

"The Borneo Case"

Talking to the film producer Erik Pauser

In an interview with the director of the movie, Erik Pauser gave an insight into the documentary and the obstacles during the production. Moreover, he talked about his current work.

Chin: Which challenges did you face during the shooting?

Pauser: The biggest challenge was the story itself. I made a film about Bruno and the *Penans* 15 years ago. Bruno Manser disappeared two weeks after we finished that shoot. The idea was then to do something about Bruno and the *Penan* tribe but the story grew. We started to do research and thereby hooked up with Clare Rewcastle, Mutang, Lukas Straumann and all these activists. We just followed what happened then. It was a slow development and things were happening all over the world, so we moved around a lot because of the different shootings. But we also did not have an end for the film. It is a tragic story and a lot of people are fighting but we did not see any real results until Taib had to step down. Due to the different journeys, the production of the film was expensive and it was difficult to get it financed. It does not look like environmental films are high on the agenda of television stations. It was hard to get the broadcasters to be part of this production. Additionally, the story was difficult because we did not know where it was going and because of its complexity. We shot much more, but in the end we tried

to simplify the story to make it easier for the audience to understand what is really going on.

Chin: How did you finance the movie?

Pauser: We started looking for interests in our own country, such as the Swedish television and the Swedish film institute. Additionally, we applied for money from the European Union, but to be able to apply for funding from the European Union, we had to have five other countries involved. We started with Denmark, Norway, Finland and England. Additionally, we made a short pilot which was presented and we found seven different television channels which made a pre-buy. Furthermore, we were supported by the film fund in Sweden, by a Norwegian and a Welsh film fund. In the end, the film was supported by 14 different sponsors.



von
Charlotte Chin

The author is currently a student of the Master's Program »Development Studies« at University of Passau. She completed her Bachelor degree in »Comparative Cultural and Religious Studies« and »Peace and Conflict Management« at Philipp's University in Marburg. Due to her voluntary service in an orphanage and her internship for a human rights organization in Malaysia, she got interested in the political conditions in South-east Asia.

*The main protagonists – Brown, Straumann, Jaban, Urud (left to right)
Foto: Erik Pauser*

Infobox

The documentary »The Borneo Case« was produced by the Swedish film makers Erik Pauser and Dylan Williams. The film deals with the illegal deforestation in Malaysia and begins with the disappearance of the Swiss environmental activist Bruno Manser in 2000. Manser had lived with the Penan tribe in the Malaysian federal state Sarawak on Borneo for six years and engaged for the rainforest preservation and for the human rights of the indigenous community. Additionally, he founded the Bruno Manser foundation. After Manser's disappearance, other human rights activists have continued his work. The film

sheds light on the current situation in Malaysia and introduces the four main protagonists to the audience – the exiled tribesman Mutang Urud, the investigative journalists Clare Rewcastle Brown and Peter John Jaban as well as the historian and executive director of the Bruno Manser fund Lukas Straumann.

Since several activists have been convicted and prosecuted for expressing their opinion in Malaysia, the five characters mostly work from abroad. Much attention is paid to the Online Radio station »Sarawak Report« which was founded by Clare Rewcastle Brown in London and which has served as an international platform to broadcast information about the political

and ecological situation in Sarawak since it was founded in 2010. But the film makers Pauser and Williams also accompany Mutang who returns after 20 years of exile to Sarawak and learn of the Government's plan to build twelve hydroelectric power dams which destroy the rain forest and several villages. Simultaneously, Clare Rewcastle Brown and Peter Jaban begin to investigate what has happened with the profits from the illegal logging and the building of the Dams. They discover a network of global money laundering which does not only involve the family of Sarawak's Chief Minister Taib Mahmud but also several international banks and companies.

Protest against the building of the dams
Foto: Erik Pauser



Chin: Have there been any threats or interferences of the Malaysian government or anybody else since the movie has been released?

Pauser: Not for us, but Clare, Peter and other people – who were involved in the film – have constantly received death threats and have been harassed. They also have been hacked several times but we have not had any comparable problems. I do not know if they are checking our emails. They could do that since the Malaysian government invests large amounts of money for intelligence services.

Chin: Have the living conditions of the indigenous community changed after Taib Mahmud resigned? If so, to what extent?

