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The Japanese Malay

Ethnic Categorisation in Southwest Borneo

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Abstract

The distinction found throughout Borneo between those peoples locally termed *Dayak* (Dayaks) and those locally termed *Melayu* (Malays) is most commonly understood as one between non-Islamic indigenous peoples (Dayaks) and Islamic indigenous peoples (Malays). While Borneo peoples recognize that not all Muslims are Malays, they nevertheless often appear to make a correlation between Muslim and Malay. This article argues that in parts of the island the distinction is more complex than such an easy elision between identity and religion can allow for; in particular, the category *Melayu*, as used among Dayak people, can only be understood in terms of local histories of domination, marginalization, and exclusion. In south-west Borneo, where Dayaks have long been subject to would-be domination by Malays, the category *Melayu*, as used by Dayaks, is one of alterity, indexing a range of characteristics seen as opposed to those found in their own societies. While adherence to Islam is one of these characteristics, it is not the only—nor even the most important—of them. The article elaborates this argument with respect to the ethnicizing of Japanese occupiers by local Dayaks during World War II.

Keywords

Borneo – Dayak – Malay – ethnicity – World War II

One of the most significant ethnic distinctions in Borneo is that between those peoples locally termed *Dayak* (Dayaks) and those locally termed *Melayu* (Malays). This distinction is most often understood in religious terms as one between non-Islamic indigenous peoples (Dayaks) and Islamic indigenous

peoples (Malays). While Borneo people recognize that not all Muslims are Malays—Javanese, for instance, are not normally described as *Melayu*—they nevertheless often appear to make a correlation between ‘Muslim’ and ‘Malay’; thus, a Dayak person who converts to Islam typically becomes ‘Malay’, often rejecting Dayak identity and practice and even denigrating these as inferior and primitive. As a result, as Connolly (2009:177) puts it, religion is seen as ‘the pre-eminent regional identity marker’.

However, as I will argue in this article, this distinction is often more complex than can be allowed for in an easy elision between identity and religion. In particular, in much of Borneo it often appears equally to reference disparities in power and position: a polarity between Malay dominance and Dayak subjection. To some degree we can see this as overlapping with a further distinction, found throughout Indonesia, between lowland or coastal (*hilir*) peoples and upland (*hulu*) peoples; as Li (1999) makes clear, this latter distinction has long corresponded with one between those with greater socio-political power (*hilir*) and those with less (*hulu*). However, in Borneo the *hilir*–*hulu* distinction correlates only very loosely with the Malay–Dayak one: while there is a tendency for Malays to be found in lowland, coastal areas, and Dayaks in upland ones, in some parts of the island Malays are found far inland (see, for example, King 1979:28–29).

There is no doubt about the importance of religion to the contemporary *Dayak*–*Melayu* distinction. Thus anthropologists have noted that many of the Malays living in upriver parts of Borneo are in fact Dayaks who have converted to Islam. Some of these Malay groups maintain Dayak traditions and practices after conversion, and even live as part of larger pagan communities; nevertheless, their adherence to Islam renders them Malays (for example, King 1979:28–34; Harwell 2000:40–41, n. 35). However, in at least some parts of the island, the distinction appears to be based on more than religion. Wadley, for example, notes that formal conversion to Islam does not always make one ‘Malay’, especially in the eyes of other Malays: in order to be accepted as Malay one often needs to adopt ‘locally recognized trappings of Malay culture’ (2000:85). Similarly, Connolly (2009:177) points out that in East Kalimantan one has to become Malay in order to convert to Islam, ‘changing one’s language, diet, material culture, and social ties’ (see also King 1993:30–31; Miles 1976:93–94; Harwell 2000:40).¹ In this regard, it is significant that Dayaks who convert to

1 In Malaysian Borneo the situation is further complicated by the state’s rigid specification of ethnic groups: in order to be formally recognized as Malay in Malaysia a person must follow Islam, practice Malay culture, and speak *bahasa Melayu*.

Islam are spoken of as *masuk Melayu* (entering Malayness/becoming Malay) rather than *masuk Islam* (entering Islam/becoming Muslim), since this suggests that the adoption of Islam is seen as going hand-in-hand with the adoption of other features of Malay culture (Acciaoli n.d.:1). And indeed, not all Dayaks who convert to Islam become *Melayu*; Avé (1972:185), for instance, notes that among the Ngaju the tendency rather is to become *Dayak Islam* (Muslim Dayak) and so retain a Dayak identity, a tendency that Acciaoli (n.d.) notes has become more pronounced in recent times among a variety of Dayak groups.

The *Dayak–Melayu* distinction is most commonly dated back to the arrival of Islam in Borneo. This gave rise to a distinction between Malay (Muslim) and non-Malay (non-Muslim) that was later hardened, via Dutch colonialism and Indonesian and Malaysian state policies, into the homogenous, reified *Dayak* and *Melayu* categories that exist today (Davidson 2008:24–25; Peluso and Harwell 2001; Peluso 2008:56–58). However, it is at least possible that a related distinction between dominant (usually coastal) and subject (usually inland) peoples predated the arrival of Islam in Borneo: the historical record suggests that raja-doms—many of them probably Dayak—already existed when Islam reached the area, and the rulers of these converted to Islam—and became ‘Malay’—in order to link themselves to Malay/Muslim trading networks (King 1993:121–125; Ricklefs 2008:18–23; Davidson 2008:24–25).² In this case, Islam would have added to the content of this pre-existing distinction, with the dominant identity increasingly expressed in Islamic terms.

Significantly, while many Dayak groups have, over the centuries, converted to Islam and become *Melayu*, there is nowhere any record of the reverse movement having occurred: of Malays converting to paganism (or Christianity) and becoming Dayak.³ This is very likely related to the greater political and economic power traditionally available to Malays (King 1993:132–134; Miles 1976:143–146), as well as to the fact that while Dayaks were subject to taxes, corvée labour, and even slavery at the hands of the Malay sultanates, Malays

2 Some of these took a long time to convert. S. Scott (1913:317), for instance, notes that some Malay sultans on the Kapuas River converted to Islam as late as 1850.

