

that argument last night about, and who took part in it?" I could now inquire, "Were Minah and Dir arguing about her sister's inheritance again?"

This approach immediately placed me backstage, for I could not be familiar with such information unless other villagers already trusted me. In this fashion I rapidly increased my access to information that hitherto had been denied me, and as it became increasingly apparent that I neither disclosed nor abused this knowledge, other villagers began to accord me a trust similar but not identical to that which Yusof and Mat had displayed.

From this point forward, my work progressed nicely. Among other things, I had learned that the evolution of trust involves mutual vulnerability. Reciprocity is widely regarded as the most fundamental of social expectations, and it obtains in fieldwork fully as much as it does in everyday life. I can never forget that I owe much of my fieldwork success not to my own professional acumen but to a night out on the town in the company of good friends.

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The Midday Sun and Other Hazards

or

**Cobras in the Kitchen, Rats in the Rafters,
and**

Ants Everywhere

Those who have read ethnographies—those anthropological descriptions of others cultures, brimming with facts and insights—probably have the impression that anthropologists fill most of their days with interviews, surveys, observations, and other forms of professional engagement. This is something less than wholly accurate. While there may indeed exist anthropologists who can lay claim to such work schedules, I have never encountered them. Instead most of us fill much of our days with the mundane tasks associated with keeping clean, feeding ourselves, looking after health concerns, staying sane (for the most part), and so on. In my case I must confess that only about 35 percent of my available research time was actually devoted to research. This is certainly not the way one conceives of research practices when writing up proposals in the comfort of an office. It also helps to explain why anthropologists seldom adhere to the detailed schedules with which they enter the field, and why fieldwork often takes more than a year to accomplish.

The continuing theme is a simple one. Anthropologists have needs that must be addressed if they are to continue working effectively in what can be rather trying circumstances. There is

benefit in devising a schedule for research, but it can be unwise to attempt to follow it slavishly in the field. Anthropologists are often surprised to discover that some experiences that were expected to be difficult are not, while others anticipated to be easy can be surprisingly problematic. This is particularly true for those who, like my friend Clive Kessler, are in the field alone. I was fortunate to be accompanied by my wife, Karen, who proved to be an invaluable helpmeet both with professional and domestic tasks (the latter in which she was far more active than I), a source of information on the women's perspective on affairs, and a major buttress of sanity. She figures prominently in the following description of daily fieldwork problems for the simple reason that she figured prominently throughout the day-to-day reality of fieldwork.

Climate Concerns

I had been apprised that the climate of Malaysia was tropical, and I expected both heat and humidity. However, having been raised in New Hampshire, it seems my expectations were a bit too abstract and intellectual. I thought that I would simply sweat a bit more. Well, I was partially correct—as a candle is to a forest fire, so was my expectation of the heat to its reality. I sweated, I flowed, I bloody well streamed. In a period of ten months I went from a rather lean 180 pounds to 154. Karen, who also suffered this climate, was pleased with her weight loss but quite concerned about mine. She took to referring to me in her journal as "the bony one."

In addition to weight loss, the heat and humidity created a set of daily problems that taxed both endurance and ingenuity. It seems that anything made of leather quickly grew a green patina of mold, cloth tended to suffer accelerated decomposition, exposed food often started to decay in a matter of hours, and moisture relentlessly attacked metals, particularly those that were part of delicate and expensive instruments, like cameras. However, the biggest daily difficulty arrived with the hot season in mid-March—unrelievedly high temperatures that refused to dissipate properly in the evening hours. Sleep became difficult and the daily schedule had to be reshaped.

Unlike mad dogs, Englishmen, and the occasional anthropologist, Malays do not go out in the midday sun. They have more

sense than that. Instead they take a nap after lunch and stay out of the sun until approximately three o'clock or so for very good reason (Raybeck 1992a). The heat of the midday sun is exceptional and can easily lead to hyperthermia and even sunstroke. However, this practice of sleeping at midday led the British colonialists to perceive Malays as lazy, a perception that was strengthened by the reluctance of Malays to participate in wage-labor situations. The British assumed that Malays were uninterested in employment because they shunned work, not recognizing that the structured circumstances of work were unintentionally designed to create *malu* situations for Malays. Traditional Malays neither give nor receive orders directly. Instead, as I have indicated earlier, communication is subtle and indirect, though nonetheless clear. Further, being called to account for a lack of



