

Clock and Calendar Time: A Missing Anthropological Problem

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ABSTRACT. The spread of clock and calendar time (CCT) from the North Atlantic region to the rest of the world is an understudied phenomenon. The second part of this article, based on anthropological fieldwork, examines the successful localization of CCT in a semi-rural area of Sarawak, in Malaysian Borneo. Before that, the article critically assesses some of the main anthropological studies of time to date, highlighting their inattention to CCT and suggesting that CCT is a subject full of interdisciplinary promise. **KEY WORDS** • Borneo • clock and calendar time (CCT) • Iban • Malaysia • media

There is no fairyland where people experience time in a way that is markedly unlike the way in which we do ourselves, where there is no past, present and future, where time stands still, or chases its own tail, or swings back and forth like a pendulum. All these possibilities have been seriously touted in the literature on the anthropology of time . . . but they are all travesties, engendered in the process of scholarly reflection. (Gell, 1992: 315)

A Ubiquitous Code

Clock and calendar time (CCT) is one of the West's most successful exports. It may not make the world go round, but it regulates (directly or indirectly) the daily rounds of most people, artefacts and representations across the world. It is the invisible hand of market, state and civil society alike. Its small set of symbols is easily acquired and communicated, for unlike more elaborate codes (e.g. those of art works) CCT leaves little room for ambiguity. Its material supports (clocks, wristwatches, radios, television sets, calendars, diaries, etc.) are virtually everywhere. These supports often have owners, but CCT has none. CCT has

invaded and helped to shape countless technological niches, from offices to farms to the Internet – and will continue to do so. Technological change has brought us new time machines, such as digital wristwatches, yet they all display CCT's same old representational system. CCT is served by a massive army of fleeting social agents with infinite lives that operate across the Planet's time-zones (social agent '15:00' died in my time-zone earlier today only to be born again and perish tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, and so on). This symbolic army feeds on the perennial need of modern people to coordinate their actions with others within and across time-zones. CCT is a cross-cultural epidemic (cf. Sperber, 1996), and there are no reports of successful resistance to it. Indeed chronoclasm – the intentional destruction of clocks and other time artefacts – is a word I cannot find in my dictionary, while iconoclasm has a long history, especially in Eurasia (see Goody, 1997). The low world-historical incidence of chronoclasm (occasionally practised, it is said, by the Taliban) in relation to iconoclasm merits comparative study.

In this essay my aims are far more local: to describe the sociotechnological, practical niches of CCT in a semi-rural area of Malaysian Borneo. This case study is but one ethnographic instance – many more could be given – of how CCT has colonized the lifeworlds of populations that in previous centuries, or even decades, had no use for it (cf. Thompson, 1967). It shows the extraordinary success, resilience and stability of this 'small genre' (cf. Spitulnik, 1996) in an indigenous culture that was, and still remains, radically different from the North Atlantic cultures where CCT took on its standard form. My main aim is to encourage fellow social scientists to think of ways in which the comparative, cross-cultural study of CCT could proceed. Being an anthropologist, I will explore one possible avenue of research for anthropology.

CCT and Anthropology

Before presenting the ethnographic materials, I shall try to remove some of the obstacles that could lie ahead of the anthropological study of CCT, hence of contemporary time, across the world's time-zones. The first obstacle is well known. In his *Time and the Other*, Fabian (1983) explores how anthropologists have distanced themselves from the people they study. He reveals in the discipline a 'persistent and systematic tendency to place the referent(s) of anthropology in a Time other than the present of the producer of anthropological discourse', a professional malpractice he calls 'denial of coevalness' (1983: 31).

The second obstacle is the anthropological habit of using a stereotypical backdrop of 'western time' in the study of time in other societies, as the sociologist Barbara Adam (1994) has shown with reference to classic studies by

Whorf (1956), Evans-Pritchard (1940) and Lévi-Strauss (1963/1972). While she convincingly puts the case that there is far more complexity to social time in western countries than has been generally acknowledged by anthropologists, Adam offers us no advice on how to study time beyond the heartland of sociology, viz. the North Atlantic region (see also Adam, 1995).

The third obstacle is the anthropological tendency to ignore the irreversible global spread of CCT ever since the Industrial Revolution transformed Britain and other North Atlantic countries in the 18th century. The two chief anthropological explorations of time to date, Gell's (1992) *The Anthropology of Time* and Munn's (1992) 'The Cultural Anthropology of Time', both broach the Industrial Revolution but do so in passing. Thus Gell (1992: 106–8) sets out to reject the crude distinction between 'primitive' and 'modern' time notions implied in Piaget's approach to cognitive growth, in which members of industrialized societies are seen as being 'steeped in the ideas of classical mechanics'. Foreshadowing Adam's argument, Gell stresses the varied embedded social contexts in which modern English speakers use non-metric notions of time to discuss events and organize themselves, e.g. 'in a jiffy/a flash/two ticks/half a mo'. Citing the work of Le Goff (1980), Thompson (1967) and Attali (1982), Gell concedes that clocks 'facilitated certain important historical transformations in the productive basis of industrial society'. Yet for him the mass daily flow of people in a modern economy is 'not produced by individuals' co-ordinating their activities on their own behalf, but *simply* by individuals following a socially established schedule' (1992: 108, emphasis added). The problem with Gell's use of the word 'simply' is only apparent as we read on:

