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**Identities in Borneo: Constructions and Transformations**

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**Abstract**

**This paper focuses on a rapidly expanding field of research in the social sciences in Borneo. There has been a noticeable focus on the multidisciplinary, multidimensional study of identities and ethnicities in Borneo in the last two decades, even though the identification of units for analysis and the labelling of ethnic groups or categories have enjoyed a long history in Borneo Studies. An important stimulus for the more recent increase in scholarly interest was the major conference held in Sarawak in 1988 which explored issues of ethnicity and then the publication by the Sarawak Museum of four volumes of papers in 1989, organised primarily in terms of the major ethnic groups identified in the state (Chin and Kedit, 1989). Other key moments in this developing interest was the publication of Jérôme Rousseau’s *Central Borneo: Ethnic Identity and Social Life in a Stratified Society* (1990), Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen*: *Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (1993) and Bernard Sellato’s *Nomades et Sedentarisation à Borneo. Histoire Economique et Sociale* (1989)and *Nomads of the Borneo Rainforest* (1994). A more recent manifestation of this expanding interest is the edited book by Zawawi Ibrahim *Representation, Identity and Multiculturalism in Sarawak* (2008a, 2008b), and Peter Metcalf’s *The Life of the Longhouse: an Archaeology of Ethnicity* (2010). This paper, which attempts an overview and analysis of the field, arranges the contributions (by no means exhaustively) into seven categories: (1) the nation-state, majorities and minorities; (2) religious conversion and identities; (3) the media, identities and nation-building; (4) borderlands, margins, migrations and identities; (5) inter-ethnic relations and violence; (6) arenas for identity construction in tourism and museums; and finally (7) emerging middle classes, lifestyles and identities in urban settings.**

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**Wider contexts**

In Southeast Asia interest in what was traditionally referred to as ‘ethnicity’ has a long history. Going back to the early post-war period anthropologists were already examining the ways in which identities (using such alternative terms as ‘tribal’, ‘indigenous’, ‘native’, ‘minority’, ‘cultunit’ or ‘culture-bearing unit’ and so on) are constructed; and are not carried unchanging from the past and anchored reassuringly in some distant ancestral time and space. Rather, it was argued, they are products of social interaction and cultural construction. Indeed, as a ‘resource’ they can be ‘switched’, ‘manipulated’, ‘deployed’ and ‘used’, and many anthropological studies have focused on the strategic ways in which particular communities adopt, change and discard identities, and the role-playing and behaviour associated with them, according to circumstances, needs and interests (Nagata, 1975, 1979; Dentan, 1975). Individuals can also carry multiple identities and deploy these as different situations and interactions demand (Dentan, 1976: 78; King and Wilder, 2003:196-200; Nagata, 1979). This is especially so in situations where minority populations have to come to terms with more powerful majorities (Dentan, 1975). Having said this I do not subscribe slavishly to an interactionist perspective on identity and I would also wish to argue that there is also some merit in the view that there are elements in identity formation for certain communities that are, in some sense, primordial, or at least are more persistent and long-established.

We could well make a case for Southeast Asia as the major site in global terms for the development of theories and concepts of cultural identity. A most significant and early contribution to these debates was Edmund Leach’s *Political Systems of Highland Burma: a Study of Kachin Social Structure* (1954) which emerged from his doctoral thesis submitted to the LSE (1947) where he argued that identity had to be examined as a historical process; he demonstrated this with regard to interactions between the village-based pagan Kachin and their Buddhist Shan neighbours and the fact that the social forms and identities of the upland-dwelling tribal Kachin were forged and transformed in relation to the valley-dwelling Shan who were organised into hierarchical states. Kachin socio-political organisation and identities were therefore unstable and subject to change and were indeed used strategically in relation the Shan. This gave rise to a whole stream of work on the relations between upland and lowland populations in Southeast Asia and the ways in which identities were constructed and transformed (see King and Wilder, 1982, 2003). It has given rise, I think, to notions of centres and margins, to focal points and peripheries, and to the concept of the formation of identities in the context of interaction and encounter across borders and boundaries. We should also note at this juncture that Leach’s important and ambitious overview *Social Science Research in Sarawak* (1950), commissioned by the Colonial Social Science Research Council, took elements from his Highland Burma study, and very much influenced my approach and that of some other anthropologists to the study of social structure, identities and inter-ethnic encounters in a Borneo context (see, for example, King, 1978, 1979, 1982, 1985).

Another more general and important contribution to this debate, though not specific to Southeast Asia, was the edited book by Fredrik Barth *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: the Social Organization of Culture Difference* (1969) in which Barth argued for the importance of focusing, not on the cultural stuff which expresses and is used to define ethnic identity (which in any case is never homogeneous) but rather the boundaries between units defined as separate and different and the process of crossing boundaries. Nevertheless, I think work in Southeast, which pre-dated Barth, had already demonstrated the importance of boundary crossing, though it had not been conceptualised specifically in the terms in which Barth presented it to us.

I first became involved in these deliberations in the 1970s when I was grappling with the problem of how to define and label an ethnic group in the Upper Kapuas region which I came to refer to as ‘Maloh’ and to weigh the competing claims of this Iban-derived ‘exonym’ with a range of locally-derived ‘endonyms’ (which included Embaloh, Taman, Kalis); the conclusion I reached was that ethnic boundaries were never neatly drawn; people cross boundaries, express their identities according to context, scale and level, and embrace new identities whilst sometimes retaining a previous identity; moreover cultural exchange and contact has given rise to hybridisation and syncretism; identities whilst presented as ‘fixed’, ‘stereotypical’ and ‘enduring’ are instead rather more fluid, relational and contingent; (see my *Ethnic Classification and Ethnic Relations: a Borneo Case Study*, 1979, and 1982, 1985, 1989, 2001, 2002, and the edited journal issue with William D. Wilder *Ethnicity in Southeast Asia*, 1982, and with Michael Hitchcock, 1997a, 1997b). Our earlier concerns with ethnicity have been translated into or perhaps have been embraced more recently by the more general concept of ‘identity’ or ‘cultural identity’ which has been increasingly viewed in the context of what has come to be called ‘cultural politics’, an arena in which identity is constructed, debated and contested, particularly in relation to minorities and the nation-state (see, for example, Kahn, 1992, 1995, 1998, 1999).

With regard to the Borneo literature on identity I still remain convinced that we need to reconceptualise the concept of ‘centres’ and ‘margins’ in relation to changing identities and that, in Leachian mode, we can conceive of Borneo societies as gaining form and identity in their interrelationships with focal points of state-based power and influence, whether indigenous or foreign (King, 2001). This in turn requires a shift to the study of interactions in urban centres (Boulanger, 2009), changing social class and ethnic configurations, the emergence of a politically aware, modern, educated elite, and the effects of urban-generated media and lifestyles on rural populations.