Mat Halimah demonstrating how rubber sap is collected. Mat's small rubber holding was a source of steady, if modest, income for himself and his wife. The sap is carried back in pails to a preparation shed where it is poured into flat pans and mixed with formic acid. Once it has set, it is pressed dry and then hung up in the rafters of the house to cure. The odor is strong, unpleasant, and pervasive.

punctuality or for other conflicts between the two cultures is emotionally very painful to traditional Malays. Thus climate helped to foment a classic example of ethnocentrism—a belief in the superiority of one's own practices—in which the British thoughtlessly extended their interpretations of behavior to the patterns manifest by Malays. The result of this misperception was hardly academic, as it helped to promote the importation of tens of thousands of Chinese and Tamil Indians to work in tin mines and on emerging rubber plantations.

By resting during midday, Kelantanese are able to maintain a daily schedule that I found very difficult to emulate, especially during the rice-growing season. They arise at dawn for *Suboh*, the first prayer of the day. A cold breakfast is eaten, and work is begun either in the rice fields or with cash crops, according to season. Later in the morning, when the sun is hot, people will work on small-scale rubber tapping or some other activity that permits access to shade. A meal is taken at midday, *berdiri* (literally, standing erect), after which *Zohor* is prayed. The period after *Zohor* is the hottest time of day, when most adults remain indoors napping or working on light handicrafts. When the shadow cast by a person's body exceeds the body's length, it is time for *Ashar*, after which people work in their gardens, return to rice fields, or carry out sundry chores. By dusk people return to their homes for what is generally regarded as the most important prayer of the day, *Magrib*, after which is the evening meal. Following the evening meal people will work on handicrafts, visit friends, drop by the local coffee shop, and generally pursue an active social agenda. Finally the day concludes with the prayer *Isha*, after which most people retire. Hardly a schedule for lazy people!

It took some time for Karen and I to adjust to this pattern, and neither of us ever became very skilled at napping, a contributor to our fatigue and an additional factor in our weight loss. Generally we would remain at home during the midday period, in no small part because visits to others were neither polite nor practical. However, we often ventured out on the motorcycle to run errands, to see friends in Kota Bharu, or to take in a film. On one occasion we foolishly took a morning drive to a beach some twelve miles distant, where we stayed until a bit past noon. This was a very un-Kelantanese thing to do, both because they

have better sense and because they are very color conscious and prefer to avoid even the hint of a sun tan.

The next day, in a movie theater in Kota Bharu, Karen complained of feeling nauseous. We went out through a side exit to stand in the shade, while I worriedly inquired how she felt. She responded that she would be fine and immediately did a nose dive for the tarmac. I caught her just before she hit, picked her up, and was carrying her hurriedly toward a row of trishaws when she began to regain consciousness. Her first words were a testament to the power of cultural conditioning: "Put me down! My skirt's too short." In a foreign setting, feeling sick, and only semiconscious, she nevertheless managed to manifest a well-developed sense of modesty, reinforced by her awareness that Kelantanese are more sensitive about the public display of limbs than we are. I, on the other hand, on the two occasions when I lost consciousness, manifested little concern for my environs.

During the hot season, from May through September, we became used to measuring the temperature in terms of numbers of showers taken. Kelantanese, as most Malays, bathe several times a day. Nearly every house has a well before or beside it, sometimes partially screened by a low pandanus divider. To bathe, Kelantanese wrap themselves in an old sarong and considerable dignity and manage their ablutions quite modestly in full view of passersby. Neither Karen nor I were sufficiently skilled nor disposed to experiment with this procedure. I have mentioned that most houses are elevated on pilings to escape the flooding that accompanies the rainy season, but our modern house, while on stilts, had a kitchen at ground level with a poured concrete floor. This made possible the construction of a partitioned shower in one corner, where we could bathe in reasonable privacy excepting the occasional intrusions of neighbors. We quickly discovered what Malays had long known: showers are as cooling as they are cleansing. Thus our penchant for walking about the house wearing sarong and damp shoulders. A bad day was sometimes worth seven showers . . . and, yes, that meant seven interruptions of work.