This schedule can be modified in marginal respects, by flexi-time arrangements, or by such ad hoc procedures as leave-taking, absenteeism or working late at the office. But these individually determined rearrangements always take place and acquire their significance against a background of established expectations as to the symbolic character of the hours of the day. The hours between 6 p.m. and 7 a.m. are not 'working hours'. Work undertaken during non-working hours is not at all the same, for all that it may involve the same activities, as work undertaken in working hours. The time-divisions marked on the clock-as-schedule, as opposed to the clock as measuring-device, are points of inflection within a symbolically structured day. (1992: 108)

In his eagerness to blur the distinctions between the West and the Rest, modernity and tradition, Gell draws our attention to the 'symbolically structured' character of all human activity, whatever the historical period, cultural setting or technological resources. For Gell, CCT has failed to turn us westerners into 'watch-dependent denizens of Megalopolis' forever attentive to 'the little slave-drivers we wear attached to our wrists' (1992: 108). We still live as richly symbolic lives as those of people in pre-industrial societies. On the other hand, he also says that individuals can only alter the social schedules of modern

economies 'in marginal respects', e.g. through leave-taking or absenteeism. Gell's notion of clock-as-schedule is potentially a very fruitful one, but he does not follow its implications through. Perhaps the most important of these is the *irreversibility* of adopting the clock-as-schedule (in my terms, CCT) system. Once in place, the system can be easily sustained whatever the ebbs and flows in the social and economic fortunes of a given territory. In many important respects, human agency in modern economies is bound up with the social agency of CCT.

Nancy Munn's (1992: 109–11) invaluable review essay suffers from a shortcoming similar to that of Gell's book. In the sixth section she examines how certain 'calendric and related time shifts' reach into 'the body time of persons' by grounding them and their daily activities in 'a wider politico-cosmic order'. The three historical examples she gives are, in this order: the Gregorian calendar introduced by missionaries into the Solomon Islands; the secular calendar of the French Revolution; and the spread of industrial time in 19th-century United States. As well chosen as they are, these examples exhibit a common social/cultural anthropological feature: they are not presented in any coherent world-historic frame. We do not get a sense of scale, or an idea of how those 'wider politico-cosmic orders' may have interlocked with other orders as the European powers and the US expanded beyond their shores. What came first, missionising in the Pacific or the French Revolution? How did US economic and military expansion in the 20th century transform time notions and practices in the Pacific, including the Solomons? How do these three country-specific 'time shifts' fit into the common history of humankind? We are not told, so we are left pining for a global frame of analysis such as Wolf's (1997) *Europe and the People Without History*.

The fourth obstacle to overcome or avoid, closely related to the previous two, is the anthropological tendency to romanticize about non-industrial societies. Take Gingrich's (1994: 169) contention that non-western conceptions of time and space are not abstract but 'concretely embedded within the totality of socio-cultural cosmivision'. Building on his fieldwork among the Munebbih, an ethnic group from Yemen, Gingrich contrasts the written almanacs of urban Arabs with the Munnebbih 'orally transmitted star calendar'. The former are of no use in the tribal society whose calendar is 'fragmentary, irregular and interrupted'. Among the Munebbih, time is an experience 'deeply rooted in bodies and emotions' (1994: 175). During the unnamed period between the time-span of the white stars and that of the black (firmament) stars, people experience private feelings of insecurity, danger and lurking evil. It is, in Gingrich's inspired phrase, 'the social time of silent fears' (1994: 173). Unfortunately, there is no adequate consideration here of the role of the nation-state in the everyday and ritual life of the localities studied. Are the Munebbih magically exempted from the moral-temporal order imposed by the Yemeni state? Have

they somehow managed to preserve their 'social time of silent fears' entirely separate from the various CCT schedules of the school system, public administration, army and economy? Is their experience of time so 'deeply rooted in bodies and emotions' that it cannot be touched by the transnational and national mass media and their CCT-guided programming?

A brief reference to another Yemeni source should be of use here. Towards the end of her 1978–9 fieldwork in the Yemeni valley of al-Ahjur, the anthropologist Najwa Adra (1993) witnessed the arrival of television. She had hoped to record traditional oral narratives during the long nights of Ramadan, but the local people preferred to spend that time watching a Kuwaiti epic through the new medium. Television had an immediate impact upon social life, and not only during the month of Ramadan. It also altered everyday work and rest patterns, as most people would now stay up watching TV until the electric generators were turned off at 11 pm 'and consequently had a hard time getting up in the morning' (1993: 259). Adra's account casts doubts on Gingrich's, for even if the Munebbih was an extreme case of chronic isolation from the effects of CCT, this isolation would have to be explained. In any comparative endeavour – and anthropology aims at being one – the *absence* of an otherwise widespread social phenomenon, such as television viewing or, say, gender inequality, demands as much of an explanation as its presence (see Goody, 1997). As Adra (1993: 256) makes clear, Yemen has exchanged or imported practices related to trade, farming, cuisine, clothing and other domains for no less than 2000 years.

Adra's ethnography brings us to the fifth obstacle – the gulf between the anthropological study of time and that of media. Both Gell and Nunn make passing reference to clock and calendar media, albeit always as part of their essentially ahistorical accounts. It is no surprise to find that they overlook the history of media technologies and practices and how these may have contributed to time/calendrical shifts around the world. In turn, those few anthropologists who have carried out any significant field research into media such as radio or television, have told us little about the concomitant spread of CCT. This is regrettable, as in the pending comparative study of media forms, CCT would seem a much stronger early candidate than far more complex forms such as soap operas or chat shows. As a cultural form it has the advantage of being simple, constant, near-universal and easily translatable. We could therefore study this humble genre both in its own right and also as a way of honing our comparative skills before broaching thicker genres (for early ethnographic, non-comparative studies of TV soaps, see Mankekar, 1993; Rofel, 1994; Miller, 1994; for reviews of media anthropology, see Spitulnik, 1993; Ginsburg, 1994; Drackle, 1999).