3 See, for example, Miles (1976:143), who notes that between 1959 and 1963 he could not find a single example of this reverse movement among the Ngaju Dayaks/Banjarese Malays with whom he worked. However, as noted earlier, there is an increasing tendency today for Dayak people to retain a Dayak identity on conversion to Islam (see Acciaoli n.d.). Similarly, Metcalf (2010:17) notes that the present-day Sultan of Brunei claims descent from pre-Islamic indigenous heroes.

living in the same territories were not so treated (Heidhues 2003:27; Davidson 2008:25; Rousseau 1989:46–47).⁴

On the other hand, there is much evidence to show that over the centuries many Dayak groups moved further inland, to more inaccessible upland terrain, partly in order to escape the control of the sultanates. Thus Healey (1985:24–28) explains the large-scale migrations of many Dayak groups—including the Iban—in terms of their desire ‘to preserve tribal autonomy’ in the face of external demands by the coastal Malay states, and Jackson (1970:17) claims that this motivation probably lay behind the fluidity of Dayak settlement patterns throughout Borneo. Like the upland peoples of Zomia described recently by J. Scott (2009), these groups can to some degree be seen as refugees from state-making projects centred largely in lowland areas, and certain of the cultural characteristics found in many (although not all) of them—a stress on swiddening as opposed to wet-rice cultivation, the high value placed on autonomy and independence, and plastic forms of social organization, among others—can be linked to this. For these peoples, the Dayak–Malay distinction indexes a far more complex set of differences—social, cultural, political, economic—than can be captured through its simple equation with a non-Muslim–Muslim one. In addition, while such socio-politico-economic difference is generally entangled with religious difference, the latter is not necessarily primary.

The production of identity is always a deeply political process (Eriksen 2010; Jenkins 2008), and that of the category *Melayu* among Dayak people is no exception. We can only understand its production—and, therefore, its content—at the local level, in terms of local histories of domination, marginalization, and exclusion. In the southern part of the province of West Kalimantan, where I have been conducting fieldwork since 1985, there is no doubt about either the contemporary salience of the *Dayak–Melayu* distinction or its religious content for the upland Dayak peoples among whom I have worked. Dayaks in this area are clear that any local person who has adopted Islam is Malay, and from my own observation such people do tend to take on practices identified locally as Malay—including certain styles of dress and housing, and particular linguistic and dietary practices—and join Malay communities.⁵

4 Li (1999:6) points out that Islam forbids the enslavement of fellow Muslims, and that its spread thus often increased the pressure to enslave non-Muslim peoples.

5 During my, admittedly, limited travels through this region, I have never come across the type of ‘transitional’ Malay communities described earlier: those in which people follow Islam but engage in a range of cultural practices identified as Dayak. While there are certainly some mixed (Malay-Dayak) communities, my observation is that their Malay members follow both

For these Dayaks, the distinction is so potent that they will often use the term *reng Melayu* (Malay person) in a generic sense simply to mean ‘non-Dayak’ (Helliwell 2001:223–224). This felt need to distinguish themselves from a Malay other can no doubt be traced to the influence of the Malay/Islamic sultanates throughout this region from the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries. Powerful sultanates operated along both of the major river systems flowing through the area—with administrative centres not only at their mouths, but also further inland—exacting tribute and corvée labour from local Dayak populations. We should note, however, that an autochthonous ruling regime preceded Islam at the site of at least one of these sultanates (Sukadana), so a version of the distinction may well have preceded Islam. In contemporary times, the distinction has been reinforced by the conversion to Christianity (usually Catholicism) of most of the Dayak people in the area.

Throughout this interior region of southern West Kalimantan, ethnic identities among Dayak populations generally have not been strongly articulated until recently: different ‘groups’ have taken the names of their villages, but have had little sense of ethnic identity or affiliation beyond that (see also Li 2000:158; J. Scott 2009: Chapter 7). The sole exception to this involves the formulation of the *Melayu* category, which nowadays is always placed in opposition to a *Dayak* one, but which probably, in earlier times, was seen in relation to a more diffuse non-*Melayu* identity.⁶ For Dayaks in this region it is the category *Melayu* that is primary, rather than the category *Dayak*, although the significance of the latter has increased in recent years with the development of a pan-Dayak ethnic consciousness.⁷

J. Scott (2009) has argued that in Zomia, ethnic identities among upland peoples have been produced through reaction and opposition to state apparatuses centred in lowland areas. Upland–lowland relationships throughout Borneo are rather different from those described by J. Scott for mainland Southeast Asia;⁸ nevertheless, in the south-west part of the island where I have worked, Dayak ethnic identities can be seen as having been, in part, formulated in response to the power of the sultanates in a way similar to that described

Islam and Malay practices, and their Dayak members follow both Christianity or paganism and Dayak practices.

6 In contrast to the *Melayu* category, which appears to have been in use for some time, the *Dayak* one (when used to mean all non-Muslim indigenous Borneo peoples), is very recent. See Davidson 2008:23–4.

7 See Davidson 2008; Acciaiolai n.d.; Peluso 2008; Peluso and Harwell 2001; and Thung, Maunati and Kedit 2004.

8 For a critique of J. Scott’s argument, some of it from a Borneo perspective, see Dove 2011.

by Scott. As I argue in this article, for local Dayaks this involves more than the self-identification via a positive stress on ‘independence, autonomy and their capacity to carve a livelihood out of their hilly forested terrain’, which is described by Li (2000:158) as a strategy developed by interior peoples throughout Indonesia in the face of dominance by coastal Muslims. It also entails a corresponding identification of these would-be masters via a discourse of alterity, reversing and refracting the Malay image of Dayaks as the inverse of the civilized ideal. J. Scott (2009:326) argues that upland groups are ‘the inescapable “dark twin” of state-making projects in the valleys’; by contrast, the upland Borneo groups described in this article are haunted by the shadow of, and take their cultural bearings from, a Malay antithesis.