The Insect Inventory

Cicak (pronounced *chee-cha*) are little wall geckos, small lizards that can walk up walls and across ceilings in search of

assorted insect delicacies. They are common in all houses and are tolerated because they help to moderate the significant insect population. We also found them cute. As our house had electricity, it was particularly popular both with insects attracted by the light and with cicak drawn by the insects. The presence of cicak was both a boon and a bane. While they provided free entertainment and did succeed in eating their weight in insects each day, they also had remarkably poor toilet habits. Since there was a light in our study, cicak frequently situated themselves nearby on the ceiling, above the table we were using as a desk, the better to capture flying insects. As a result, my field notes carry speckled reminders of the exigencies of fieldwork. Further, my concentration was occasionally broken when a cicak, in pursuit of dinner, would overreach itself and fall to the table, stare briefly at me, and scurry away.

Unwittingly (and that is precisely the right word), one night in early May, Karen and I provided our little reptilian friends with an unexpected feast. It was after ten o'clock when we noticed that the lights were going out in our neighbors' houses. This was a departure from the norm and was shortly followed by another. Within fifteen minutes our living-room light had drawn hundreds of lovely flying insects with large white wings. Initially entranced by this spectacle of nature, we watched as they surrounded the light, landed upon walls, ceiling, and floors . . . and then began to lose their wings. Things go awry.

Too late, I extinguished the lights (as my better-informed neighbors had done earlier) and we made an unsuccessful effort to clean up the mess, then retired to bed. Emerging from our mosquito netting in the morning, we found the living area covered with light, fragile, pernicious wings, which stubbornly resisted the best effort of broom and dust rag. It took two days of determined labor to clear out the flutter clutter, and we soon learned that the wings were merely a harbinger of a greater infestation. It seems that the flying ants borne on the wings were a form of termite. Thereafter one of my maintenance tasks was to crawl under the house with my pickax handle and smash the surprisingly strong mud edifices these insects erected.

The termites were an occasional problem, and we learned to deal with them fairly effectively. The mosquitoes, on the other hand, were a constant nuisance that one could only endure. Mosquitos ranged in size from those with which you are familiar

to the size of horseflies. While not quite capable of flying off with young children, some (Anopheles) were known to carry malaria, and all were capable of irritating bites. Mosquito defenses consisted of a variety of mosquito coils that could be burned at night and that worked fitfully, citronella candles that worked not at all, and mosquito netting that was quite effective but tended to limit one's domain to the bed.

Mosquitos were a far greater trial for me than for Karen. Although indifferently attractive to members of my own species, I am beloved by a wide range of insects. Thus, when we sat together in the study, Karen was able to relax in comparative comfort and be entertained by my occasional contortion as I sought to swat an insect on the middle of my back. Her most peaceful times were at night when we both retired to the protection of the mosquito netting that surrounded our double bed. Sometimes we would find a few mosquitos nicely ensconced and awaiting our appearance. On such occasions Karen would cheerfully roll over, secure in the knowledge that either I would kill them or I, not she, would awaken in the morning with some new, itchy blemishes.

Mosquitos were a problem for our comfort, but one that could be endured without great difficulty. The ants, on the other hand, were an incessant challenge to our food larder and our piece of mind. Ants in the tropics come in assorted sizes, from large black-bodied ones capable of carrying off whole loaves of bread (well, slices at any rate) to tiny red ones that seem able to penetrate any container, perhaps passing directly through glass and metal in some mysterious sexapedlian fashion. We quickly learned to place our open edibles such as rice, flour, vegetables, and especially fruit on a single table for which we devised ant guards. Each table leg was in the center of a tin can filled with kerosene. This created a moat that effectively prevented these formidable Formicidae access to our goodies, assuming, of course, that no portion of the can touched the table leg, nor were there any dangling strings, projecting pieces of wood, or even stray hairs to provide a stepladder to heaven. We went on to learn that our definition of edible fell far short of the one employed by the ants, who were found cheerfully munching leather, items of clothing, books, and even some of my film negatives. They could get into anything and usually did. Karen even found an unopened jar of strawberry jam that had been penetrated by and infested

with red ants. She did not take well to these incursions into our food stores and other belongings.

Ants quickly became Karen's *bête noire*, and she set about doing her best to reduce their population throughout our house and surroundings. She used poison, she baited traps, she struck them dead by the hundreds, she toyed with importing her own aardvark: in short, she became quite "ant agonistic." As an act of spousal support, I presented her with her own Flit gun and a quart of spray. Thereafter many of the entries in Karen's daily journal read as follows: "Washed, swept, killed ants, sewed," and "I washed clothes, killed ants and worked on getting the accounts into shape to send in." Her best days were those in which she located dense collections of the beasts: "Whee—killed a whole colony of ants living in a hole in the living room sink. Justice triumphs," and "Forgot best thing of whole day—found a whole huge nest of big black ants and decimated the population!" As you might imagine, Karen's efforts to reduce the six-legged population were unremitting, if not Herculean. She sprayed, beat, boiled, and even burned thousands of the little devils, and after months of effort succeeded in making . . . not one whit of difference in the local ant population.