**Culture and Identity**

I have already argued elsewhere that the concept of identity (or cultural identity) is closely related to that of ethnicity (King, 2012) and that, in some contexts, they are used interchangeably in that they both refer to the realm of values, behaviour and cultural meaning. Nevertheless, I think we should see ethnicity as a special kind of identity attached to particular groups, categories or communities which command larger scale forms of allegiance and loyalty. In its specifically ethnic dimension identity is what distinguishes or differentiates a particular category or group of individuals from others. Ethnicity is frequently expressed as unifying and differentiating people at varying levels of contrast, and with the process of separating or distinguishing some from others by using certain cultural criteria (Hitchcock and King, 1997a, 1997b).

Therefore, the concept of identity is bound up with processes of cultural construction and transformation and the various forms and levels of identity can never be taken to be complete and firmly established. They are always in the process of ‘becoming’ and are invariably located in a world of competing, conflicting and interacting identities made more intense by the impacts of globalisation and media technology, nation-building, and trans-national movements and encounters (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983; Anderson, 1991). Identities are also forged and transformed in situations where power and the ability to exercise one’s will and discretion are differentially allocated in hierarchical social formations (Wertheim, 1964, 1967, 1974, 1993). In this regard Jenks says ‘There are no societies in which the quality of life is not differentiated by complexes of class, status and power, and as societies become more complex this differentiation becomes more marked, but also more subtly encoded in networks of symbolic cultural representations’ (1993: 99; and see Clammer, 2002: 32). These issues of hierarchy, inequality and contention are in turn closely connected to Foucault’s concept of ‘discourse’ and the role of knowledge, ideas, images and cultural categories in exercising control, regulation and domination over others (1977, 1980).

It is sometimes difficult to anticipate what elements will be given significance in establishing similarity and difference, but the processes of identifying and differentiating ‘us’ from ‘them’ are deeply cultural (Kahn, 1992: 159). Obviously those who study ethnicity and identity have to examine the criteria which can be used to unite and differentiate people and choose which make sense and are most appropriate and useful in their analyses. These may or may not correspond with the criteria which the people under study themselves use, the so-called ‘subjective’ dimension of identity (Nagata, 1974, 1975, 1979) or in Chua’s terms ‘native exegesis’ (2007). But an outside observer in attempting to construct wider ranging classifications for comparative purposes might well choose to emphasise certain criteria, say language, rather than local principles of identity. The establishment of identities can also entail a range of active interactions (cultural exchange, social intercourse including possibly intermarriage, trade and commerce, political alliance, and even peaceful assimilation) across the boundaries between different or separate groupings or they may involve processes of exclusion, avoidance, non-recognition, or hostility, the latter sometimes resulting in political subjugation, economic exploitation, forced acculturation or in extreme cases violence and genocide. In the case of the construction of national identities we can see how politically dominant groups, or in more abstract terms ‘the state’, attempt to promote, disseminate and sometimes impose on others their notions of identity and what that identity from a national perspective comprises.

**Bornean identities: reorientations**

It is in the cultural realm (in the construction and contestation of identities [see Appadurai, 1986, 1990, 1991, 1996] and the relations between identity formation, nation-building and globalisation), and the discourses which are generated in the interfaces between people and the nation-state on which we need to focus. There are three points in relation to these issues in Borneo and the ways in which Borneo researchers have positioned themselves in regional studies. First, up to the 1990s Borneo specialists tended to conform to the boundaries that had been set by the colonial powers; we worked either in the former British dependencies or in former Dutch Borneo. We usually did not cross borders; even those between Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei Darussalam. This territorial confinement presented major problems in understanding cultural identities and historical interconnections which cut across artificially created imperial borders. There was not a great deal of research that took a boldly comparative perspective across the whole island or major parts of it up to about 1990, though I have to single out the work of Jérôme Rousseau (1990) and Bernard Sellato (1989, 1994) as pioneers in this field, consolidated in the later work of Winzeler (1997a), among several others. I tried to do the same broad sweep in the co-authored book with Jan Avé *People of the Weeping Forests: Tradition and Change in Borneo* (1986) and in the general book on *The Peoples of Borneo* (1993a). What has happened in the last two decades is a rapidly increasing amount of work on Kalimantan, which was certainly not the case in the 1970s and the 1980s which has helped us in our understanding of both historical connections between populations across Borneo but also about the formation and transformation of identities which cut across artificial divides.

Secondly, once we have begun to grasp the complexities of Borneo history, cultures and identities we can then locate the island within the nation-states which incorporate it (and although Brunei Darussalam appears to be an exception here, it does not make much sense to study it without examining its relations with neighbouring areas of Malaysian Sarawak and Sabah, and historically with the southern Philippines). In my view the study of Borneo identities, unless it is content to lapse into a kind of parochialism, needs to address the connections between Kalimantan and the wider Republic of Indonesia and the policies of the central government in relation to its outer island dependencies; and in the Malaysian Borneo territories to examine the consequences for identities in Sarawak and Sabah of the policies and practices of those who control and administer the state in Kuala Lumpur and Putra Jaya and organise patronage systems within Kuching and Kota Kinabalu. In the case of Brunei, it has to be considered in relation to those neighbouring territories and peoples to which the sultanate was historically connected and with which it maintains social, cultural and economic relations. Indeed, it has been one of my main contentions that to understand the forms, composition and processes of what I refer to as ‘Brunei society’ then one must examine cross-border relations and comparative cases which demonstrate important similarities between political, economic and cultural ‘centres’ like Brunei (or more specifically Bandar Seri Begawan) and the populations which surround them (1994, 1996,2001).

Thirdly, apart from the work of political scientists and economists which has occasionally connected Borneo to the two nation-states with which the major parts of the island are connected, there has been an interesting turn more recently in studies of identities. There are at least seven strands to this (though a rather more intense review of the literature might find others and will certainly demonstrate that there is overlap between some of these strands or categories of research and publication). The first category comprises the movement from a preoccupation with a circumscribed population to a perspective which sees this population in relation to the nation-state and associated dominant groups through which it has to negotiate its identity and resources. Anna Lowenhaupt Tsing’s work on the Meratus Dayaks is an early example of this approach (1984, 1993; and see also Winzeler [1997a, 1997b] and Sillander [2004]).

A second strand has focused on religious identities and religious conversion primarily to Islam or some form of Christianity (see, for example Chalmers, 2006 and Asiyah, 2011; and Connolly, 2004), or to emerging indigenous religions such as Kaharingan in Central Kalimantan (Schiller, 1987, 1997). The literature on religious conversion and on transformations in religious ideas and practices is becoming increasingly substantial and, of course, particular religious configurations, specific beliefs and practices, and the connections established between myth, cosmology and ethnic origins are important ingredients in the construction and maintenance of identities. A significant segment of this literature has emerged from Christian missionary activity going as far back as Conley’s proselytising work on Kenyah conversion in Kalimantan (1976). Much later we have had the detailed studies of Bidayuh conversion by Harris (2002) and Chua (2007, 2012), among others.