This article argues, then, that while in this part of Borneo the Malay–Dayak distinction might seem most clearly to be a religious one—with Malay generally being equated with Muslim—in fact it is more complex than can be allowed for by such an equation. I will elaborate this argument with respect to the ethnicizing of Japanese occupiers during World War II in the Dayak community of Gerai, found in what is now the northern part of the *kabupaten* Ketapang (Ketapang district) in the Indonesian province of Kalimantan Barat (West Borneo). Unlike some coastal Borneo peoples, the people of Gerai—a remote inland community—had had no prior contact with, or knowledge of, Japanese when the occupation occurred in 1942.⁹ It is significant, then, that in narratives that I collected during my first spell of fieldwork, in 1985, Japanese soldiers were frequently referred to as *Melayu*, in spite of the fact that they were known not to be Muslim. In subsequent fieldwork trips fewer and fewer people remembered the occupation first-hand; nevertheless, in wartime stories and myths that circulated Japanese soldiers continued to be equated with Malays.

I am not attempting in this article to produce an accurate ‘historical’ account of Japanese–Gerai relations during the Japanese occupation. Rather, I wish to explore Gerai representations of the Japanese occupiers as these have circulated in the community from the 1980s onwards. As we will see, Gerai classification of the Japanese suggests that the Malay–Dayak distinction here reflects the fraught history of would-be domination by Malays to which Dayak populations in this region have long been subject. As a consequence, for Gerai people

9 The Japanese population in Borneo before the war appears to have been very small. Reece (1998:11), for instance, tells us that in 1935 the total Japanese population of Sarawak was 136. From Ooi’s (2011:11–6) discussion it appears that most of this population was confined to the larger coastal cities.

the key ethnic category *Melayu* is one of alterity, indexing a range of characteristics seen as opposed to those found in their own society, and so referencing a profound moral distance between those so labelled and themselves. While adherence to Islam is one of these characteristics, it is not the only—nor even the most important—of them.

Historical Background

As with most other Dayak groups, the community of Gerai has a long history of contact with peoples who would now be regarded as non-Dayaks, including some who have exercised a degree of overlordship with respect to the community. Gerai people can readily list the different external political regimes to which they have been subject through the generations: the Malay raja of Sukadana (whose raja-dom was located some 80 kilometres, as the crow flies, from Gerai on the coast), the Dutch, the Japanese, and now the Indonesians.

While Gerai oral history always depicts the Sukadana raja—in whose domain Gerai fell—as Muslim, it is likely that the Sukadana raja-dom preceded Islam—that it was an autochthonous ruling regime that converted to Islam, probably sometime around the sixteenth century (Davidson 2008:24).¹⁰ The rapid spread of Malay migrants, and the new trading opportunities opened up, meant that by the seventeenth century sultanates like that at Sukadana had emerged as powerful Islamic centres. They were located at the mouths of major rivers, and inland peoples living on those rivers, especially in the near hinterland, were forced to pay taxes and tribute to their Malay overlords (Jackson 1970:15; Irwin 1955:3–4; Davidson 2008:25). From these locations Malay subjects moved inland, with smaller potentates settling at the mouths of tributaries, levying taxes and tribute, and controlling trade in the vicinity. These continued to pay tribute to, and trade with, rulers downriver; via this system of *hulu* (upstream) and *hilir* (downstream) relationships, rulers came to exercise considerable control over the hinterland (Heidhues 2003:20; Irwin 1955:3–4). Sultans and their vassals were able to levy Dayaks living in their domains for labour, including fighting men during warfare, and goods, such as rice (Heidhues 2003:24). There is evidence to suggest that the Sukadana sultanate used its own currency, had agents set at all river tributary mouths in order to collect tribute, and possessed an extensive armada which eventually enabled it

10 See also King (1993:121–5), who suggests that the main ancestors of coastal Malays in Borneo are Dayak converts to Islam.

to form an alliance with Pontianak in the early nineteenth century for mutual protection against outside attack (Lontaan 1975:92–94, 101).

Heidhues notes that while ideally the *hulu–hilir* system was mutually beneficial, in practice Dayaks often appear to have been the weaker partner, with many observers seeing the relationship as ‘purely exploitative’. Lacking political organization beyond the village level, and dependent on goods like salt and cloth, many Dayaks were unable to resist such exploitation (Heidhues 2003:24–25).¹¹ By the nineteenth century Malays had a ‘virtual monopoly’ on trade between the coast and the interior, with Malay traders regularly travelling upriver to obtain produce (Jackson 1970:17). Only very recently does this Malay monopoly over trade appear to have been broken: in Gerai, for instance, most community trade has been in the hands of several Gerai entrepreneurs since the 1970s.

A number of courses of action were available to Dayak groups reluctant to accept Malay overlordship. These included crossing watersheds to trade outside of their own raja’s sphere of influence (Rousseau 1989:44); aligning themselves with Chinese in order to distance themselves from Malays (Heidhues 2003:26–27); playing one raja off against another (Haji Ibn Ahmad 1982:72–80; King 1993:128); and labour migration, especially by young men (Healey 1985:5, 22–24). However, the most obvious strategy available to Dayak groups was that of physically removing themselves from regions heavily controlled by Malays and, as noted earlier, many appear to have availed themselves of it.

Gerai people say that their ancestors originally lived closer to the coast. However, they refused to submit to the overlordship of Sukadana, and so moved inland to escape both the raja’s domination and exploitative Malay trading practices more generally. The inaccessibility of the Gerai community—and especially the fact that it is not located on a navigable river—might be seen as resulting, in part, from this desire to escape Malay control. Genealogies of both dwellings and community residents indicate that the present village site was settled some time around the second half of the nineteenth century. The community’s location, far from a river deep enough to be used for transport, meant that it remained relatively free from direct Malay interference in its affairs from then on, although oral history recounts occasional visits from the raja’s emissaries.

11 Rousseau (1989), however, argues that in Central Borneo there was a balance—or a ‘stalemate’, as he puts it—between the two groups. See also King (1993:129–30), who points out that it was in the interests of Dutch observers to paint the Dayaks as exploited, since this provided a justification for an intensification of colonial rule. For a rather different perspective, see Heidhues 2003:25–6.

The Dutch arrived in Borneo at the end of the sixteenth century, and in 1604 the Dutch East India Company set up a diamond-trading relationship in the Sukadana–Ketapang area (Irwin 1955:4; Lontaan 1975:84; Jackson 1970:3). However, due to local resistance this and other Dutch ventures established on the west coast in the first decade of the seventeenth century do not appear to have lasted for very long (Irwin 1955:4–5; Jackson 1970:3).