The sixth and final obstacle I consider is more recent. We might call it 'temporal hypochondria', that is, an abnormal anxiety concerning the cross-cultural robustness of 'our' (western/anthropological) notions of time. Thus

Hobart (1997) has taken Geertz to task for denying the Balinese both agency and a sense of history. In Geertz's account (1973: 393), Balinese calendars are 'clearly not durational but punctual . . . Their internal order has no significance, without climax. They do not accumulate, they do not build, and they are not consumed'. According to Hobart (1997: 4), this interpretation deemphasizes the importance of the Balinese solar-lunar *saka* calendar, and the fact that Balinese people use well-known events such as volcanic eruptions, wars or plagues to single out periods between events. By basing his analysis on his own reading of formal calendars, Geertz is assuming that there is 'a meaning which may be extrapolated without regard to the understandings and purposes of the agents and the subjects of actions' (Hobart, 1997: 4). Although I sympathize with his post-interpretive approach, Hobart expends too much energy revealing western academic presuppositions about time as a 'linear and irreversible' reality and not enough on more pressing actualities. For instance, on the use by the Indonesian state of precisely such 'linear and irreversible' CCT notions through various media (including textbooks, radio, television and shadow plays) to spread and consolidate its rule over the Archipelago. Consider the following mid-1970s lament by one of Soeharto's New Order scholars:

. . . irrationality, work methods which ignore economic criteria, dependence on one's family due to [a] lack of self-confidence, a low valuation on time, working without a plan, absence of an orientation towards the future, an avoidance of directness which obstructs communication and so on. (Wibisono, 1975: 59)

No, he is not referring to British academics from the pre-auditing era, but rather to Javanese peasants. What solution does the Indonesian scholar propose? To train more puppeteers who can modernize the rural masses, including their time-management skills, through the medium of *wayang* [shadow puppet plays]. A second missing link in Hobart's analysis is the uses of CCT by ordinary Balinese and other Indonesians in addition to, and/or competition with, indigenous ways of social scheduling. As in the Yemeni case, its absence or social *insignificance* would also require an explanation. To judge by a sojourn in Bali in the 1990s, CCT is already a busy mass agent on the island. My first ever Balinese experience, after a gruelling bus journey across Java, was watching a World Cup final on television surrounded by a mesmerized crowd who, unlike me, supported Brazil. Despite the drivers' best efforts we had failed to reach our destination before kick-off, so we made an unscheduled stop at a small bus station. CCT waits for no man, and the locals knew it full well, for the best squatting spots in front of the television were already taken.

I have made explicit six shortcomings in the anthropological study of time – namely the tendency to deny the natives coevalness, caricature 'western time', overlook the irreversible global spread of CCT, romanticize non-industrial societies, neglect the time-media bond, and exhibit a postcolonial fear of mis-

representing ‘the Other’. I lack both the competence and the space to tackle all these problems here. Instead I will merely present an ethnographic example based on my 1996–8 fieldwork into the uses of modern media among the Iban of Sarawak (see Notes). The aims are (1) to demonstrate the successful spread of CCT within a non-western society, and thereby (2) to open up the study of CCT as a legitimate anthropological research problem.

The Saribas Iban

The Iban – the largest of all Dayak subgroups – are a predominantly rural people of West-Central Borneo whose language is a cognate of Malay. Most live in longhouses, or ‘villages’ under one roof consisting of a communal gallery [*ruai*] and a series of collateral family rooms or apartments known as *bilik*. The Saribas basin of Sarawak, in Malaysian Borneo, has long had a reputation as an area that experienced early social and economic progress (Pringle, 1970: 208). Iban from this basin took advantage of a strong international rubber market in the 1910s and 1920s to amass considerable fortunes. Before that, they already displayed an ‘early thirst for education’, and many would travel considerable distances to acquire a mission education (1970: 206). For decades migration to urban and industrial areas has been on the increase (Kedit, 1993).

Media in the Daily Life of Saribas Iban

New information technologies are not immediately assimilated into the domestic sphere. Their incorporation may demand a great deal of adjusting and negotiating among family members, as particular technologies may clash with the moral, spatial and temporal structuration of the family group (Silverstone and Hirsch, 1994: 1–11). Thus in Australia radio was seen at first, in the 1920s, as an intrusive guest for its ‘timetabled family activities and challenged domestic rituals’. Over the years it was gradually naturalized, helping to normalize a regimentation of time and space demanded by the new industrial order (Johnson, 1981: 167).

Saribas Iban have listened to the radio on a regular basis since the 1950s. To understand its naturalization over the decades we need to recall its early days. Grandfather-of-Nyaru,¹ now aged 61, then a so-called ‘leading coolie’ in a provincial town, was the first person at Semak Longhouse to own a wireless receiver. He remembers well how an astonished woman went round the set in search of the invisible speaker, and how extremely popular his set was. This is how the wife of an official of the British Colonial Service described the arrival of radio in a remote Iban (then Dyak) longhouse in 1954.