Pauser: After Taib resigned, Adenan came to power. He made kinds of promises but he died three or four months ago. His successor also belongs to Malaysia's elite and has not changed anything of Adenan's promises yet. But apart from that, the indigenous people are discussing the project the "Baram Peace Park". The Bruno Manser foundation has worked on the Baram Peace Park which com-

prises 244,000 hectares of land and which the *Penan* people want to protect.

They therefore formed a coalition with the NGO "Save the rivers" and others. In contrast to that, the local government in Sarawak has not been very interested in protecting this area. But now the Sarawak Forestry Department has shown an interest in the project and the delegation from the department has come to Switzerland and Sweden to discuss how to save the land with different partners. A success of this project would mean a big change and it would mean a lot to these people if the area could be protected. Otherwise, I think changes are slow. Sarawak has a corrupt government and Malaysia does not have a strong civil society. This makes it difficult to see fast changes. Changes in Malaysia are slow and I think there is a need of international pressure to keep things up.

Chin: Coming back to the former question: Which threats exist for the rain forest, its citizens and its biodiversity nowadays?

Pauser: A lot of logging is still going on. When we travelled to the interior of Sarawak, we continuously saw logging trucks and sometimes I was not sure if these were from protected areas or not. 15 years ago, there were still couple of hundreds of *Penans* that were nomadic but nowadays all of them are semi-settled. Certain areas are closed off and clear-cut to build dams or palm oil plantations. Sarawak already has as much energy as it needs, so why do you have to build twelve dams? What are they going to do with the electricity? Taib and his government built these dams to establish industrial zones, for instance aluminium factories which need a lot of energy. Many of the indigenous people are suffering because they lose land and they do not get their rights in court. Even when court proceedings are going on and when land rights cases are won,

Penan settlement
Foto: Erik Pauser





Logging Trucks at Sarawak
Foto: Erik Pauser

the logging is continued because the legal system does not really work.

Chin: Can you tell me something about the projects in which you have been involved since the documentary was finished?

Pauser: At the moment, we try to get the film shown in different parts of the world. Our plan is to do a world tour in co-operation with the NGO "Global Bersih" before the next election in Malaysia takes place. We have also formed several co-operations to screen the film, for instance with the NGO "Transparency International" and "Cinema for Peace". Moreover, we are trying to launch an impact campaign in Germany in fall before the film will be on screen. We also worked with the "Fair and Finance Guide". The organization is placed in nine different nations worldwide. They look at banks and financial institutions and check if these institutions follow their own ethical guidelines and if they keep their promises, concerning for instance the protection of the environment or the workers. The "Fair and Finance Guide" made a big report in Sweden, which was released at the same time as the film. In the 112 page reports they investigated Sweden's seven biggest banks and their investments in four companies in Borneo. The organization cooperates with the NGO "Swedwatch" which sent two groups of researchers to Sarwak to check the companies. It was a very critical report about these seven Swedish banks. Another criticized bank was the *Deutsche Bank*. While our film shows the feelings of the human beings, the report presents numbers and hard facts. I think it is really interesting that we often believe that we are far away from the problems although countries – such as Sweden or Germany – are connected to Sarawak and its problems. We are even part of these problems because our companies, our banks, our money is invested in problematic companies in Sarawak.

Chin: How can people – who live abroad, for example in Germany – support the indigenous community in Sarawak?

Pauser: There are many different organizations and NGOs. It is not easy but you can engage yourself in such an NGO. This is the way to do it. Otherwise, you can also contact your bank and demand change. This is part of our impact campaign.

Chin: Thank you very much for your time and it was nice talking to you. ■



Erik Pauser (left) and Dylan Williams (right)
Foto: Erik Pauser

About Erik Pauser

Erik Pauser is a Swedish film producer and artist who was born in Linköping in 1957 and who lives in Stockholm. He has been involved in several exhibitions in different European countries, in the United States, in Palestine, in Southeast Asia and in South Africa. Some of his popular films as a director are "The Face of the Enemy" and "The Machine" and as a producer "Once there was Love", "Maneuvers in the Dark – The North Korean Jeans Story" and "Men Who Swim Together". Throughout the last five years Erik Pauser and Dylan Williams accompanied the protagonists of the documentary "The Borneo Case" and worked on the film. The documentary will be aired by ZDF this fall. Further information can be found on: theborneocase.com