In 1818 the Dutch returned to what is now West Kalimantan and, by the 1830s, had signed treaties with the Malay rulers of Pontianak and other west-coast states (Irwin 1955:50–51; Ricklefs 2008:169). Ricklefs (2008:169) notes that the chief interest of the Dutch at the time was in controlling the south and west coasts, so that pirates and anti-Dutch Chinese could not disrupt trade; they largely governed through the raja via a system of indirect rule. This meant that they allowed the raja to continue subjugating Dayak groups—and collecting tribute, taxes, and *corvée* labour from them—on behalf of the Dutch (Davidson 2008:31; Heidhues 2003:23–24, 45). However, the activities of James Brooke in Sarawak, and the Dutch fear that he wanted to control all of Borneo, led to a more active policy of Dutch colonial expansion in Kalimantan (Ricklefs 2008:169–170; Rousseau 1989:49). By the 1850s the Dutch were intervening in internal disputes, and during the latter half of the nineteenth century they extended their control throughout the entire region, abolishing headhunting and slavery, and establishing a widespread administrative system (Ricklefs 2008:170; Irwin 1955:156–157; Rousseau 1989:49).¹² The Dutch military established a network of paths throughout the region, and older Gerai people recalled that Dutch soldiers had visited the village occasionally. However, the Dutch never instituted the system of direct and intense control over the population in West Kalimantan that they did over some populations in other parts of the Dutch East Indies; thus Heidhues (2003:43) notes that in 1860 there were only 104 Europeans (of all persuasions) in the West Borneo residency, and that by 1930 the number was still only 1,077. At the time of the Japanese invasion, Gerai was probably still largely under the formal control of the Sukadana sultanate, but it was relatively free of interference from either the Malays or the Dutch.

12 During the period of Dutch control many Dayak peoples throughout this southern part of West Kalimantan resisted their rule. Thus, in 1916, the Dutch built a road through the interior, starting some 100 kilometres south of Gerai and running for 180 kilometres, in order to put down a series of Dayak revolts in that area. The Dutch Passionist Brothers (from whose archives in Ketapang the above information was obtained) told me that when they first arrived in the area, in 1946, they had to be accompanied on any trips into the interior by Dutch military.

The Japanese came to West Kalimantan in late 1941, taking its main town, Pontianak, by the end of January 1942. After an interim Japanese army administration, the area (along with the remainder of then Dutch-controlled Borneo) came under the responsibility of the Japanese navy. Many Malays and Dayaks welcomed the Japanese forces, since they saw the Japanese as liberating them from Dutch rule, and perhaps even supporting nationalist aspirations (Ooi 2011:73).

In line with their claims to be fighting a war of liberation for Asian peoples, the Japanese interned or executed all of the Dutch nationals in the area, and promoted many native Indonesians to fill former Dutch posts in the bureaucracy which, in the process, was greatly expanded (Heidhues 2003:198). All twelve of the Malay raja in West Kalimantan, including the raja of Sukadana, were initially permitted to remain in office. Malays, in particular, appear to have been favoured by the Japanese, with the local police force during the occupation consisting mainly of Malays who 'cooperated in arrests, interrogations, and torture' (Heidhues 2003:203). Teachers and other community leaders were forced to learn Japanese, and a range of Japanese 'cultural activities' were introduced (Ooi 2011:72–84, 120–121; Heidhues 2003:199). Since the Japanese were largely located along the coast, and especially in Pontianak, their interactions with Dayaks (most of whom lived inland) were less frequent and less intense than those with Chinese and Malays.

This was a period of deprivation for most inhabitants of what is now West Kalimantan, including the Dayaks. The collapse of international trade resulted in severe shortages of rice, cloth, sugar, salt, and other products. Failures of the rice harvest during this period intensified rice shortages ((Heidhues 2003:199–200; Ooi 2011:76, 119, 143). Japanese forces seized property and crops, especially rice, where they could (Ooi 2011:76), including from inland Dayaks.

In addition to the deprivation, the region suffered considerable violence at the hands of the Japanese, although Dayaks appear to have been left relatively unscathed.¹³ In particular, the infamous 'Pontianak Affair',¹⁴ starting in October 1943, involved the arrest, torture, and execution of thousands of prominent people from all ethnic communities (Ooi 2011:104–116; Heidhues 2003:203–210). Around half to two-thirds of those executed appear to have been Chinese, with one-third being 'native Indonesians' (presumably including both Malays and,

13 Davidson (2008:37) suggests that this may have been because few of them lived in urban areas and/or because the Japanese saw them as insignificant.

14 Heidhues terms it the 'Pontianak Affair', Ooi the 'Pontianak Incident'. Davidson (2008:37) collectively refers to the mass detainings and executions of which the Pontianak Affair was a part as the 'Mandor Affair'.

to a lesser degree, Dayaks).¹⁵ Significantly, some of these killings occurred in Ketapang (Ooi 2011:109; Heidhues 2003:209), one of the two reasonably accessible riverine towns for Gerai people (then around four to five days' travel from the village), and very much within their realm of experience. The Pontianak Affair involved the killing of all twelve of the province's Malay raja, including the one at Sukadana, along with the urban elites of most other ethnic groups (Heidhues 2003:207; Ooi 2011:103, 112).

The Japanese formally surrendered on 15 August 1945 and Australian soldiers, acting for the Allies in general (including the Dutch), landed in West Kalimantan on 17 October 1945, accompanied by a few Dutch representatives of the Netherlands Indies Civil Administration, whose task was to restore colonial government (Heidhues 2003:208). But local sentiment against the Dutch had strengthened during the occupation, less out of any sympathy for, or loyalty towards, the Japanese, and more because of growing nationalist feelings: towards China on the part of many Chinese, and towards Indonesia on the part of many others, including Dayaks (Heidhues 2003:211). Resistance to the return of the Dutch occurred among many Dayak groups: Iban from Dutch-controlled Borneo, for instance, met with those from Brooke- and British-controlled Borneo to discuss an integrated push for independence (Sutlive 1992:121). However, many also feared that independence might result in Malay rule, and preferred a return to Dutch control over this. While resistance to the move to independence was most notable in then South Borneo—especially among Ngaju Dayaks, who feared that they would be incorporated into an Islamic Banjarese state (Miles 1976:112–114; Harwell 2000:53–54)—in the part of West Kalimantan where I have worked, Dayaks in the 1980s also recalled their opposition to the resumption of Malay rule. Eventually superior Dutch power prevailed, and by March 1946 the Dutch had once again assumed control of their pre-war Borneo territories (Ooi 2011:140).