The third strand of research has taken the media route to nation-building and asked the question ‘How are populations in Borneo responding to media-generated nation-building in Malaysia and Indonesia?’ Research in the field of media anthropology by John Postill (2006), Fausto Barlocco (2008) and Poline Bala (2007), among others, has explored these dimensions of identity formation and the different ways in which different minorities are responding to the opportunities and constraints presented by their inclusion in a nation-state structure.

A fourth area of research has examined Indonesian border populations and the responses of these territorially marginal communities to the pressures of a perceived remote central government (which is seen as dominated by culturally and ethnically different populations with different cultural and ethnic priorities); the work of Eilenberg and Wadley (2009) is important here. Research on the Sarawak side of the border has also focused on territorially marginal populations and their ambiguous and shifting relations with the nation-state (see Ishikawa, 2010; Bala, 2002; and Reid, 1997); this work also presents us with a range of case-studies which complement those on media-generated nation-building and minority responses.

A fifth strand has emerged in response to the violent inter-ethnic conflicts in West and Central Kalimantan in the 1990s and the relationship between the construction, transformation and expression of ethnicity, the politicisation of identity, the reasons for conflict, and its cultural patterning and local interpretation, in the work of many social scientists, particularly anthropologists, historians and political scientists, including Davidson (2008), Dove (2006), Harwell (2000), Hawkins (2005), Heidhues (2001), Peluso and Harwell (2001), König (2012). I think it important to note that this dramatically violent expression of identity and inter-ethnic relations has also served to increase academic and popular interest in the whole area of ethnicity and culture.

The next category comprises arenas for constructing and expressing identities in what might be termed leisure pursuits and entertainments; these comprise such activities as tourism (the Sarawak Cultural Village demonstrates how identities are constructed and represented) and exhibitions and presentations within and sponsored by regional museums. Examples of this work are provided by William Kruse (2003) and Heather Zeppel (1995) on tourism, selling ‘wild Borneo’ and authenticity, and Christine Faye Kreps (1994) and Dianne Tillotson (1994) on cultural construction in museums.

Finally, there is an emerging, though still rather nominal interest in identity construction in urban areas and the lifestyles of an expanding middle class (see, for example Boulanger, 1999, 2000, 2002, 2009). All seven strands have, in one way or another, tackled issues of identity and change.

**Identities and Ethnicities: some cases**

What has been achieved in the last couple of decades in this field? Are their significant moments in the study of identities in Borneo? If we turn to any anthropological study of Borneo, whether it focuses on ethnicity or not, there is very likely to be some discussion of the problem of identity and ethnic labelling. We have the well known four-volume collection as a special issue of the *Sarawak* *Museum Journal* (Chin and Kedit, 1989) arising from a 1988 conference in Kuching and a series of ethnic-based seminars around the country to demonstrate the importance of ethnic identities in Sarawak and how they might be managed and transformed. The Cultural Heritage Symposia gained a momentum and has resulted in five events (1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2009) which have brought together representatives from the officially sanctioned ethnic categories in Sarawak (Chua, 2012: 48). The inaugural event was a monumental enterprise and one which, in my view, emphasised the importance of ethnicity and identity in both academic research and in government policy. But very few of the deliberations at that gathering gave explicit attention to the ways in which social transformations are thought about, discussed, and debated within and between the different constituent ethnic groups of Sarawak and in relation to representations generated at higher levels of the nation-state and beyond. This is hardly surprising in that the cultural heritage seminars to celebrate the twenty-fifth anniversary of Sarawak’s independence within Malaysia, were designed to encourage ‘the various communities…to examine their respective cultures to determine what to discard in the interest of “development” and “unity” and what to preserve and incorporate into a national (Malaysian) culture’ (Winzeler, 1997c: 201; Chin and Kedit, 1989). Here we have an apt illustration of what inspires my current deliberations, in that culture and identity are constructed and subject to the demands and interests of the nation-state; they are politicised. Indeed the Sarawak government delineated those ‘ethnic divisions’ which would debate their future roles in the state: Bidayuh, Iban, Melanau, Orang Ulu, Malay, Chinese and Indian (Jeffrey Jehom, 2008).

There also seems to have been little attention to the political dimensions of these concerns in the four-volume proceedings arising from the sixth biennial conference of the Borneo Research Council in Kuching in 2000, although there was considerable attention paid to issues of ethnicity and culture (Leigh, 2000). However, the appearance since the 1990s of several studies which examine the responses of local populations to the policies and practices of state representatives enable us to draw out similarities and differences in those responses and discourses. These emerging interests were consolidated and brought together in the Borneo Research Council’s 11th international conference in Brunei on the themes of ‘Identities, Cultures, Environments’. Some of the key variables in explaining differences in responses and discourses appear to be: (1) the time frame and changes in government and its policies; (2) location of the communities under study (whether close to urban centres or more distant, whether near an international border or not, whether some members of an identified group live and work in an urban area or not): (3) the character and history of inter-ethnic relationships: (4) local economic structures and resource use; (5) demography and population profiles; (6) and relative physical mobility of both men and women.

**(1)*The Nation-state, Majorities and Minorities***

One of the first major studies of the effects of national policies and the actions and attitudes of a lowland majority on a minority community and the local responses to these pressures was undertaken not in Sarawak (where one might have anticipated an earlier interest) but in South Kalimantan. Interest in local identities in the context of a nation-state was marked above all by the appearance of Anna Tsing’s study *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen* which examined the ‘cultural and political construction of marginality’ (1993:5), though this was based on an earlier doctoral thesis (1984). I should add here that, although I combine the concept of nation with that of state, I recognise that they are conceptually distinct and in certain cases may not cohere (Thongchai, 1994). Tsing’s study demonstrates how the Meratus Dayaks (an exonym for those diverse indigenous populations which live in the Meratus Uplands, and perhaps this lack of differentiation is a problem in her argument) of South Kalimantan are marginalised not only by the policies and practices of the state but also by their neighbours, the lowland Banjar Malays, and how the Meratus people challenge, negotiate, reinterpret and explain their lowly status. I should add that subsequently Mary Hawkins has examined the Banjar side of the story and demonstrated that their dominance as a Muslim community has not only generated marginality among minority groups but has also encouraged members of upland communities to assimilate to the ethnic category ‘Banjar’, a familiar story in majority-minority relations across Borneo and indeed Southeast Asia (2000: 24-36).

We are familiar with Tsing’s perspectives from other studies of outer islanders in Indonesia, and, of course, in the work of James Scott on ‘weapons of the weak’ (1985) and ‘the art of not being governed’ (2009). But, to my knowledge, this is the first detailed and sustained attempt in a Borneo context to analyse the interrelationships between the discourses and practices associated with civilisation, modernity, progress, order and power on the one hand and the primitive, traditional, backward, nomadic, disordered, untamed and displaced on the other. We should, however, make reference to Douglas Miles’ pioneering study of Banjarese-Dayak relations in South Kalimantan and the politicisation of Muslim and non-Muslim identities from the early part of the twentieth century (1976).