While ants were the most numerous of insect pests, they were not among the more formidable. There were spiders larger than my spread hand (I have pictures), centipedes, millipedes, and other multipedes. These latter, especially the millipedes, could inflict painful though not dangerous bites. However, scorpions, another element in the local insect array, could be quite problematic. There were tales of children and elderly who have died of scorpion stings, and our neighbor Hussein assured us that some reached five to six inches in length. The result of our encounters with a few such vermin was greatly increased caution. We would look under an object before moving it and, whenever possible, items that had to be moved were lifted at arm's length. Those of you who have friends recently returned from a stay in the tropics now have an explanation of why they are apt to approach their furniture in a paranoid fashion.

Rodentia and Fowls

Tropical climates such as Kelantan's provide a plentiful supply of rotting waste to please and attract the local rodent

population. In Kelantan, rodents are divided into three classes: mice, rural rats, and urban rats. The distinction between rural and urban rats is less one of Linnaean morphology than it is one of simple mass: urban rats are bloody enormous! In cities rats can reach three feet in length (Yes, this includes the tail, but so what?) and weigh up to six pounds. They tend to live in the covered culverts and to scurry forth at night in search of edibles. Cats are far too sensible to take on such behemoths, and the only animals that threaten them are dogs. Despite whatever effects might be occasioned by going about in the midday sun, even individual dogs are reluctant to attack a large city rat, and on those occasions when these rodents are attacked, it is by a pack.

In the villages rats are usually no more than a foot in length, sometimes two. They abound in populated areas where garbage is often easily found, and they are quite willing to invade homes in search of sustenance. Village Kelantanese, who do not commonly have pets as Westerners do, do keep cats about to restrain the rodent population. The cats are not particularly well treated and are not generally welcome in the house proper. In contrast to smaller, urban cats sometimes kept as pets, a Kelantanese village cat is an imposing beast, characterized by a stocky body, large jaws, and a thick neck suggesting the possibility of steroids, or at least a weight-training program. For the most part, cats do their rat hunting at night. Lovely tropical evenings are sometimes punctuated by the squeal of unfortunate rats who have encountered foraging cats. The amount of sympathy generated by these unfortunate sounds is minimal.

Unlike most village houses, which have exposed beams and no ceilings, our "modern" house, mimicking Western fashion, had a false ceiling. This, as it eventuated, did not improve the quality of life. In most houses rats enter through holes in the floor or wall and, when not scuttling across the floor, run about on the rafters . . . quietly. Our false ceiling, however, provided a sheltered and secure area where, as nearly as we could determine, rats could hold their version of the NBA playoffs. Further, these unwanted visitors did not confine themselves to the ceiling but would, after we had retired, venture throughout the house in search of food. More than once we were awakened by scurrying visitors fighting over a discovered morsel, which could range from a bar of soap to the glued binding of one of our paperbacks. They were eclectic diners.



A relatively small rat captured in our kitchen and awaiting his terminal bath. Initially I was reluctant to drown these rodents, but practice and their pestiferous persistence altered my attitude.

If ants were Karen's special province, rats were mine, and I attacked them with slingshot, poison, and traps. The slingshot failed to daunt them, perhaps owing to my less-than-William-Tell-like marksmanship. The poison may have had some impact, but we were never able to witness any. Only the traps had a perceptible effect. One of my occasional morning tasks was to take a captured rat out and drown it in a pail of water. Initially, like a good American, I found this task distasteful and difficult. My first rat expired of sunstroke because I was reluctant to immerse it. However, as their nuisance value increased, I became inured to giving these animals a terminal baptism. Not only can one adapt to a new cultural setting, one can also change one's deeply ingrained attitudes about the treatment of animals. One of these changes involved a rooster owned by my neighbor Hussein.