Gerai Categorization of the Japanese

Gerai is a Dayak community of around 700 inhabitants. Gerai people are largely subsistence rice cultivators, although some raise cash through such activities as producing rubber or working at the nearby timber camps. In terms of the conventional (albeit problematic) distinction made between 'egalitarian' and

15 Heidhues (2003:207) and Ooi (2011:109) both estimate that around 1,500 people were killed during the Pontianak Affair. The official death toll is 21,037 (Davidson 2008:37).

'stratified' Dayak societies, Gerai would be classified among the former due to the lack of a formalized authority structure within the community: here there are no chiefs, and no system of ranks.¹⁶

As noted earlier, in the past, according to Gerai oral history, the community was included within the political domain of the Malay raja based in Sukadana, several days' travel away on the coast. Gerai people in fact say that their community was originally located closer to the coast, but that their ancestors 'ran into the hills' to escape Malay domination, and the taxes and corvée labour that it involved. And indeed, people say that once in its present location, the community only very rarely received visits from the raja's emissaries. Similarly, although the Dutch claimed formal authority over what is now West Kalimantan in the early nineteenth century, and began to extend their control through the Ketapang region in the late nineteenth century—including building a network of paths which still exists today—they largely governed through the raja via a system of indirect rule. This means that while Gerai was under the formal control of both the Sukadana sultanate and the Dutch at the time of the Japanese invasion, in fact it was relatively free of external interference.

Like most other Borneo Dayak peoples, Gerai people were traditionally animist in their religious beliefs, and when I first spent time in the community, in the mid 1980s, most people were still largely animist. However, since under Indonesia's constitution animism is not considered a legitimate religion, Gerai people have been forced, since the 1950s, to convert (at least in name) to one of the 'world religions'. As a consequence, most now describe themselves as Catholic, although the degree to which individuals adhere to Catholic doctrine varies markedly. Even in the twenty-first century, many Gerai people continue to follow at least some of their animist traditions.

In 1985, during my first spell of fieldwork, many people in Gerai had clear memories of the Japanese occupation, or what they called the *jaman Jepang* (Japanese era). Most of these people had been children or youths at the time of the occupation, but a number had been adults. While Gerai's remote location meant that its inhabitants had less contact with the Japanese than those of some other nearby communities,¹⁷ everyone who had lived through the

16 But see Helliwell 1995 on the hierarchy that nevertheless exists in Gerai, and the consequent inappropriateness of the 'stratified'/'egalitarian' divide for describing Dayak societies.

17 Both the nearby communities of Simpang Dua (almost a three-hour walk away) and Sepotong (more than a six-hour walk away) are located on navigable rivers, and hence received much more frequent visits from Japanese soldiers. Simpang Dua, in particular, was an administrative centre for the Japanese (as for the Dutch before them); the (Malay)

occupation nevertheless remembered some encounters with Japanese soldiers. According to the narratives that I recorded, most of these encounters took place in the jungle around Gerai, usually on the *jalan Belanda*—the network of paths that had been made by the Dutch throughout this region. Many of these stories appear more apocryphal than historically accurate, containing identical themes, motifs, and so on to those found in the *sensangan* corpus of narratives detailing the exploits of the Gerai culture hero Koling.¹⁸ A recurring motif involves Gerai people using trickery (often the sound of women's voices) to lead astray the soldiers, and so prevent them from reaching the village; in other stories, Japanese soldiers are killed and, usually, beheaded. There are also more mundane accounts which are almost certainly true, including one that I recorded from three different women who, as teenage girls, had been part of a group collecting firewood in the jungle when they encountered several Japanese soldiers travelling to Simpang Dua with a Malay guide. According to all three accounts, the guide asked the girls what community they were from, and how far away it was. One of the Japanese soldiers then screamed at the girls and slapped two of them about the face and shoulders. The guide shouted at them that they must bow whenever they saw a Japanese soldier.¹⁹ In terrible fear, the girls endeavoured to drop their loads of firewood and bow (people in the village had already been instructed in how to do this by the Malay policeman based in Simpang Dua), and the group passed on. Still, forty years later, the women recalled the terror they had felt at the time, and the terrible anger the event had provoked when they had reported it back to people in the village.

In addition, there is no doubt that on at least one occasion Japanese soldiers accompanied the local Malay policeman from Simpang Dua to Gerai and demanded that people hand over their rice stocks. People told me that on these occasions their village *jurong* (rice storage huts) were largely emptied, although the Japanese were limited in how much rice they could take by the fact that Gerai is not on a navigable river, and the rice had to be carried overland to Simpang Dua (largely using Gerai people as porters, much to their chagrin).

policeman responsible for maintaining order in the area during the period of Japanese rule was located there.

- 18 See Helliwell 2012 for a detailed discussion of *sensangan*. Some of the, almost certainly fictionalized, anti-Japanese activities described by Gerai people are similar to those outlined by Heimann 2007 for the Lun Dayeh of the north-eastern part of Kalimantan during the occupation. For this reason, we might want to exercise caution in accepting the veracity of parts of the account as set out by Heimann.
- 19 Under Japanese rule in Borneo it was a requirement that members of all other ethnic groups bow to any Japanese person (Ooi 2011:53–4; see also Reece 1998:88–90).

However, many people had taken to living away from the village at remote rice fields during the period of the occupation (largely, as they explained, to avoid contact with the Japanese),²⁰ and kept much of their rice with them there—consequently, they lost less than they might otherwise have done. Nevertheless, people still, in 1985, harboured bitter memories of these losses, and of the ensuing rice shortages.