During the past couple of decades there have been several other studies of different Borneo populations examining how both colonial and post-colonial actions have served to divide populations off from each other and create separate, marginal populations and how these in turn talk about and represent state power (Steckman, 2011). In the case of the Meratus Dayaks under Suharto’s New Order this representation of the state was expressed and identified in terms of violence, terrorism, government ‘head-hunting’, ceremonial building projects in the name of development and the political preoccupation with establishing ‘order’ (ibid: 76ff). I would also link the detailed work of Kenneth Sillander on the Bentian Dayaks of East Kalimantan with that of Tsing (as Sillander does himself), in that he examines some of the consequences of being on the margins or on ‘several peripheries’(2004:48ff). However, he does state from the outset that, although originally he had planned ‘to make a study of ethnicity’, he then found that he was unable to gather sufficient data on this topic mainly because ‘of the relative insignificance of ethnic identity and ethnicity as criteria for social action among the Bentian’ (2004: 3; 1995). Even so Sillander does provide us with the kind of information and analysis which suggests to me that we can situate the Bentian within the literature on ‘centres’ and ‘margins’ and on the processes of constructing marginal identities in interaction with powerful centres. In this connection Sillander explains how the Bentian as a recognisable unit of identification was constructed but interestingly he argues that ethnicity is not a significant factor among the Bentian and the Luangan (1995).

We have also seen, in the case of the Punan/Penan of Sarawak, a case to which Tsing refers, how the media and other external observers including politicians, government agents, and NGO activists (and even anthropologists) choose to represent and ‘construct’ these ‘out-of-the way’ peoples in the context of commercial logging and the undermining of a nomadic way of life (see for example Bending [2006]; and for a review King [2006]; and Brosius, 2007; and Thambiah on the Bhuket/Ukit, 1995). A major recent study which focuses on the ‘images’ and identities of the Punan Malinau in East Kalimantan is that by Lars Kaskija (2012); Kaskija, building on the work of Sellato (1994), Thambiah (1995) and others, develops notions of Punan identity in their engagement with more powerful neighbours on the bases of a foraging ethos, openness, sociality, flexibility and opportunism, immediate return and sharing, variability and diversity, and ‘code-switching’. Kaskija’s findings and his characterisation of the Punan as ‘stuck at the bottom’ and as adopting strategies to engage with dominant others reminds me very much of Tsing’s observations on the Meratus. But in the case of the Punan Malinau there is interaction with and response to several dominant others and not just one as in Meratus-Banjar relations.

Another very important development in the Tsing theme is Robert Winzeler’s edited book (1997a) which examines the encounters between the post-colonial state and minority groups and the range of local responses to external pressures, which ‘have often involved a mixture of dependency and acceptance, on the one hand, and of hostility and resistance, on the other’ (1997b: 2; Zawawi, 2000). Winzeler’s book is something of a bold departure in Borneo Studies in that it embraces the Malaysian Peninsula, and Malaysian and Indonesian Borneo. What he also draws our attention to is the increasingly interventionist policies of the post-colonial state in comparison with the colonial experience in that

[t]he national policies and projects carried out by postcolonial governments in regard to the indigenous peoples involve efforts at social and cultural transformation……[they] generally seek to promote a common national culture, religion, and language and to eradicate what are regarded as backward or savage beliefs, customs, lifestyles, and modes of adaptation (1997b: 1-2).

Winzeler identifies the indigenous responses to these interventions in predictable fashion: ‘dependency and acceptance’, hostility and resistance’, ‘peaceful protest’, ‘accepted forums’, ‘passive noncooperation’, ‘sabotage’, and ‘open rebellion’; again all very James Scott (ibid:2-3). The consequences for identity are clear; in situations of pressure, tension and conflict minorities have a different attitude to their ‘cultural patterns and traditions’ in that what was previously ‘implicit’ have become ‘objectified or externalized’ (ibid: 3). Winzeler explores some of these issues in relation to the Bidayuh, and in noting their much more intense relations with those in power because of their proximity to Kuching (the Brunei Malays, the Brooke Raj, the British colonial regime and the representatives of the post-colonial Malaysian federal authorities in Kuala Lumpur and their agents in Kuching) Winzeler remarks that the Bidayuh are ‘involved in the creative cultural process of maintaining, restoring, discovering, and, in some instances, creating traditions’ (1997c: 216). They have done so, among other agencies, through the Dayak Bidayuh National Association which has been concerned both to modernise the Bidayuh and to retain the core elements of Bidayuh identity and tradition which include the men’s house (ibid: 222-223). It is above all about identity, but as Winzeler notes it is part of an overall process of ‘cultural objectification’ in Malaysia following the need for the government to formulate a national cultural policy in order to promote national unity and identity (ibid: 225-226). In order to survive cultures (and in this regard identities) have to be formalised and promoted, and this is especially pressing for those populations under threat, particularly the Bidayuh, and their need to overcome the construction of the Bidayuh in the colonial and early anthropological literature as passive victims of modernisation and the aggression of others (ibid: 227).

**(2) *Religious Conversion and Identities***

Religious conversion is another significant consideration in the maintenance and transformation of identities. We are fortunate in having major studies of ‘traditional’ religions, including, among many others, Stephen Morris’ posthumous study of Melanau religion in *The Oya Melanau* (1997), Jéröme Rousseau’s *Kayan Religion: Ritual Life and Religious Reform in Central Borneo* (1998), Peter Metcalf’s *A Borneo Journey into Death* (1982), Eva Maria Kershaw’s *A Study of Brunei Dusun Religion: Ethnic Priesthood on a Frontier of Islam* (2000), Sian Eira Jay on *Shamans, Priests and the Cosmology of the Ngaju Dayak of Central Kalimantan* (1991) and Ann L. Appleton’s *Acts of Integration, Expressions of Faith: Madness, Death and Ritual in Melanau Ontology* (2006). All of these important and detailed studies also announce and demonstrate cultural identities.