There were some children playing at the landing-place of the long-house as we arrived. They greeted us and some of them ran off and told the headman or Tuai Rumah, an old friend called Garu. . . I had come up-river from Sibul, the Divisional capital, with Philip Daly, the Programme Director of Radio Sarawak who was on a trip to demonstrate wireless receivers to a community of Dyaks who were not familiar with them and to make recordings of their songs and stories . . .

. . . The orchestra sounded charming on the river bank and the ever-conscientious Philip and his engineer, Mr Chung, immediately set to work to take a recording. The Dyaks were very curious and it was a matter of some difficulty to explain to them exactly what was being done. The music was played back to them and this created great enthusiasm. Once they understood what was wanted they were extremely pleased with the idea and did everything possible to help.

This is typical of the Dyak mentality. Although a relatively backward and unsophisticated people they are quick to grasp new ideas. (Morrison, 1954: 390)

But how did Iban listeners integrate radio into their day-to-day lives in the early days, after the initial excitement had died down? For lack of hard ethnographic data, let us consult a well-placed Iban source: the rural officer, broadcaster and author Andria Ejau. In the extract that follows, taken from his morality novella *Dilah Tanah*, the residents of a remote longhouse have all gathered at the headman's section of the gallery [*ruai*] to settle a land dispute between a man called Biul and the resident shaman. The community's only wireless has been turned on:

. . . Realizing that everybody was there, Biul tried to address the gathering.

'Hang on, we're still listening to the news,' said Enchelegi, the wife of Shaman Ula.

Not a word could be heard, even coughing was forbidden. The little ones who were whispering on the fringes were promptly scolded by Ensingut. The news was unusually long that evening. One of the reports said that the longhouse at Batang Kara Tunsang had burnt down the night before. . . . (Ejau, 1964: 21, my translation)

In the early days of radio, when receivers were expensive, their reception poor, money rare and news scarce owing to the difficulty and expense of transport, listening to this medium in rural Sarawak was a collective activity undertaken in the longhouse gallery [*ruai*]. Listening etiquette was markedly stringent, and 'even coughing was forbidden'.² The same applies to television which began to percolate from the urban areas in the 1980s. A North American acquaintance who knows the Iban well was shocked on a recent trip to Sarawak when an old Iban friend ignored his attempts at conversing while a Bombay musical was being shown on television, in glaring breach of traditional norms of longhouse hospitality. In a parallel example, Pace (1993: 196) describes Gurupa, a remote Brazilian community where television was still a novelty in the late 1980s and 'viewing etiquette' was characterized by a fixed collective gaze upon the screen, still bodies and the absence of talking. He recounts how on one occasion two

distinguished guests from Sao Paulo – where television had been available to the well-off for several decades – visited the mayor of Gurupa during prime-time. To the high-status visitors, ‘television etiquette required no strict rules on silence, and they proceeded to converse throughout the programme’. Their hosts, however, were trapped in an ‘uncomfortable bind’ and responded with ‘constant fidgeting in their seats, unable to watch television nor properly entertain their visitors’. Going back to the Iban anecdote, it appears that after all it was the westerner who was breaching his host longhouse’s newly established viewing etiquette!

Women’s Freelance Uses of CCT

Today radio sets are very common in the Saribas, with many *bilik*-families owning more than one set, and there are alternative sources of information available, notably television. Radio has long become an integral part of day-to-day life among Saribas Iban, especially women. There is a marked sexual division of labour in Saribas longhouses near the market town. At Semak Longhouse most men work as low-skilled labourers in the construction sector, for the Public Works Department (JKR), the bus company and the police. By contrast, most women alternate farming with household chores. There is also a good proportion of children of school age, as well as of people over the age of 65 who seldom leave the longhouse.

*Door 18.*³ Mother-of-Michelle is in her 50s. She usually gets up at around 5 in the morning, prepares the family breakfast (coffee and rice or biscuits), cooks some more rice for lunch, sweeps the *bilik* and sees her grandchildren off to the nearby bus stop at 6.30. Soon afterwards she leaves for her paddy farm, taking her farming implements, a small radio and a pot with boiled rice and some greens or meat. At around noon she takes a lunch break in the farm hut and listens to the midday radio programme (*Ngela Tengahari*) on RTM’s Iban Section. She enjoys in particular the personal messages (*jaku pesan*). In the afternoon she farms again, returning to the longhouse at around five. Now that they have television they hardly ever listen to the radio in the evening. ‘We no longer have any elders [at Semak Longhouse]’, she says. ‘In the old days people would chat in the gallery because there was nothing to see in the *bilik* (*laban nadai utai dipeda dalam bilik*)

Radio sets are today inexpensive and easily portable. Many Saribas Iban women either keep a small set in their farm hut or carry one with them in their farming baskets [*sintong*]. Some have it on while they work in the fields, most during their lunch break in the hut. This extract also illuminates a fundamental change that began at Semak and other longhouses in the 1980s: the shift of evening social interaction from longhouse gallery to family apartments [*bilik*]. All human beings and societies construct their views of the past in the present

