

WOMEN AND
URBAN IZATION IN
SARAWAK

VILLAG
E
MOTHERS

CITY
DAUGHTERS

BY

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From Highlands to Lowlands Kelabit Women and Their Migrant Daughters

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Introduction: The Highlands, Kelabit and Isolation

A survey conducted in 1998 revealed that 63.8 per cent of the total Kelabit population have migrated out of the highlands (Murang 1998). ¹ This is highly significant for the Kelabit people who forty years ago were considered remote and unreachable. Harrison,² one of the first white writers to arrive in the area described it as one of the ...few [places] where, in fact, you cannot be more away from what most people call 'the world'. There are fewer places where you (or I) are likely to be able to feel more remote, more 'cut off' from the great outside. . ." (Harrison 1959, p. 5). As a result, lowlanders like the people of Tinjar area have always considered the Kelabit to be living in "another world" fabled for its "big men, sexy women, cold nights, rich harvests, irrigation, inaccessibility, cattle and goats" (Harrison 1959, p. 152). Not many understood their way of life and in fact, at the turn of the twentieth century, were deemed "lost" "terrible, troublesome and apathetic drunkards", and "on the way out" (Hudson 1999; Crain and Pearson-Rounds 1999).