To return to the issue of religious transformation, and following Conley’s early study of Kenyah religious conversion (1976), we now have several more recent studies, mainly examining processes of conversion and its social and cultural consequences, of Annette Harris on Sabah in her *The Impact of Christianity on Power Relationships and Social Exchanges: a Case Study of Change among the Tagal Murut of Sabah, Malaysia* (1995); in Kalimantan Anne Schiller’s work on the Ngaju and Kaharingan in *The Dynamics of Death: Ritual Identity, and Religious Change among the Kalimantan Ngaju* (1987) and *Small Sacrifices: Religious Change and Cultural Identity among the Ngaju of Indonesia* (1997); Larry Kenneth Thomson on *The Effect of the Dayak Worldview, Customs, Traditions, and Customary Law (adat-istiadat) on the Interpretation of the Gospel in West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo* (2000); and Jennifer Connolly *Becoming Christian and Dayak: a Study of Christian Conversion among Dayaks in East Kalimantan, Indonesia* (2004); in Sarawak there are Fiona Harris’ *Growing Gods: Bidayuh Processes of Religious Change in Sarawak, Malaysia* (2002), Liana Chua’s *Objects of Culture: Constituting Bidayuh-ness in Sarawak, East Malaysia* (2007) and *The Christianity of Culture: Conversion, Ethnic Citizenship and the Matter of Religion in Malaysian Borneo* (2012), Tan Sooi Ling’s *Transformative Worship among the Selako in Sarawak, Malaysia* (2008), and Pamela Lindell’s *The Longhouse and the Legacy of History: Religion, Architecture and Change among the Bisingai of Sarawak (Malaysi*a) (2000); and finally in Brunei , among others there is Asiyah az-Zahra Ahmad Kumpoh’s *Conversion to Islam: the Case of the Dusun Ethnic Group in Brunei Darussalam* (2011).

Clearly conversion to a particular religion is also implicated in political processes and nation-building. Conversion in the Borneo territories is invariably to one of the world religions, particularly Islam (see, for example, Chalmers, 2006, 2007, 2009; and Asiyah, 2011) and various forms of Christianity (Chua, 2012), or in parts of central and south-eastern Kalimantan to the Dayak religion referred to as Kaharingan which is recognised by the Indonesian government as an official religion and categorised as a version of Hinduism (Schiller, 1997). The indigenous religion of the Ngaju has been codified and its ritual standardised in the process of gaining acceptance as an official religion. It is also deployed by the Ngaju and others as a central element in their identity and their claims to modernity in the Indonesian nation-state. Schiller’s study provides a template for many of the prominent and pressing issues to be considered in conversion processes: embracing modernisation but without converting to the majority religion, and embracing modernity by converting to an officially recognised religion. But the whole process of conversion and deciding what to convert to is deeply political.

Two studies of the Bidayuh in Sarawak have also, among other things, explored the relationship between conversion and identity (Chua, 2009, 2012; Harris, 2002), and Winzeler, who has examined processes of identity change among the Bidayuh, has also considered conversion among minority populations more generally in Southeast Asia, and the economic, material, magical and spiritual, and the ethnic and identity reasons for it (2008; and see Winzeler for material expressions of religion and its transformations [2004]). Clearly culture has been subject to increasing essentialisation or objectification in Sarawak in the context of the political imperative to promote multiculturalism. Yet, as Chua argues, we should not be so seduced by the political dimensions of conversion (though I would argue that this is a vitally important element of what we are witnessing in Borneo and throughout Southeast Asia), but instead we must approach the issue of ‘cultural consciousness’ from the perspective of those we study who ‘not only act in the world but also contemplate, speculate about, and debate various notions about which anthropologists are also concerned – such as “culture”, “religion”, “(dis)continuity” and “Christianity”’ (2012: 29). What is clear is that conversion to Christianity has enabled Bidayuhs to continue to connect with their past and to claim through Christianity a Bidayuh identity. Chua’s work in particular, also draws our attention to the issue of whether or not conversion requires and results in ‘rupture’ with the past in the realisation of a new set of ritual practices, and, perhaps for some, a new spirituality, or whether there is the possibility of a continuing connection with the old religion. With some notable exceptions she proposes that there is continuity and that *gawai adat* is still connected and, for some, meaningful to the religious lives of the Bidayuh. Chua says with great conviction that religious conversion ‘did not only generate discourses of change and difference, but also gave rise to a strong, and in many ways, more pervasive, sense of connection with the past: of continuity and contiguity between *adat gawai* and Christianity’ (ibid: 104).

**(3)** ***The Media, Identities and Nation-building***

A third major area of developing interest is in the media, which in turn focuses on ‘agency from below’, and whether in national terms it is a positive or a negative response. Anderson’s excursion into the mechanisms of nation-creation – print media, census, map and museum - in the period of early modernity, has to be augmented by attention to the effects of diverse forms of electronic and print media in the era of late-modernity (1991). One of the few researchers to address this subject in a Borneo context is John Postill. In his study of the relationships between the media and nation-building in Malaysia, he examines the ways in which the Sarawak Iban have responded to and been affected by state-led and media-directed Malaysianisation processes (1998, 2006). What for me is intriguing about Postill’s body of work, which he locates within the sub-field of ‘media anthropology’, is that he interweaves the consideration of the roles and consequences of conventional media forms – in newspapers and other published material, television and radio – with an examination of the changing attitudes to and implications of devices (like wristwatches, clocks, calendars, television sets) in the conceptualisation and arrangement of time, place, identity and tradition (2001, 2002).

Following John Comaroff (1996), Postill, though critical of some of Comaroff’s propositions, addresses the phenomenon of global communications and the ways in which global cultural flows generate reactions and mediations on the part of the representatives of the state and responses on the part of constituent ethnic groups (like the Iban) in the arena of cultural politics and identity construction and change within the nation-state (2001: 147; and see 1998, 2008). Postill carefully and subtly examines historically different media forms (literature [including school texts and indigenous language publications], radio, television) during the post-war period in Sarawak and tries to determine to what extent and in what ways the Sarawak state and Malaysian national governments have been able to manage and control media productions (through mass education and a national language policy as well as the control of certain information sources) in order to build a national culture, and how their actions have impacted on the development and transformation of Iban identity (2001: 148).

In particular, the dissemination of cultural information, bearing in mind the distinction between oral and written forms of information and between oral and literate traditions, has generated tensions among minority groups to both modernise and retain their identities based selectively on elements of past traditions. In this process identity is both constructed and transformed and re-invented but the vital issue is whether or not minority languages are permitted in written and other forms through, for example, school instruction and newspapers. In the era of interpersonal communication, particularly the internet and email, these devices which enable criticism and resistance, become even more important when other major outlets of information are government-controlled. Postill’s main conclusion is that there is a need ‘to understand ethnicity not as an isolated category of analysis but as part of a broader context of social, economic, and political relations’ (2002: 118). His significant contribution is to investigate the diverse modes in which information, ideology and forms of knowledge are conveyed and how these in turn are incorporated, changed and responded to by individuals and communities in constructing and transforming their identities. He also asserts that through media-disseminated nation-building ‘Malaysia has become an unquestioned reality amongst the Iban of Sarawak’ as has their participation in ‘mass public culture’ (2006: 192-193). Even more positively, though this might be contentious if we wish to encompass all Iban in Sarawak, he asserts that ‘state-led media efforts have been amply rewarded for the Iban of Sarawak have become thoroughly “Malaysianised”’ (2006:3). This, of course, depends on what we understand by the concept of Malaysia and its relationship to development and modernity (for example is it primarily in cultural terms or political-territorial terms?).