(Adam, 1994: 509). Mother-of-Michelle looks back at the not-so-distant 1970s, when the longhouse gallery was still busy at night, and offers a presentist explanation for its current bareness: in those days 'there was nothing to see in the *bilik*'. I encountered this version of the past as the 'absence-of' [*nadai*] many a time in rural Sarawak. The past is portrayed as the time when people had no electricity, no piped water, no roads, no schools, and so on – a not-yet-modern time [*bedau moden*]. For instance, a Semak man in his 30s who is very fond of action videos told me that his grandparents were quite happy to attend shadow plays [*wayang kulit*] because in the old days 'they didn't know any better' [*nadai nemu utai bukai*]. Another man in his 40s described the institution of *randau ruai* [evening chats in the gallery] as 'the entertainment of our ancestors' [*hiburan urang kelia*] in the days when there was no television *as yet* [*bedau*]. But what distinguishes Mother-of-Michelle from both men is not her presentist view of the past, but rather the fact that as a woman and a farmer – not a labourer – *it is radio that structures most of her daylight life*, while television viewing is reserved for the evening. The following case study brings this point out even more clearly:

Door 10. Mother-of-Dora, 32, is a farmer and a housewife. She is married to the headman and has three children aged 8, 6 and 3. Every morning she rises to RTM's Iban Section. Her mother-in-law looks after her infant daughter when she is away farming. Mother-of-Dora is a very keen radio listener. She usually listens to part of RTM's midday programme and to the 1 to 2 show on CATS, the new commercial station, while having lunch and cooling off in the farm hut. She enjoys the news, songs, and personal messages. Sometimes she listens to the Malay Section as well. After completing her farming work she returns to the longhouse at around 5 to look after her children and prepare supper. From 6 to 6.45 she listens to RTM Iban in the kitchen, including the news at 6.30 from Kuching and the debates. In her view, one recent improvement has been the opening up of the telephone lines to listeners who can now pass on urgent messages to their relations in remote longhouses or take part in debates of all kinds. 'The RTM people used to do all the talking, they wouldn't let any outsiders [participate]. Now [the listeners] phone in every single day. It started this year, for example to talk about new longhouse projects'. In the evening Mother-of-Dora watches TV with the rest of her *bilik*-family. Although there are more Iban radio programmes now than ever before, she thinks traditional songs are losing ground to pop songs and radio in general stands no chance against the advance of television.

Mother-of-Dora's day-to-day life offers us a variation on the same theme of daytime radio versus nighttime television structuring. Like other Saribas Iban women, she is keenly aware of the predictable broadcasting schedule and uses it to guide her farming and *bilik* chores. What struck me about Iban farmers in the early days of fieldwork was their confident, matter-of-fact handling of CCT. I had expected a widespread vagueness about time of the sort we European

visitors associate with Southeast Asians in general and peasants in particular, such as Indonesians' proverbial *waktu gumi* [literally, 'rubber time']. In stark contrast, Mother-of-Michelle exemplifies a high degree of temporal structuring built upon what we might call the 'chronographic' dimension of radio and television. In addition to the linear (throughout the day) and cyclical (from day to day) guidance provided by these two media, she values simultaneity, that is the newly found ability of broadcasters and listeners to partake in a debate [*randau*] or hear an important announcement at the same time from distant places. Simultaneity becomes more valuable during certain seasons, notably in the March–May period punctuated every year by the paddy harvest and subsequent build-up towards Gawai Dayak, the much-awaited pan-Dayak festival of 31 May to 1 June. The Festival was conceived by urban Dayak intellectuals and officially launched in 1965. Today it is firmly established and hugely successful. I have argued elsewhere (Postill, 2000, ch. 4) that this public event is, above all, a celebration of the Dayaks' symbolic CCT parity with the two dominant 'races' [*bansa*] of Sarawak: the Malays and the Chinese. As Andria Ejau, the indigenous broadcaster and author I quoted earlier, puts it through one of his fictional characters, a native chief speaking to a longhouse audience:

... so following the wishes of the Dayak people, every first of June from the year 1965 onwards would be officially recognised as [Gawai Dayak Day]. Ever since that day our people has been on a par with other peoples, for all men to behold. Ever since there have been two days out of 365 in every year for all other peoples to pay their respects to us, two days of public holiday. (Ejau, 1968, my translation)

At this critical period of farming completion and housework followed by celebration, knowing that others are, to paraphrase Anderson (1983/1991: 23), steadily marching along the same path, is a reassuring feeling for farmers like Mother-of-Michelle. Besides structuring women's daily lives and synchronizing them with those of other women, men and children (both locally and throughout Sarawak's sole time-zone), radio provides listeners with a source of (auto)biographical and historical reflection, for instance on the fate of Iban traditions as pop music gains airtime and television attracts ever-larger audiences. A third case study draws our attention to yet another temporal dimension structured by radio and television: national calendrical time.

Door 20. Mother-of-Tina, 23, is a housewife. She is married to a bricklayer and has two young children whose care prevents her from doing farming work. She tells me she listens to Iban radio several times a day, roughly from 7 to 9 am, from 12 to 2 pm and from 6 to 7 pm, mostly in her *bilik*. However in the middle hours of the day, when the sun-beaten iron roof makes the stifling *bilik* air unbearably hot, she joins other women and elderly residents in the cooler gallery. Leaving the door open, she can still listen to the radio from there while she knits or sews and her children sleep in their hanging cots. Her favourite programmes are *Selamat*

Pagi Malaysia (Good Morning Malaysia), the news, songs and the weekly Iban folk stories (*peringat tuai*). In the evening she watches television with her 8-strong *bilik*-family, including her husband and parents-in-law. She enjoys the news and the commercials. They usually turn off the television at around 9.30 and go to sleep.

