more "hallucination" than "vision" to the majority of South-East Asia's citizens.

3. RTZ, active in Australia, PNG, Namibia, Canada, etc., etc., were founded more than a century ago, supported Franco in Spain (noting that since Franco shot the trade union leaders there had been less trouble at their Spanish minesite), overseers of the Bougainville Panguna mine which led to a vicious separatist war (Australian forces deployed in support of the company), exploitation and appropriation in Cape York, uranium mining, anti-Union practices, links to Oppenheimer family, etc., etc. See the work of a campaign group against RTZ on: <http://www.icem.org/campaigns/riotinto/index.html>. Nobody knows more about the seedy side of Rio Tinto around the world than PARTiZANs (People against the activities of RTZ). The book *Plunder!* details things that the company doesn't want known about its operations in Africa, the Americas, Europe, Australia. PARTiZANs can be reached at email: [partizans@mole.gn.apc.org](mailto:partizans@mole.gn.apc.org)

4. The Sarawak Museum participation in the resettlement process was not clearly "political" but it was reported in late 1997 — after the postponement — as "embarking on an exercise to remove graveyard sites to a loftier area." (*Sarawak Tribune*, 26 November, 1997)

5. The constraints are of course also real, if sometimes originating in totalitarian hysteria, as the following example from a different field shows: KUALA LUMPUR, Nov 19 1997 (AFP) - The Malaysian government has set up a committee to screen all foreign reports about the country in the Internet, a newspaper reported Wednesday. *The Star* daily quoted Culture, Arts and Tourism Ministry deputy secretary-general Tengku Alaudin Tengku Abdul Majid as saying the committee would "decide on the appropriate action to correct any wrong perceptions in the reports." It would submit weekly reports to the prime minister's department, he added. Tengku Alaudin urged the local media not to write negative reports to prevent the foreign press from picking up the stories and tarnishing Malaysia's image. Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad slammed the western media for alleged bias against developing nations. He said sensationalism and profit-seeking led to distortions, as reflected by the playing up of negative issues in Malaysia while ignoring the positive points. Meanwhile, *The Sun* newspaper reported that the education ministry has lifted a "gag order" which prevented university academics from talking to the media about the haze problem.

6. Government ministers of all stripes still praise the plan months after the postponement: Deputy Energy, Telecommunications and Post Minister Datuk Chan Kong Choy said the Government considered Bakun "a serious and viable project which will benefit the nation" (*Rakyat The Star* December 3, 1997).

7. It is worth including here part of the response by local organisations to the postponement and retreat of Ekran from the project: FROM: Coalition of Concerned NGOs on Bakun, Press statement, 22 November 1997: "What has been trumpeted as an example of privatisation in energy production to justify the project has today been proven a dismal failure. It is inconceivable that the government would even think of compensating Ekran for this 'takeover'! It is outrageous and unjustifiable that public funds be used to pay for private sector initiatives under any economic environment ... The Gabungan reminds the public and especially the government that Ekran Berhad had been awarded the contract to build Bakun without any open tender and in utmost secrecy. Why should the public be made to pay for the processes of unaccountability, non-transparency, incompetence and excesses of the government and the private sector?" Dr. Kua Kia Soong, Spokesperson, Coalition of Concerned NGOs on Bakun.

8. Quoted by Mark Daly. Amnesty International, at the Hong Kong Rotary Club, 10th July 1997.

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