Media-generated nation-building in Malaysia seems to have produced a different result among the Kadazandusun in the neighbouring Malaysian Borneo state of Sabah, which demonstrates that, according to context, state propaganda can have both positive and negative effects. Fausto Barlocco examines the encounters between members of a local community of Kadazandusun in the village of Kituau in the Penampang region of Sabah and the Muslim-Malay-dominated federal authorities in Kuala Lumpur and their surrogates in Kota Kinabalu (2008, 2009, 2010). Certain observations are extended to the wider Kadazandusun population. The specific focus is on the ways in which Kadazandusun identities have been constructed and transformed and the situational manipulations of identities in the context of the post-independence Malaysian nation-building project. In this regard, and as with Postill’s study, a major area of interest is the use of the media by the representatives of the state in presenting its images and visions of the nation and the ‘national culture’ and the problems and issues which this presents for a marginalised Kadazandusun minority. The analysis of the practices and discourses surrounding identity formation and change and resistance to state-generated priorities leads Barlocco to address some of the general and Southeast Asian-specific literature on ethnicity, identity, modernity, ‘the invention of tradition’, ‘imagined communities’, and the media and consumption.

Barlocco focuses on the sense of belonging of the Kadazandusun and on two major kinds of collective identification: the nation and the ethnic group. In contrast to the Iban of Postill’s study Kadazandusun villagers (and we must acknowledge that this, as with Postill’s Iban study, probably does not apply to all Kadazandusun) usually reject the state’s promotion of a national identity and are unwilling to identify with the Malaysian nation. They more often identify themselves as members of their ethnic group or village which, in Kadazandusun eyes, enable greater participation than at the national level. Yet the Malaysian nation-building project is profoundly ambiguous: it seeks to promote a national culture and identity whilst at the same time differentiating its citizens into separate ethnic categories and treating them differently. In this situation (though it conforms to what we know about the situational operation of identities in other cases) the Kadazandusun villagers identify themselves as Malaysian, Kadazan, Sabahan and members of their village according to context. Nevertheless, according to Barlocco they feel themselves to be a marginalised population and their sense of belonging is rooted at the local rather than the national level. Barlocco argues that the official state discourse and practice of ethnic and religious differentiation has been deeply internalised by the Kadazan and is a primary reason for their opposition to the state, because of their experience of being treated as marginal and second-class citizens (and see Reid, 1997).

A similar experience is recorded for the Bidayuh of Sarawak. Chua gives us considerable evidence that the Bidayuh, whilst embracing modernity and wishing to benefit from it, are, in an important sense, ambivalent about it. She, like Postill in the Iban case, confirms that the Bidayuh are ‘part of the wider Malaysian nation’. But, in contrast to Postill’s conclusions, she proposes that this process of constructing a nation in Muslim-Malay terms ‘has certainly generated a widespread sense of alienation from its institutions and the powers-that-be’ and for the Bidayuh have led to their realisation that modernisation and development has become ‘inescapably ethnicized’ (2012: 42-43).

In another rather different study of nation-building and of the process of drawing minority populations into the national fold, Poline Bala has examined the processes and consequences of the introduction of the e-Bario development programme (Information Communication Technologies, comprising telephones, computers, Very Small Aperture Terminals (VSATs) and the internet) in the Kelabit Highlands from the year 2000. Bala was herself engaged in the implementation and monitoring of the programme and she explores various issues to do with local responses to state-generated development, and the opportunities, tensions and constraints surrounding what we have come to refer to as ‘action anthropology’. Bala’s recurring theme is that in contrast to the critical positions taken by a number of prominent and distinguished social scientists on the dimensions of power, control, hegemony, exploitation, marginalisation and dependency in development discourse and action (notably in the work of Arturo Escobar, 1995), in the Kelabit case there is a more optimistic story to tell. She argues that, during several decades of exposure to the outside world both during the late colonial period and the period of independence within Malaysia, the Kelabit have engaged in a positive quest for development and progress and a desire to embrace modernity. Development is seen in local cultural terms as a resource, a product to be consumed and used. They embraced Christianity, formal education, and opportunities in the world beyond their homeland in the remote uplands.

In a later paper Bala is a little more equivocal in examining some of the problems and issues which will face the Kelabit as a Christian minority in Malaysia (2008: 139-150). Yet overall Kelabit are depicted as makers of their own futures: problem-solvers and decision-makers, who observe, learn, evaluate and make choices, though, of course, within certain parameters. The Kelabit search for status, success, affluence and respect, the means of acquiring these qualities and the meanings attached to them have changed with the increasing engagement of the Kelabit with the outside world. Nevertheless, there does appear to be areas of change in which the Kelabit are rather more powerless: the threats posed by commercial logging and by the pressures on land and native land rights, and in broader political terms the exercise of power by a Malay-dominated federation, and, in Sarawak, a Melanau-Malay-dominated state which categorises marginal minorities as ‘other indigenous’ or ‘orang ulu’, and ensures that the main benefits of economic development do not go to them. We know that there are successful, prominent, and outward-looking Kelabit, but we have to ask what power and influence do they wield? Nevertheless, as with Postill’s Iban study the Kelabit, through their access to media and in this case their use of modern electronic technology, appear to be embracing modernity and the national agenda. But we have to emphasise that there are others in Malaysian Borneo who are not so engaged and that the commitment to the Malaysian nation-building project is decidedly equivocal.

**(4) *Borderlands, Margins, Migrations and Identities***

We all recognise that territorial borders, as artificial political constructs determining sovereignty, citizenship and the reach of state laws and jurisdiction, are not necessarily impermeable or even necessarily formidable barriers to movement. This is especially so in the case of the border between Indonesian Kalimantan and Malaysian Borneo (Fariastuti, 2002; Riwanto, 2002). Nevertheless, borders define states and, depending on the capacities of central governments to monitor, police and secure their borders then they can and do make a difference. Noboru Ishikawa’s study of the borderland Malay community of Telok Melano in the Lundu district of Sarawak explores how nation-states are made and sustained and how those who live at or near borders ‘deal with the most concrete manifestation of the nation-state – its territorial boundary’ (2010: 4-5; 1998). It demonstrates, in extended historical perspective, how the occupation, deployment and symbolism of space and human movement across it are interrelated with the formation, maintenance and transformation of different interrelated levels of identity – national, ethnic, and community/village. What is especially important about the study is the way in which the focus moves from understanding the activities of the nation-state (and the problematical connection between ‘nation’ and ‘state’) not simply in terms of incorporating people and space, forging an identity which transcends the local, and instilling a sense of belonging but also for those at the borders how these larger activities also produce social dislocation, ethnic displacement, marginalisation, heterogeneity and unevenness. It shows too how trans-national movements both serve to strengthen and undermine the national project.