Immediately outside our bedroom, only three feet from the house, was the stump of an old rubber tree. My neighbor's rooster was accustomed to use that stump as a forum from which he would loudly address the village at 4:30 each morning. To observe that Karen and I found this morning call to arms somewhat disconcerting is akin to noting that Californians find earthquakes disconcerting. We already had enough difficulty sleeping due to the heat and the rats. Quite frequently we would fall asleep in the early morning hours, only to be jolted awake a bit later by the crowing of this officious fowl. Further, our efforts to dislodge him by hollering and banging on the bedroom wall were callously disregarded. However, should one of us stealthily arise in an effort to do him physical harm, he would immediately retreat. (I would gladly have done him psychological harm, had I known how.) The rooster, whom we named after a rather noisy and obnoxious acquaintance, became an irritant of surprising proportion.

Over the ensuing months, in addition to calling him names, I threw sticks and stones at Sylvester. I also employed my slingshot in a vain effort to increase the distance between his perceived domain and ours. All of this was to little avail. It was apparent that Sly was both devious and fast. How fast? Faster than a speeding pullet. During the Chinese New Year I even resorted to shooting small rockets at him. These were made from a sliver of bamboo, to one end of which was taped an inch-and-a-half firecracker that gave up half its charge as thrust and terminated in a small but satisfying explosion. They were reasonably accurate and did serve to make Sly a bit more cautious, though they also alerted all our neighbors to my vermin vendetta. So much for the image of the dispassionate professional carefully avoiding controversial behaviors. Things go awry.

Hussein, ever the delicate politician and aware of our unhappiness with Sly, tried to explain to me that crowing is what cocks do and that cocks were necessary to freshen hens. I responded that, having tended some two hundred chickens in my New Hampshire village, I was aware of the behavior and services of cocks, but that Sly's preferred perch was nettlesome. Through a series of typically indirect conversations, we reached a compromise. I gave him money for another bird and Karen and I resolved the problem of what to do with a noxious rooster:

Rooster Curry, Malay Style

one 2-1/2-3 pound rooster or rooster parts, not boned, chopped into smallish pieces (regular chicken may be substituted)

3-4 cups coconut milk (nonsweetened, from a can, OR make by soaking nonsweetened grated coconut in warm water and squeezing out milk, repeating until there is enough)

2 large onions, finely chopped

3 garlic cloves, finely chopped

2 Tb. ground coriander

1 Tb. ground anise

1 Tb. ground cumin

10 small dried red chilies, seeded and crushed, OR 1-2 Tb. crushed pepper flakes

1 tsp. lemon grass powder

2 tsp. Turmeric

Salt to taste

Simmer chicken pieces in 2-3 cups of the coconut milk, adding salt, until chicken is just tender and milk becomes oily. Fry the onions and garlic in a little oil until tender, add spices, and fry well. Add remaining coconut milk and simmer about 30 minutes. Add to chicken and simmer, covered, until gravy becomes thick. Serve with rice.

Cobras in the Kitchen

Snakes are a significant problem throughout the Malay Peninsula and particularly in Kelantan. To this day, despite the erratic driving habits of many people, the leading cause of accidental death in Kelantan is not traffic accidents but snakebite, especially that of the King Cobra, which is both numerous and deadly. I have no clear sense of how many species of snakes there are in Kelantan, but I have been told repeatedly by villagers that the poisonous ones outnumber the nonpoisonous. Whether or not this is true, Kelantanese have, with one exception, a common response to any snake they come across: they kill it. The one exception is a large black snake that subsists largely on mice and other small rodents. Kelantanese actually encourage these snakes to take up residence

in their eaves or rafters, believing, with no small justification, that their presence means good luck (or at least a better night's sleep).

During the nine months we had been in the village, I had toured Wakaf Bharu and neighboring villages on motorcycle and on foot. I had been with Kelantanese when snakes were spotted and duly dispatched, and invariably my companions always saw the snake well before I did. The technical term for this ability is increased response salience and disposition. They knew where to look for snakes, and they had numerous past encounters to heighten their perceptions. Throughout this time, I never once encountered the dreaded King Cobra.

One afternoon in early October, I returned home on my Yamaha to find Karen standing on the front porch in a very composed, even formal fashion. She said in a perfectly controlled voice, "There is a snake in the kitchen, and I think it is a cobra." Being far more experienced with the local environment, I suggested that she had probably erred, as I had yet to encounter one of these venomous vipers during my travels. Full of masculine assurance, I entered the house and descended from the raised portions to the ground-floor kitchen. According to Karen, the snake had entered under the back door (lots of clearance) and then slithered into the shower stall. She had then blocked the run-off drain, placed a heavy chair against the shower stall door, and settled back to await my appearance. Having heard the fuller version of her tale, I reassured her about the snake, grabbed a nearby broom, moved the chair away from the door, and entered the shower stall. I approached the snake and poked at it with the broom. The snake responded by rising up, looking distinctly displeased with my presence, and flaring its hood. I shut the door to the shower stall, replaced the chair, put back the broom . . . and apologized most humbly to my wife. Things really can go awry.