When, in the 1980s, I first talked to Gerai people about the Japanese occupation, I was struck by the marked similarities between the terms in which they described the Japanese, and those in which they described Malays. Most obviously, they often referred to Japanese soldiers as '*Melayu*' when describing encounters—mythical or otherwise—with them in the jungle. As noted earlier, Gerai people use the term *Melayu* in two senses: while the first refers specifically to autochthonous Muslim groups, the second refers to a kind of generalized, non-Dayak other. In both uses the term indicates an oppositional relationship with the speaker, with *Melayu* in the first, narrower, sense seen as quintessentially non-Gerai, while *Melayu* in the second, broader, sense connotes a less intense polarity. The deep opposition that Gerai people see between themselves and Malays (in the first sense) was most cogently expressed in the layout of a Gerai longhouse.²¹ Gerai people designated the 'outer' verandah (*sawah*) area of any longhouse as a '*Melayu*' area (as opposed to the 'inner' *lawang* area, designated as 'our' area); Malay visitors to the longhouse slept and ate in the outer area and were not permitted, on pain of death, to enter the inner area, although strangers from other ethnic groups were often invited to do so.

Initially, when I heard Gerai people refer to Japanese as *Melayu* I supposed that they were using the term in the second, generalized sense. But as I listened to more narratives about the war, I came to recognize that this was not so: rather, Gerai people were referring to Japanese as *Melayu* in the first, specific sense.

20 The Japanese occupation appears to have occasioned a similar response in at least some other Dayak groups (see, for example, Schiller 2009:282–3 on Dayaks in East Kalimantan). I have noted elsewhere (Helliwell 1991, 2001) that in the past Gerai people appear to have had more scattered, mobile forms of residence than in the present: even now, they are torn between living in the village and living at their rice fields (or in hamlets situated close to the rice fields). Since the end of the war and incorporation into the Indonesian state, there has been a steady movement of Gerai people from more scattered residences to centralized residence in the village itself.

21 There were originally three longhouses in Gerai. The last one finally fell into disuse around 2000. For a detailed description of the Gerai longhouse, see Helliwell 1996.

This was clear, in particular, from the tropes that Gerai people used to indicate Japanese presence in the narratives that I collected about the war. Thus, just as Malays are signified in oral history and myth through their carrying of a certain kind of long knife—a kind of knife which, for example, Dayaks or Chinese are never depicted as carrying—so, too, were Japanese in the war narratives. Similarly, as I will discuss shortly, proximity to a Malay community is often marked by the image of slaves (*ulun*) working in irrigated rice-fields, and exactly the same image was used in the war narratives to indicate that the protagonist was coming near to a Japanese community. In one narrative, for example, a Gerai man named Luntar is travelling to Pontianak when he encounters slaves working in an irrigated rice-field. They ask him where he is from, and when he tells them they urge him to return to Gerai ‘so that you will not also become a slave of the Japanese’. Similarly, there are striking parallels between the ways in which Gerai people are depicted as behaving with respect to Malays in oral histories and myth, and the ways that they are depicted as behaving towards the Japanese in the war narratives. In both cases the Gerai protagonist usually seeks to mock—and, often, to trick—any Malays or Japanese that he (the primary protagonists of such ‘heroic’ narratives are invariably male) encounters, and the Malays and Japanese encountered often suffer the same kind of fate, including being sent on a wild goose chase into impenetrable jungle, being physically humiliated in some way, or even being beheaded.

Perhaps most importantly, Gerai people made it clear to me that just as Malay visitors to the longhouse were expected to eat and sleep in the ‘outer’ *sawah* area—the area designated as *Melayu*—so would any Japanese visitors be expected to remain in that area. This is in contrast to the treatment of visitors from other ethnic groups—Chinese, Dutch, Dayaks from other communities, even visiting New Zealand anthropologists!—who were almost always invited to enter the ‘inner’ *lawang* area.

In short, in my conversations with Gerai people about the Japanese occupation—mostly during the 1980s, when there were many still alive who remembered it first-hand—being Japanese was very often elided with being Malay. This does not mean that Gerai people did not distinguish between *reng Jepang* (Japanese person) and *reng Melayu* (Malay person)—when pressed, they would readily specify whether the particular *Melayu* person or community was Japanese or Malay. It does indicate, however, that for Gerai people the Japanese were categorized as a kind of Malay in the narrow sense, and distinguished from all other ethnic groups—Chinese, Javanese, Dutch, other Dayaks, and so on—in these terms. While the members of most of these other groups could be included in the broader *Melayu*-as-generalized-other category, they were never

elided with Malays in the narrower sense; only Japanese were categorized in this way. This raises important questions about the character of the *Melayu* category for Gerai people.

The *Melayu* Category in Gerai

There is no doubt that adherence to Islam is significant in determining membership of the *Melayu* category for Gerai people. Thus, reference to Malays often includes some reference to their religious practices—especially the taboos on consuming alcohol and pork, which Gerai people find both incomprehensible and ridiculous (Helliwell 2001:224). One of the main reasons given for the exclusion of Malays from the inner *lawang* area of a longhouse was that their religious prohibitions might lead them to be offended by Dayak practices, both dietary (such as consuming pork and alcohol) and spiritual (such as making offerings to spirits). Clearly, then, religious difference is key to the opposition that Gerai people see between themselves and *Melayu*.

However, Gerai classification of Japanese as *Melayu* suggests that much more than religious identity is invoked by this category, and that religious identity may not even be its central defining characteristic. Gerai people were uncertain about Japanese religious practices, but knew that they drank alcohol (they were less clear on the question of eating pork) and that they did not identify as Muslim. Yet, they nevertheless classified them as *Melayu*.

The ways in which Japanese were represented in the narratives that I collected give us some clues as to why this was the case. In particular, the use of the same motif—slaves toiling in irrigated rice-fields—to indicate proximity to a Japanese or a Malay community is highly significant.

Gerai people attribute great significance to any external expression of dominance over them. This is related to the importance that they attach to the value of ‘standing’ (*diri*), according to which every rice group should take responsibility for its own affairs (Helliwell 1995, 2001). The rice group is the most important social unit in Gerai. It is a small grouping (of, on average, six to seven persons), ideally consisting of a stem family and usually (although not always) co-residential. Members produce rice on behalf of the group, share rights in the product, and take responsibility for the well-being of one another. As I have described elsewhere (Helliwell 1995, 2001), the two chief activities around which the rice group coalesces are the production of rice and the raising of children. These two activities are viewed by Gerai people as inseparable: the group produces rice in order to raise healthy children who will, in turn, produce the rice that will perpetuate the group once their parents are old and frail.