Eilenberg’s work (2012) and his jointly written papers with Wadley (Eilenberg and Wadley, 2009; Wadley and Eilenberg, 2006) must be read in conjunction with Ishikawa’s study. Operating at a different section of the border and on the Indonesian side, focusing on the Iban of the Emperan (or the former Dutch-named ‘Batang-Loepar-landen’) their work serves both to confirm some of Ishikawa’s findings and perspectives and to take this field of research into different directions. Eilenberg demonstrates, as does Ishikawa, the porosity of the border between Sarawak and West Kalimantan. However, he considers the increasingly strengthened position of what he terms the ‘border elite’ in West Kalimantan, particularly since the post-Suharto government’s policy of decentralisation and the decision to grant more autonomy to the regions, as well as the political, cultural and psychological distance which these Indonesian border populations, in this case the Ibans, feel towards not only Jakarta but also the provincial capital of Pontianak. Experiencing this sense of marginalisation, their orientation is across the border to Sarawak and their Iban kin, friends and ethnic cousins where they frequently go to visit and work, and where some also settle permanently. In other words, rather than seeing themselves as citizens of an Indonesian nation-state, the Indonesian Iban feel closer, as do the Kadazandusun in Sabah, to those who share a particular ethnic identity (even though this too has been constructed by political centres). But the interesting dimension to this issue in West Kalimantan is that the core of Iban ethnic identity is found across a national border and not as in the Kadazandusun case in easy reach of the state capital. Eilenberg says, ‘For many, their connections over the border are often stronger than those with their own nation’ (2012: 23). This leaves open, however, the question of what the orientation of the Kalimantan Iban was and is to the Sarawak state and the Kuala Lumpur federal government.

Although in a rather different context looking across the border from Sarawak to Kalimantan, Poline Bala also emphasises the importance of the social, cultural and historical connectedness between the Kelabit and the Lun Berian, their close relatives (*lun ruyung*) on the other side of the border (2002; and see Amster, 2006: 218). However, in this sector of the border it would appear that this political and territorial demarcation has made a real difference in that, despite cross-border relationships these have been distanced over time and that the perceptions of the border and the people who live on the other side have changed so that there is an emerging differentiation of ‘insiders’ and ‘outsiders’. This was especially strengthened during Sukarno’s ‘Confrontation’ with Malaysia in the early 1960s when borders hardened and made a difference. This set of findings is also supported by Matthew Amster’s work on the Kelabit when he proposes that they have ‘a positive understanding of the relationship to the nation and state’ (2006: 222). In Eilenberg’s, Bala’s and Amster’s studies there is also a sense of the economic and status differentiation between those who live on either side of the border; Malaysians are more wealthy, and in Sarawak have greater freedom of cultural expression. Indonesians cross the border to find work where they can, usually in menial jobs. Nevertheless, the cross-border perspectives and interactions which are active and ongoing do make a difference to the efforts of political elites at the centre to build a nation and national consciousness. They also encourage us to re-conceptualise the nature of the state and the nation, and to engage with the nation-state as both an idea and as everyday practices (Eilenberg, 2012: 50).

This important and emerging literature on the issues posed for nation-states and by its populations at the margins, engendered by the inevitable existence of borderlands, draws attention, among other things, to the importance of the relationship between territory and identity and the process of colonising space. It is at the margins that the arrangement and demarcation of space takes on a particular resonance.

**(5) *Inter-ethnic Relations and Violence***

There is an interesting body of work which has examined the construction and demarcation of identities through state action, the politicisation of identities and the association of identities with particular territories, and the competition for resources. Nancy Lee Peluso examines some of these dimensions of ethnicity in her analysis of the Dayak-Madurese conflicts in West Kalimantan in 1996-97 (2008; and see Peluso, 2003, 2006, and Davidson, 2008), which also builds on the work of Emily Harwell (2000; and see Peluso and Harwell [2001]). It is clear that there was a relationship between violence and identity but Peluso also suggests that ‘[b]ecause ethnicity or “race” was the basis by which territory, authority, and land rights were allocated under Dutch colonial legal pluralism, territory and ethnicity had become conjoined in new and unprecedented ways, most importantly in the ways individuals were allowed access to land or governed’ (2008: 56). Ethnic differences were the product of colonial and post-colonial policies and actions, and cultural identities were the subject of more recent government attention to ‘revitalise and reconfigure “culture”’ (ibid) which in turn served to give form and substance to a wider Dayak identity (ibid: 64). The explanation for violent conflict in terms of competition for resources between native Dayaks on the one hand and Chinese, Madurese, and private and public sector logging and plantation companies on the other has assumed some importance in the literature (Heidhues, 2001, Dove, 2006, Bertrand, 2004).

Jamie Davidson’s work focuses on the politicisation of Dayak identity in rural Kalimantan promoted by such NGOs as the Institut Dayakologi and Pancur Kasih with such publications as the *Kalimantan Review* (2008; and 2002) arguing that the Institute along with other NGOs have identified with Dayak frustrations about marginalisation under the New Order and the perceived advantages enjoyed by other ethnic groups, including the Madurese. The government-generated stereotypes of Dayaks as isolated, backward and left-behind people also contributed to the solidification of identities and the increasing consciousness of a Dayak identity, a distinctive *adat* and an aboriginal sovereignty as against more recent mainly Muslim immigrants from other parts of the archipelago (Schiller, 2007; Van Klinken, 2004, 2007; Bertrand, 2004). We should also note the involvement of a Dayak, Christian mission-educated intelligentsia in these Dayak movements which argued for Dayak empowerment (Heidhues, 2001: 141); and the early role of the New Order government in encouraging the development of a Dayak identity in support of their anti-Chinese, anti-communist campaigns in West Kalimantan. In other words, a pan-Dayak identity has been constructed over a long period of time, though it has been increasingly embraced and reinforced by the Dayaks themselves. This consciousness of an identity separate from others has also resulted in several doctoral theses written by local scholars on the theme of identity and social change in Indonesian Kalimantan (see Syarif Ibrahim Alquadrie, 1990, Johannes Kustanto, 2002, and Kumpiady Widen, 2001).

Rather than political or economic factors in the explanation, or at least the understanding of inter-ethnic conflicts, a recent doctoral thesis examines the cultural dimensions of Dayak-Madurese violence in West Kalimantan (König, 2012; and see Schiller and Bambang Garang, 2002). König therefore concentrates more on the cultural expression or the character of violence – why did it take the form it did among the Kanayatn Dayaks and how do they explain and perceive their actions? What is the cultural logic underlying these acts of violence? Her approach is rather more subtly argued than culturalist approaches which have invoked such explanations as a Dayak ‘culture of violence’ which relates to a return to the raiding and head-hunting traditions of the past (De Jonge and Nooteboom, 2006; Loveband and Young, 2006).