I then went outside to get what I regarded as a reasonable length of wood with which to assault our unwanted visitor. I returned with an eight-foot-long hardwood staff that had been leaning against the back of the house. I placed another chair next to the shower stall, clambered atop it, swung the staff over the top and began doing my very best to smite the offending reptile, yea, verily. Unfortunately the ponderous length of wood moved slowly and gave the cobra plenty of time to evade my poorly aimed bashes. Further, if my blows, driven by considerable energy and

fear, did little to damage the snake, they made a considerable ruckus as the corrugated sides of the stall were struck repeatedly. Within moments a worried Hussein burst through the side door, asked what was wrong, and sized up the situation.

There stood my diminutive friend in the center of the kitchen floor, staring up at the 6'4" anthropologist perched atop a chair and wielding a staff that would have done credit to Little John, himself. Hussein shook his head and grimaced in bemusement (an expression he frequently wore in my company). After I described the cobra, he informed me that I was going about the thing incorrectly and that I had chosen the wrong wood, as only bamboo is truly efficacious against poisonous snakes. He then went outside to locate what he regarded as a reasonable length of wood, returning shortly with a three-and-a-half-foot length of flexible bamboo, which I regarded as better suited to Charlie Chaplin than to the dangerous business of dispatching cobras. I watched from my elevated vantage point as Hussein then walked to the shower stall, removed the chair, entered the stall, and killed the cobra with several rapid and well-aimed blows. Properly chagrined, I descended from my eyrie to thank my 5'4" neighbor. He turned to me and suggested that we talk, as I had much to learn about snakes.

We sat on the kitchen steps leading up to the main part of the house, while he spoke and I took notes. He listed a series of rather deadly snakes and general precautions to take against them. He went into particular detail about cobras: "if you want to keep cobras away, sprinkle goose dung around the house. They don't like the smell." He then cautioned me that cobras marry and thereafter travel in pairs. I nodded noncommittally and entered this in my notes under the heading of "folk beliefs." Some ten days later I was forced to amend this heading.

Once again I was out, this time transporting our friend Clive Kessler to town, and Karen was in the kitchen trying to do some baking. When one of our cats began to hiss and back away from the door, Karen took note. Beneath the same back door and into the same shower stall came cobra number two. This time the snake, perhaps frightened by the fearsome cat, entered the shower stall and appeared to immediately exit through the drain hole. I returned home shortly afterward and seeking the snake, found it AWOL. This was a problem. A cobra in your shower is an unwelcome guest, but a cobra somewhere in the general

The first of our least welcome visitors. Intelligently, I took this with a telephoto from my perch on a kitchen chair outside the shower stall.



vicinity is a constant and deadly threat. The location of our outhouse, just behind our home and near the run-off drain, only compounded the problem. We were faced with dreadful (literally) visions of visits to the outhouse that might be interrupted in a most unseemly fashion. Thus I undertook what may be my greatest act of bravery: I grabbed Hussein's length of bamboo, which he had kindly left with me, and started stalking the cobra in the tall grass between the house and the privy. From a distance I would have appeared a fine imitation of a nervous flamingo, as my strategy involved taking the longest step I could, perching on one leg, and then examining my surroundings with minute, anxious attention.

After some ten minutes of this terrifying exercise, Karen called out from the house that she had located the snake, curled up midway down the run-off drain. I greeted this news somewhat like Fay Wray discovering that King Kong was a vegetarian. Although my danger had been illusory, the terror was not, and my adrenaline level would have done credit to the entire defensive line of the New England Patriots.

Karen and I determined a relatively safe means of dispatching the snake. We first closed both ends of the drain while Karen heated water. I then removed the block from the outer end of the drain, grabbed my insufficiently long bamboo withe, arranged what I prayed would be an effective ambush, and called for her to pour the hot water in the other end. The cobra burst forth in irritated haste and I smote it, yea, verily. If I lacked Hussein's finesse, I made up for it with excessive enthusiasm. Powered by my excess of adrenaline, for approximately twenty seconds I did hit, strike, hammer, clout, ding, pop, slog, sock, pummel, swat, whack, beat, whop, cudgel, poke, punch, bang, bash, and thrash that unfortunate reptile. I then discarded what had once been a snake and climbed to our study, where I changed the entry of Hussein's advice from "folk beliefs" to "indigenous knowledge of nature."