When people talk about their favourite programmes, they are not simply telling us about their personalities and cultural influences; they are also talking about how they structure their day-to-day social time and space, and about a specific articulation between personal, local, and national space-time. The radio programme *Selamat Pagi Malaysia*, like *Good Morning America* and its other overseas precursors, addresses the whole nation simultaneously, morning after morning, in the national language.

A second aspect emerging from Mother-of-Tina's media-related practices is the combined effect of four postwar technologies upon the longhouse 'soundscape', namely corrugated iron roofs, radio, electricity and television. The replacement of leaf-thatched roofs [*atap daun*] made of local materials with mass-produced corrugated iron roofs has had the unintended side-effect of making the longhouse hotter, leading to the routine afternoon migration of people from family room [*bilik*] to gallery to escape the oppressive heat – a shift which mirrors the impact of electricity and television upon evening patterns of spatial use in the opposite direction, that is from gallery to *bilik*. In addition the sound emanating from *bilik* radios onto the shared gallery has altered the afternoon soundscape. Some sections of the gallery are fairly quiet, particularly at peak farming periods, for they correspond to *bilik* whose women spend their afternoons on the farm. Others are loud, especially when two or three women have their radios on. Writing about Gerai Dayak longhouses in the Indonesian province of Kalimantan Barat (West Borneo), Helliwell (1993: 51) argues that the permeability of the partitions between neighbouring family rooms [*lawang*] allows 'an almost unimpeded flow of both sound and light between all the apartments that together constitute a longhouse'. The Gerai Dayak longhouse, she adds, is a 'community of voices'. Gerai voices 'flow in a longhouse in a most extraordinary fashion; moving up and down its length in seeming monologue, they are in fact in continual dialogue with listeners who may be unseen, but are always present. As such they create, more than does any other facet of longhouse life, a sense of community'.

In Saribas Iban longhouse walls are also thin and permeable to the human voice, yet during the day another familiar strand is woven into the invisible fabric that crosses through the thin walls and along the gallery: the voices and music from the radio. Together they web a distinctive kind of temporality, the here-and-now of a hot, sleepy longhouse in the middle hours of the day [*ngela tengahari*]. In the evening, this *ruai*-based community of mediated and unmediated sounds moves back to the family rooms [*bilik*], where it disperses into

clusters of loud electronic sounds and flickering lights that allow for little *inter-bilik* communication.

Men's Labour CCT

Now to men's labour-dependent activities. If most women structure their days with radio, men's days are already prestructured by the demands of an inflexible workplace. The following example illustrates, perhaps in an extreme form, the contrast between men and women:

Door 4. Father-of-Ross is a policeman in his early 50s. His wife and daughter-in-law work together on a low-lying paddy farm (*umai tanjong*) by the Saribas river. He met his wife in the state capital and was then posted to provincial Sri Aman where their three children were born. In 1987 they moved into Semak Longhouse to prepare for the following year's major bardic ritual, *Gawai Antu*. They have lived in the area ever since, for the past few years in a detached brick house they built opposite the longhouse. Father-of-Ross works in shifts (*sip*), either on Shift A (from 7 am to 3 pm), Shift B (from 3 pm to 11 pm) or on Shift C (from 11 pm to 7 am). He has one day off a week. In the office he sometimes listens to Malay-language broadcasts and checks the football results in the Malay papers. If he is not working in the evening he will usually stay at home listening to the radio. Most evenings his teenage son and daughter watch television at a cousin's *bilik* in the longhouse (door 12). It is Father-of-Ross' own television but they cannot watch it at home because they have yet to be supplied with electricity. Occasionally he will join his wife, children and cousins at door 12. At other times he watches television with his sister who lives 15 doors downriver. Either way a glass or two of distilled rice wine (*chap langkau*) is always good to relax with (in colloquial Ib. *rile'*).

Where women's daily, seasonal and yearly cycles are structured primarily through practices related to farming, those of men are structured through the waged workplace. Father-of-Ross's shift-based schedule is a non-ecological application of CCT to the organization of labour – it knows neither ecological niches nor seasons. By contrast, his wife's annual organization of farming work follows the cycle of wet and dry seasons (*maia landas* and *kemarau*). Moores (1986, in Morley, 1992: 258) maintains that radio brought the 'domestication of standard national time' to families around the world. This excerpt shows how in the Saribas Iban case (and probably in many other rural areas of Southeast Asia as well), this point is far more relevant to women's apprehension of CCT through radio than to men's utter dependency on the rigid temporal demands of the workplace, in which radio does not play a central role. Radio does not merely produce and reproduce an imagined national community, it also helps women coordinate their freelance activities with those of their men and children whose day-to-day life is organized for them by their institutions. In other words,

it sustains the social organization of a far-from-imagined local community over time and space. It is only in the evening that CCT is jointly 'domesticated' in the family *bilik* by stable clusters of television viewers drawn from all four socio-economic segments of the longhouse population (men, women, children and elderly people), as in the following instance:

Door 11. Father-of-Juna, 43, has been a local bus conductor for 18 years. His wife is a farmer and a housewife. He works six days a week, including Sundays. He rises at 5.30 and leaves for work at 6 as the first Iban programme comes on the radio. At 11.30 he returns from the market town bringing greens or fish to supplement their lunch. If his wife is away farming, he eats with his elderly father. At 12.30 he goes back to work. The last bus (Ib. *lasbas*) he inspects departs at 3.20 pm and returns to town over an hour later. Occasionally he will listen to the news at 7 on the Iban Section. Father-of-Juna used to be a keen radio listener. He was particularly fond of traditional Iban oral and musical genres, even if often he could not grasp their 'deep meaning' (*jaku dalam*). Nowadays he prefers television, especially the 8 o'clock evening news on the first channel, which he watches with his father, wife and children. The institution of *randau ruai* (evening chats in the gallery) was the only form of entertainment available to Iban in the old days (*hiburan urang kelia*), he says. Today they can enjoy watching people from other countries ('*rindu meda urang ari menua tasik*').