In certain respects, *diri* correlates with the English notion of ‘autonomy’, although it also connotes an interdependence and mutuality between rice groups that is denied by this English notion. While the stress on *diri* does not relieve any rice group of the need to engage in relations of precedence within the community itself, it does deny the right of any outsider—anyone not tied into the *adat* hierarchy at work within the community—to exercise authority, or any form of coercion, over Gerai people. To Gerai people, being subject to external overlordship is anathema. Thus, as noted earlier, they describe their ancestors as having ‘run into the hills’ in order to escape the domination of the Malay sultanate at Sukadana. A similar sense of outrage was present in accounts of the war period, this time pertaining to the Japanese. As one man put it: ‘The Japanese were just like the Malays, just the same. They wanted to rule us, to make us into their slaves. It didn’t feel right/comfortable (*nyaman*).’²²

The reference to slaves (*ulun*) here is crucial. In Gerai myth and oral history relating to Malays the fear of enslavement is a key theme, and slaves serve as a trope for Malay presence. Thus many stories tell of attempts by the raja and his emissaries to forcibly recruit Gerai (and other) people as slaves to work in his rice fields, and of how Gerai heroes of the past were able to outwit them. For Gerai people, then, the category *Melayu* is identified with those who have attempted to subjugate them—to make them into slaves economically, politically and to a lesser degree culturally—over the generations.

Significantly, the context in which I heard the term *ulun* used most frequently in Gerai was with reference to the cultivation of rice in irrigated, permanent fields. Indeed, in many tales the first sign that a protagonist is nearing a Malay community (and especially one containing members of the elite) is the presence of many slaves toiling in such fields. There is no doubt that rice cultivation practices are, for Gerai people, a crucial marker of difference between themselves and Malays, and hence a key element of the categorization of others as *Melayu*.²³ This is hardly surprising, given the importance of swid-

22 In this respect Gerai people resemble the Iban, who also have a long history of seeking independence from state control (see Healey 1985:24–8; Harwell 2000:83).

23 See Helliwell 1991 for a detailed discussion. In Zomia, as described by J. Scott (2009), upland groups grow root crops—as opposed to the wet-rice cultivation practised in the lowland states—because they are resistant to appropriation by the state. In Borneo, on the other hand, upland Dayak groups mostly engage in swidden rice-cultivation, again in contrast to the irrigated rice-cultivation practised by lowland Malays. For many of these Dayak groups, rice has long been a key element of what they have to trade with Malays and others.

den rice in Gerai culture—something about which I have written elsewhere (Helliwell 2001). Thus, the two Gerai myths that most cogently express Gerai core values—told on the first and final night of a major wedding ceremony (*sabat*)—detail, respectively, the techniques and practices involved in the production of swidden rice, and the origins of *tuak*, or rice wine—both quintessentially Gerai/Dayak, as opposed to *Melayu* (Helliwell 1994, 2000, 2012). Story after story in Gerai sees a happy ending (that is, a return to normality after a sequence of extraordinary events) signified by outlining—often in voluptuous and loving detail—the sequence of stages involved in the cultivation of rice in dry swiddens:

So indeed, that's how it was. Until the end of their lives that plant gave fruit, it always wanted to fruit. *Padi* was its name. They took its fruit and slashed undergrowth. They made a rice swidden (*umo*). After they had made a rice swidden they dibbled and planted it; after they had planted it—when it was the right size—they weeded it. After it was weeded, after it was ripe, they harvested it. When it had been tramped it was dried in the sun, pounded in a mortar, and then it was cooked. And so for the rest of their lives they could make rice swiddens far and wide—they knew how to cultivate rice.

Furthermore, that rice, once produced in the swiddens, is marked explicitly as part of 'our' rather than of the '*Melayu*' world: after being carried back to the village it is processed (trampled, husked, and winnowed) on a longhouse space intermediate between the 'inner' and the '*Melayu*' sections of the apartment, before being carried into the 'inner' section to be stored at its spiritual heart, in a sacred jar (*perumpung*) immediately next to the hearth. At this point the rice is said to have 'come home' (*pulang*); it is one of us rather than an other, a *Melayu* (Helliwell 2001).

In Gerai oral history and myth, then, a Malay presence is often marked through the combined tropes of slaves and irrigated rice-fields: in Gerai thought, these go together. While Western scholars point out that permanent irrigated-field cultivation tends to be associated with increased social hierarchy (Bellwood 1985:148),²⁴ Gerai people stress a related correlation. Their rejection of forms of irrigated cultivation and veneration of shifting cultivation can be

24 See also Li (1999:7), who points out that in the Lesser Sundas, prior to colonialism, irrigated rice-cultivation was imposed by coastal lords not because of its productivity as such, but because of its suitability for use by subject, concentrated populations.

read as a moral statement comparing (unfavourably) the exploitative character of Malay society with the (professed) greater autonomy found in their own (see Li 2000:158).

It is highly significant, then, that the Japanese engaged in large-scale rice cultivation projects throughout Borneo using forced labour, including that taken from Dayak groups (Ooi 2011:77; Reece 1998:142, 149). Gerai people claim that young men from the neighbouring (and much more accessible) village of Sepotong were taken and forced to work in large-scale irrigated rice-fields downriver, although I have been unable to confirm this. For Gerai people there is a clear parallel here with the behaviour of Malays: the Japanese, like the Malays before them, were seen as not only seeking to enslave them, but as doing so in order to put them to work in irrigated rice-fields.

In addition, the Japanese requisitioned rice itself from Gerai people. The taking of Gerai rice—the produce of specifically Gerai, as opposed to Malay, forms of cultivation—by Malays is also a key trope in Gerai narratives about their past relationship with Malays. According to Gerai oral history, not only were their ancestors expected to pay tribute (usually in the form of rice) to the raja, but rice also formed the bulk of what they had to trade with Malay traders. Since these traders were under the protection of—and worked with the authority of—the raja, they were able (as Gerai people describe it) to engage in exploitative trading practices with respect to Gerai people. In Gerai perception, both payment of tribute to the raja and trading relationships with Malays were predicated on the same relationship as that expressed in their irrigated-rice-field trope: the production of rice by slaves for masters.