Of Other Irritants

Not all pests are animals. Some are human, and they are apt to be the most tenacious and problematic of nuisances.

All cultures have marginal members, individuals who, for reasons ranging from a lack of resources to a checkered personal history, are not well integrated into their own societies. These people are usually unhappy with their personal circumstances, critical of the surrounding social environment, and at variance with the dominant goals and values. Anthropologists are familiar with this phenomenon, in part, because our discipline abounds with stories concerning the manner in which disaffected persons have tried to attach themselves to visiting anthropologists in hopes of improving their social situations. Not surprisingly, most anthropologists encounter one or several such individuals during the period of field research.

During the year and a half Karen and I were in the field, I dealt with a number of people who had the potential to be true pests. However, the Kelantanese sensibility is such that indirect allusions to work, to other involvements, to the need for travel flexibility, and so on, were generally sufficient to dissuade most hangers-on. There was one exception, however, a young man of mixed Malay-Thai ancestry who determined that I must become an integral part of his social network.

This fellow, whom I shall call Badi, lived with his mother at the edge of the village. Although bright, he seemed peculiarly insensitive to the nuances of Kelantanese communication, an important element of which was nonverbal. Where Kelantanese are characteristically indirect and deferential, he was forthright and even pushy. Kelantanese were not comfortable dealing with him and avoided him whenever possible. Badi had acquired a reputation for social obtuseness long before Karen and I had entered the area.

Badi found my presence a promising means of altering his own position in the village. He approached me during my first month and cheerfully offered to be helpful. Unaware of his lack of social graces and of his social standing in the community, I accepted his offer and encouraged him to accompany me on various forays about the village. I had thought that he might prove a suitable field assistant, for he did seem intelligent and quite familiar with the local area. I gradually became aware that Badi was trying to use his relationship with me to alter his status with others. One day I found him arguing with a Chinese shop owner who was an acquaintance of mine. When I inquired what the problem was, the shop owner explained that Badi was demanding a discount because he was my friend and field assistant. At this point he had yet to become either, and I soon resolved that these relationships would never mature.

Checking with my neighbor Hussein, with Yusof, and with others, I acquired information on Badi's history of difficulties within the village. I then resolved to terminate our relationship. Of course this resolution required action on my part, and therein lay the difficulty. I knew I lacked the social skills that Kelantanese would have called upon, and I feared giving such offense that I might become the target of the kind of gossip that Badi himself engendered. I tried my versions of indirect intimations, circuitous

suggestions, and oblique hints, all of which had no perceptible effect on his determination to remain close to me.

The solution to this problem was ultimately Kelantanese and was provided by Badi himself. He had appeared in a number of color slides I had taken, and he requested color photographic copies. At first I demurred, citing the expense involved in the copying process. Shortly thereafter, having borrowed some Kelantanese wisdom, I agreed to make the copies if he would shoulder half of the expense. He agreed, the copies were made, and I began my Kelantanese-style campaign to separate myself from Badi. When he came by, I would make oblique allusions to the pictures, asking him how he liked them and generally inquiring after his satisfaction. This was, of course, also a reminder that he owed me money. After a couple of days of enduring such references, Badi came by less frequently. Within two weeks, I hardly saw him. The stratagem cost me M\$7 (about U.S.\$2.30) and was well worth it.

The CIA and Me

Not all my problems arose from the local environment. One owed its origin to behaviors undertaken by the U.S. government, specifically the Central Intelligence Agency in its unrelenting pursuit of Communism.

Shortly after the end of World War II, a group of discontented Chinese, who had fought against the Japanese during the war, identified themselves as Communists and attempted an armed insurrection. This precipitated the period termed the "Emergency," which lasted from 1946 until after Malaysia's independence in 1957. At its conclusion several hundred Chinese fled across the border to Thailand. Thereafter they would move back and forth across the border to create mischief and to seek supplies. When one government took decisive military action against them, they would cross to its neighbor. It seems that during the United States involvement in Vietnam, this roving band of Chinese Communists, which had probably never numbered more than a few hundred, drew the attention of our government. In any event, in 1968 there were village tales of CIA agents in southern Thailand, where they were reputed to be gathering information on the Communists.