Moore (1988: 35) has argued that capitalism 'tabled' time, dividing weeks and days into 'units of work and leisure'. Among rural Iban, this division is captured verbally in the adoption of two standard Malay words into everyday Iban: *kerja* [work] and *hiburan* [entertainment]. *Kerja* is normally used to signify waged employment as opposed to unwaged activities within the longhouse sphere, all labelled *pengawa'*, including ritual and farming practices. It is therefore a term more commonly associated with men. *Hiburan* was often used by informants when I asked them about their reasons for watching television or about their favourite programmes. Father-of-Juna's above usage of *hiburan* is interesting in its dual temporality: on the one hand, it charts out the daily and weekly stretch of space-time when he is free from work commitments and able to watch television, on the other it separates him and his generation from the material lacks of previous generations, a view of history I earlier termed 'presentism'. At electrified Saribas longhouses, the *bilik*-family's central marker and conveyor of *hiburan* is television. Echoing the etymological roots of this medium (lit. 'vision from afar'), Father-of-Juna and many other Saribas Iban I talked to often justified their interest in television by explaining that it enables them *to see people in distant countries*, especially white people, deemed far more modern and wealthy than the Iban (cf. Lull, 1991: 170ff. on similar reasons given by Chinese viewers). They use television therefore as a way both of 'broadening their horizons' and seeing the future. At the local level television compresses the space-time paths of Saribas Iban by fomenting the clustering of social life

away from the gallery and into family *biliks* every evening at around 8 o'clock. At the cognitive level, by contrast, it *expands* those paths by imaginatively transporting viewers to distant lands and times. The two levels are routinely naturalized and blended in bodily movement, conversation and play.

Prime Time, Prime Place

Scannell and Cardiff (1991: 319) have argued that both radio and television have over the decades made the British nation 'real and tangible through a whole range of images and symbols, events and ceremonies relayed to audiences direct and live'. Following Giddens (1984), Scannell (1988: 5–7) has distinguished three intersecting temporal planes in the structuring of broadcasting: clock time, life time and calendrical time. Through calendrical time, discrete events in the life of the British nation previously separated in time and space, such as the FA Cup Final, the Last Night of the Proms and the Grand National are now 'woven together as idioms of a corporate national life'. I find this separation of CCT into 'clock time' and 'calendrical time' unhelpful, as it obscures the interdependence of these two strands of temporal-numerical code in modern scheduling practices. Also problematic is the insertion of 'life time' as a comparable temporal plane. It is more fruitful, in my view, to study the biographical-historical uses of the CCT code by broadcasters in different countries. Thus the importance of television in this continuous process of temporal and symbolic weaving has also been noted in Brazil. The remote Amazonian town of Gurupa relies for its electricity supply on a costly diesel generator controlled by the municipal authorities who restrict its operation to a few hours in the evening. However, during daytime broadcasts of events considered vital to the nation – what Dayan and Katz (1992) would call 'media events' – such as a presidential funeral or a football match involving the national team, this rule is relaxed so that the local population may partake of them (Pace, 1993:1997).

In the daily life of Saribas Iban longhouses the more important 'idioms of a corporate national life' also include great media events. They are routinely woven together through the 8 o'clock news on RTM's first channel and its neighbouring slots. This is an example from my fieldnotes:

Semak Longhouse, 18 June 1997. Watching TV1 with Grandmother-of-Kalong. At 7.30 pm they started showing *Emosi* (Emotion), a dull Malay horror drama. Grandmother-of-Kalong kept filling me in on the various kinship relations binding together the characters. The 'drama' was interrupted by the Muslim call to prayer, featuring new footage of the Malaysian team who recently climbed Mount Everest and some aerial shots of Kuala Lumpur's modern architectural wonders. The slogan 'Let us follow the path to prosperity' was presented in three languages:

Arabic, Malay and English. At 7.52 we watched another promotional video, this time on PM Mahathir's Vision 2020 project, aimed at turning Malaysia into a developed nation with a strong national culture by the year 2020. The video appeared to stress the compatibility between Islam, science and technology. It was followed by a panel with the countdown to the 16th Commonwealth Games, to be held in Kuala Lumpur in September 1998.

There followed a second Vision 2020 clip in a karaoke-like format. Five attractive young women clad in traditional dress, each one representing a major ethnic group (Malay, Chinese, Tamil, Kadazandusun and Iban) sang the catchy 2020 song hand in hand. Subtitles had been added, presumably to entice the audience to join in and make the song more memorable. There followed a clip urging drivers to control their speed on the motorway. Then came a third 2020 song promoting cooperation (*kerjasama*) among the nation's many groups. A torrent of pleasant images flooded the screen: there were vibrant cultural shows from Sarawak and other states, glistening robot-operated factories, homes for the elderly and the handicapped, healthy-looking schoolchildren, and more. Finally, the news at 8 began. The first item was PM Mahathir's 3-day visit to the Lebanon. A sharp increase of sales of Malaysia's national car, the Proton, was expected as a result of this historic visit. Then came a second encouraging report. . .