**(6) *Arenas for Identity Construction in Tourism and Museums***

The island of Borneo is fortunate in having a number of important and well-managed museums. These too are the locus of identity construction. Prior to the foundation of universities in Borneo the museums were the major sponsors and coordinators of research, the best example being The Sarawak Museum. But they have always been influential in presenting particular interpretations of culture and identity by demarcating ethnic groups and categories and attaching items of material culture to them. Perhaps we might argue that their role in relation to the general public and to tourist visitors has become more important as state governments have seen museums as a significant element in tourism promotion. It is clear from the work of Dianne Tillotson (1994) and Christina Kreps (1994) that museums are important agents for constructing and presenting culture, and as departments responsible to government they usually present a nation-state view of what ethnic groups are important and how they are defined. Indeed, Tillotson posed the question in her thesis ‘Who invented the Dayaks?’ In tourism too, cultures and identities are constructed and staged particularly in ethnic or longhouse tourism. William Kruse has demonstrated the ways in which Iban culture, for example, is presented to tourists in ‘selling wild Borneo’ (2003), and Heather Zeppel has also examined issues of authenticity and the staging of the most obvious manifestations of Iban culture (or what is presented as Iban culture in tourism promotion) (1994). I like to think that I kick-started an interest in tourism research in Borneo with the panel which I organised at the BRC conference in Sabah in 1992 (see King 1995), but, of course, there was already some work being undertaken on tourism by, among others, Heather Zeppel.

.**(7) *Emerging Middle Classes, Lifestyles and Identities in Urban Settings***

This vital concern with identity construction and transformation is especially important at a time when there has been the growth of a multi-ethnic, disparate young middle class in Borneo and the wider Malaysia and Indonesia (and indeed in Brunei) - educated, urban-based, consumerist - and notable evidence of the development of civil society. Junaenah Sulehan and Madeline Berma have made reference to these young professionals and consumerism in Sarawak for example without specifically analysing the phenomenon (1999: 68-71). In this connection I am thinking of the valuable work of such researchers as Kahn and Loh Kok Wah (1992; and see Kahn, 1995, 1998; Abdul Rahman Embong, 1996, 2001a, 2001b, 2001c, 2001d, 2002, 2006a, 2006b; and see King, 2008a, 2008b; and King, Nguyen and Nguyen, 2008) in Peninsular Malaysia and Loh in relation to the Kadazan of Sabah (1992) which might serve as an appropriate model for Sarawak. Maznah and Wong have also contributed to this agenda (2001a, 2001b), and Zawawi Ibrahim and his contributors, in his edited book on Sarawak multiculturalism, also acknowledge the importance of this field of research in cultural politics and the politics of identity (2008a, 2008b; and see Zawawi, 1999). They have managed to push this agenda forward, but much more needs to be done in the Sarawak (and Sabah) context on the study of identities in changing class situations in Malaysian Borneo. Even more needs to be done in Kalimantan

One might also expect that concerns about globalisation would surface most directly in studies of urbanisation in Borneo where local people experience some of the most immediate manifestations of global processes and late modernity, through encounters with the state and bureaucracy, nation-building symbols and actions, the media, technology and consumerism, international tourists, and representatives of other ethnic groups. However, attention to the urban context in Borneo has not been substantial. Among the most important studies have been Lockard’s social and economic history of Kuching (1987), Sutlive’s anthropological work on Rejang Iban migration to Sibu (1972, 1977), and Hew Cheng Sim’s focus on female migration and women’s circumstances in urban settings (2001, 2003, 2007a, 2007b). However, even these studies were done without any explicit attention to identity formation. One researcher who does attempt, to my mind, to situate her work in the arena of identities and culture is Boulanger (which I have summarised earlier) with her interest in changing Dayak urban identities and the implications of modernity and ‘being modern’ for the identification with and conceptualisation of Dayak traditions and religion, distinctions between the present (the future) and the past, between the urban and the rural, and between urban and rural representatives of different Dayak ethnic categories and groups (1999, 2000, 2002, 2008, 2009). She also identifies three dimensions of modernity among urban Dayaks: Christianity, education and entrepreneurship (1999). Here we return to the theme of identity through religion, but also the importance of being modern (moden) (see, for example, Chua, 2012: 40-44). The disjunctures between traditional and modern (with specific reference to the discourse of developmentalism) and the issue of boundary maintenance are also explored by Edey in the context of urban Sarawak (2007).

**Conclusions**

The relationship between culture and identity and the potential which a focus on the concept of identities in motion has in the development of research on Borneo, and particularly comparative research is significant, I would argue. The conceptualisation of at least some of the relations in a Borneo context in terms of ‘centres’ and ‘margins’ or alternatively ‘cores’ and ‘peripheries’ may also be of some analytical value. In a similar vein Ishikawa has said, in relation to his study of a Malay borderland community in Sarawak, that ‘The emergence of a centre-periphery relationship in the making of the geo-body of the territorial state has been a crucial factor for the uneven expansion of national life’ (2010: 92; 135-137). We can examine these relations in spatial terms (or rather in terms of the occupation, consolidation, construction and symbolism of space) or in terms of cultural hierarchies or layers (nations, ethnic categories and groups, local communities and so on), and their relationships to power and wealth, keeping in mind that these layers in relation to centres and margins are also relative (Horstmann and Wadley, 2006). In other words, margins have different orders of magnitude from relatively remote minority groups to larger urban populations so that for certain purposes residents of Kuching can be seen as marginal or peripheral to those of Kuala Lumpur or Putra Jaya. In admittedly rather crude terms I also posed the question some time ago of why the state of Sarawak has been ‘peripheral’ to the powerful centres of Peninsular Malaysia (King, 1990: 110-129).

In this connection we have an expanding literature on marginal or peripheral populations and identity construction and transformation among minorities in Borneo. But in certain respects, and, as I and my co-editor Michael Parnwell argued a couple of decades ago in a book on ‘margins’ and ‘minorities’ in Malaysia, ‘there is often an ethnic, and specifically a cultural dimension to the feature of marginality ….[so that] ….uneven development also comes to be expressed in cultural terms’ (1990: 2-3). In a very similar vein Joel Kahn, in his analysis of the relations between uplands and lowlands, core and periphery, the powerful and the marginal, and the rich and the poor in Indonesia draws attention to the state-generated process of ‘culturalising’ relationships in Suharto’s Indonesia which might otherwise be thought of in terms of unequal access to resources or unequal access to power and wealth (1999). In this connection too König has recently culturalised inter-ethnic violence (2012).

Perhaps the comparative study of cultural identities across Borneo, (taking in the range of cases and circumstances to be found in different locations and political units) might prove rewarding in not only continuing to embrace the wider perspective which the field of Borneo Studies should provide for the study of the whole island, but also to bring the wider nation-states within which the major areas of Borneo are situated into our frames of analysis.

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