One afternoon in November, I was visiting the village police post, a modest little structure containing two policemen and

some records I wished to consult. Like all police in Malaysia, these men were posted from other states, Selangor and Perak. This meant, among other things, that their ability to understand Kelantanese dialect was limited and that villagers would view them as threatening outsiders. This arrangement was part of the government's effort to reduce the likelihood of bribery and corruption. They reasoned that police working in areas where they lacked relatives and acquaintances would be less likely to engage in questionable practices. Whether or not this was true, it was the case that the honesty and efficiency of Malaysia's police compared favorably with other countries in Southeast Asia.

The documents I was studying recorded births and deaths for the local administrative area. At least they were presumed to do so, but I gradually learned that what they lacked in accuracy they made up for in creativity. Villagers are quite indifferent to state rules such as these, and while deaths were usually reported, owing to the role of the Imam, birth reports were often omitted. Nonetheless I dutifully took down what information I could obtain on these two facets of life in hopes that I might be able to devise a use for it at some later time (I have yet to do so). I had been visiting the station regularly for several days and had become acquainted with the two police officers assigned to the post. That afternoon the senior officer (he may have been twenty-five years old) leaned over the little table where I was transcribing figures on birth and inquired in a conspiratorial fashion, "Tell me Cik Lah, how long have you been with the CIA?" Things go . . . well, you get the idea.

I immediately protested that I was not, never had been, and possessed no desire to be, a member of the CIA. In response the officer smiled, winked, and offered whatever assistance he could. I immediately returned to our house, grabbed my passport, letter of introduction from a dean at Cornell, and whatever other supporting papers I could find, and returned to the police station to demonstrate my independence of the CIA. The officer dutifully examined the documents, smiled, winked, and offered whatever assistance he could. Of course a CIA agent would possess a convincing set of false documents.

I later learned that much of the bureaucratic establishment had assumed I was connected with our government and was in Wakaf Bharu posing as an anthropologist in order to monitor the activities of Chinese Communists. After all, there I was, staying

in a small village only fifteen miles from the Thai border and, for reasons I will discuss later, moving back and forth across that border on several occasions. Further, there had been detailed stories of CIA agents in southern Thailand posing as anthropologists!

This whole misperception could have greatly altered my relationship to the villagers, made my work difficult or impossible, and possibly even endangered Karen and me. Fortunately the governments of Malaysia and Kelantan, as well as the villagers, thought the CIA was a wonderful organization because it was opposed to Communism. For the Kelantanese in particular, Communism meant *Chinese* Communism and bore directly upon their fear of Chinese influence in Malaysia. Interethnic relations are complex and will be discussed later.

Concluding Comment

The preceding information has been included precisely because it is not a guide to good fieldwork technique. Indeed, this kind of material is not a part of what one encounters in most books on fieldwork. Hopefully, however, it provides the reader with some sense of the daily tribulations that absorb time and energy and that may have little or nothing to do with the field research proper. Finally, it also reveals that even trained and well-intentioned professionals can exhibit behavior that they know to be unwise. My misadventures with Sly are worth relating, but they hardly represent behavior of which I am proud. Still, fieldwork is an intensive learning experience, which means, among other things, that anthropologists learn a good deal about themselves.

6

Intimations of Sunburn

Communicating accurately across cultures and about them is one of the most intellectually challenging tasks possible. Anthropologists are aware that there is always some cultural content that will not readily translate across cultural boundaries. This may be because a term refers to a concept for which there is no ready referent in the second culture, or it may be because the two cultures segment reality in differing ways. Even with closely related cultures there can be distinct problems. Thus, to translate the German *gemütlich* as "comfortable" only approximates the meaning of the term and loses much of the culturally grounded nuance that would be present to any German.

This does not mean that a cultural element is wholly untranslatable, but it can mean that the translation process can be arduous and result only in a rough approximation. A Kelantanese wishing to reference the state of severe embarrassment and the complex social behaviors that can result in this state simply uses the term *malu*. In order for me to convey an approximation of the import of this expression I need several sentences that include both descriptors and examples, and I remain aware that I can still never capture the full meaning of the term. The only way to do so is to be born and enculturated in Kelantan. Thus any attempt to record for oneself, let alone to convey to others, the nature of a cultural reality is bound to be flawed. This does not signify that such efforts are failures or poor uses of our time. On the contrary, efforts to better understand others are quite useful