We can break up this barrage of Federal government propaganda into nine items:

1. Urban Malay serial (aborted)
2. Muslim call to prayer combined with pro-development slogan
3. Vision 2020 promotional video: Islam, science and technology are in harmony
4. Countdown to Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games [a future media event]
5. Vision 2020 promotional video: the five major ethnic groups are in harmony
6. Motorway safety promotional video
7. Vision 2020 promotional video: all ethnic and social groups are in harmony
8. News at 8: first governmental propaganda item.
9. News at 8: second governmental propaganda item.

Elsewhere (Postill, 2000: ch. 5) I have analysed prime-time television from the perspective of Saribas Iban viewers' ideas and practices. Here I wish to tease out a number of interrelated spatial and temporal factors. First, the highly structured, predictable nature of prime-time television. Saribas Iban viewers often remark on how they can get to see distant, more advanced countries through television. What they systematically fail to mention is the temporal-ideological framing of such news reports, a taken-for-granted, naturalized, invisible component that 'goes without saying'. Anderson (1983/1991: 33) has discussed the arbitrary juxtaposition of items on the front page of a newspaper. They are linked through the date at the top, signifying 'the steady onward clocking of homogenous, empty time'. In the case of Malaysian television, the randomness of world news affairs is routinely organized around CCT to serve a stable representation of the world in which the nation is steadily progressing 'along the path

to prosperity'. Items 8 and 9 above may be news to the viewers, but they are still designed to support an unchanging unity-in-diversity national ideology. Second, Malaysia's RTM repeatedly broadcasts the theme of a common national *future* that will transcend current religious, linguistic, ethnic, regional, economic and social divides by the year 2020. Saribas Iban viewers may or may not be confident about the attainability of Mahathir's Vision 2020. In either case, and owing to relentless broadcasts on radio and television, they all believe that their future has already been charted out on their behalf by leaders in far-off Kuala Lumpur. No alternative national future is ever broadcast.

This monofuturistic orientation of the government-controlled media has percolated into all spheres of Saribas Iban life. For example, local children often sing or hum to the catchy 2020 song. Numerous other instances can be given. Thus I once overheard an inebriated man loudly question the ability of the Iban people to achieve the 2020 dream. At a wedding, a local official encouraged the attendants to strive to achieve Vision 2020. On a trip upriver I met an Iban man who had a 2020 tattoo on his arm. On another occasion, a young man proudly told me about the Commonwealth Games to be held in September 1998 in which 'all countries in the world' would participate. Characteristically, he knew the exact CCT and geographical indexes, but little about the historical and political significance of this media event. A fourth man had followed closely on television the Malaysian team's Everest climb, and wished an Iban had been represented. These examples are proof not only of how radio and television weave together a national calendar, but also of how they promote the government's CCT orientation through repeated national success stories in the fields of diplomacy, sport, technology, business, etc.

Conclusion

I have stressed some of the limitations of the anthropology of time as well as the potential of CCT as a problem worthy of both anthropological and interdisciplinary research. This article is but an early exploration of CCT uses/localization in a small area of Borneo. A great deal of work remains to be done to increase our understanding of Bornean and Southeast Asian historical time shifts since the arrival of Islam, the European powers and industrialization. Ethnographic case studies such as the one presented here need to be set against a much broader canvas. Whatever the disciplinary approach and angle chosen, we cannot afford to leave out world-historical and regional processes. Among these I would single out the Industrial Revolution, the formation of modern nation-states, and the spread of road traffic and media technologies – all four wholly dependent on the CCT code. In a forthcoming article, I analyse the centrality of CCT to the media-saturated Dayak Festival officially launched in 1965 and

mentioned earlier in passing. The climax of the Festival is a collective count-down to the New Year (1st June) – a thoroughly modern practice. It is here that the inextricable bond between clock and calendar time (*pace* Giddens, 1984) is revealed. The ticking of the clock ‘ushers in’ a new day, month and year. CCT is not merely a convenient, abstract backdrop to the festivities opposed to ‘indigenous time’ – it is *what they are all about*, since what is at stake is the Dayak claim to clock-and-calendar (i.e. modern) parity with the hegemonic Malays and Chinese. In other words, this official CCT ‘slot’ is central to the recognition of the Dayaks as a cultural and political force.

Notes

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1. I am using pseudonyms throughout, for both persons and longhouses. I am also following the Iban practice of calling someone by the name of his or her child or grandchild, e.g. Grandfather-of-Samuel is the English translation of *Aki Samuel*, while Mother-of-Nuing stands for *Indai Nuing* (see Steinmayer, 1999: 110).
2. John K. Wilson, a Scottish development officer, played a pivotal role in spreading the new radio technologies in the Saratok area, north of the Saribas. In the mid-1950s, a grant from the Nuffield Foundation allowed him to purchase a number of radio telephone sets. Notice the element of CCT precision: ‘Through those radios, Saratok used to relay important messages to all [development] centres and to all longhouses at certain times each day. Indeed each day at ten thirty, everyone stopped what they were doing to come and listen in. Why not? There might be a message for them or for someone in their longhouse’ (Wilson 1969: 163).
3. I am assigning random ‘door’ [*pintu*] numbers to all *bilik*-families in order to facilitate the reader’s cross-referencing (e.g. between doors no. 4 and no. 12).

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