It is instructive, in this regard, to compare Gerai categorization of the Japanese with their categorization of the Dutch—the other external group that exercised control over them before their incorporation into the Indonesian state. In particular, the question must be asked, following on from the discussion so far, as to whether Gerai people have ever categorized the Dutch as a kind of Malay in the narrow sense. The answer to this is no: I have never heard the Dutch described as *Melayu* except in very generalized terms, and nor are they referenced in myth or oral history using the tropes conventionally used to signify Malays. In part this is undoubtedly because the Gerai community had less direct experience of Dutch control than it did of Japanese control and, indeed, until recently people were a little unclear about the role that the Dutch had played in their governance. While Dutch soldiers are said to have visited the village occasionally, there is little reference to them in myth and oral history—certainly far less than there is to the Japanese. I would speculate that during the years of formal Dutch control, Gerai people rarely, if ever, saw them and continued to regard the raja as their overlord. While by the 1980s they certainly

knew of the Dutch, and of their former control over the area, their experience of the Dutch had been largely confined to Catholic missionaries who had passed through occasionally and, in the case of younger people who had attended school in Ketapang Town, Dutch monks, nuns, and teachers, who had run the dormitories and schools there.

But perhaps of greater importance is the fact that there is no memory (in Gerai, at least) of the Dutch requisitioning rice, or any other kinds of goods, from local people. Neither is there any memory of the Dutch forcibly recruiting labour, for rice field or any other kind of work. While the Japanese, like the Malays before them, are identified in Gerai thought with irrigated rice-fields—and with the recruitment of slaves to work in those fields—the Dutch are not associated in any way with rice or rice fields and indeed were seen, until recently, as unable to eat rice.

This is a critical point, since rice lies at the centre of Gerai life, both materially and spiritually; its consumption serves to mark not only the boundary between health and sickness, but also that between human (*mensio*) and non-human (Helliwell 2001). Gerai people are aware that many non-human creatures—animals, insects, birds, and certain spirits—eat rice, and such eating is not seen to make them human. But among creatures resembling humans, rice consumption may serve as a crucial marker of humanity. The fact that the Dutch (along with most Europeans) were long seen as unable to eat rice thus cast serious doubt over their status as human, raising enduring speculation concerning whether they were, in fact, some kind of spirit people (and giving rise to associated anxieties).²⁵ The Japanese identification as rice eaters, on the other hand, marked them as part of the human universe. While they were seen as dangerous (and to be avoided if possible), the threat that they encapsulated was of a known, comprehensible kind.

While the Dutch were resented, then, this resentment was of a more diffuse, less intense type than that directed at Malays and Japanese. The Dutch were classified as (probably) not part of the human universe, and therefore as ‘not like us’ (*nowe tokoh diret*); their lives were seen as remote from those of Gerai people. By contrast, Malays and Japanese were classified as humans, and so as ‘like us’ (*tokoh diret*); their position within the known human universe was defined as one of alterity.

25 The spectre of cannibalism haunts all those possible humans not seen to live on rice. I have written elsewhere on how I have been categorized by Gerai people in this regard (Helliwell 2001:10).

Concluding Remarks: The Japanese Malay

Rice lies at the heart of sociality and humanity in Gerai, and its cultivation and disposal are central to the Gerai production of identity. In requisitioning rice and in recruiting rice field labour, then, the Japanese entrenched the Gerai view of them as a kind of Malay: as people who not only forced others to work in their (Malay-style) rice fields, but who also appropriated the rice grown in Gerai rice fields. Consequently, when they referred to Japanese as *'Melayu'*, Gerai people were using the term in its narrower sense, and Japanese were often signified in oral history and myth via tropes conventionally used to signify Malays. By contrast, the Dutch were seen as having no interest in rice—either its cultivation or its consumption—and so while they (along with everyone else) were included in the broader *Melayu* category, they were never treated as *Melayu* in the narrower sense.

It is not surprising, then, that Gerai narratives about the Japanese are pervaded by the same sense of ridicule and mockery that characterizes their oral history and myth relating to Malays. When the trope of slaves working in irrigated rice-fields—whether those belonging to Malays or to Japanese—occurs in any story, storyteller and audience invariably make fun of the idea of people being forced to slosh around in mud and slime all day long. In ridiculing the slaves, they are also ridiculing the masters: their pomposity and self-centredness, the absurdity of their presumption of superiority vis-à-vis Gerai people.

With respect to the Japanese, this ridicule was most explicit with reference to the Japanese rule that all other peoples bow to them during the period of the occupation. Gerai people told me that they were instructed by the local Malay policeman to bow before any Japanese soldiers they encountered, and in the 1980s this practice was a source of much derision. In many of the (largely mythical) tales about the occupation that I collected, such bowing was taken as an opportunity to insult the unsuspecting Japanese (through, for example, farting, or engaging in obscene gestures and/or obscene language while bowing) or to trick them (through, for example, taking the opportunity to stab them, or through having people hidden nearby who leapt out while Japanese attention was focused on the person bowing).

It is also not surprising that Gerai people responded to Japanese rule in the same way that they responded to Malay rule: by making themselves as inaccessible as possible. As noted earlier, Gerai people say that they 'ran into the hills' to escape Malay overlordship. With the coming of the Japanese they 'ran away' once again, this time not into the hills, but into more impenetrable jungle to live in farm huts or scattered hamlets close to their rice fields. People talk of the village itself at the time as having been 'empty' (*puang*).

In Gerai, then, the Malay–Dayak distinction has been shaped by the long history of regional relations between these two populations, and the *Melayu* category indexes human otherness. The intense otherness indicated by the use of the term in its narrow sense is equated with a variety of behaviours—including the cultivation of rice in irrigated fields, the forced requisitioning of rice, the keeping of slaves, and the insistence on overt markers of superiority and deference—seen as contemptible, and whose practice marks *Melayu* as morally deficient in comparison with Gerai people. While adherence to Islam is also a marker of human otherness for Gerai people, it is by no means the primary one. Indeed, I would speculate that in this region it is at least possible that Islam was overlaid onto a set of pre-existing idioms referencing differential—albeit shifting and contested—positions in a socio-politico-economic hierarchy. In their assumption of authority over the community and their replication of Malay practices, including irrigated rice-cultivation, the use of slave labour, and the forced requisitioning of Gerai rice, the Japanese were readily categorized as a kind of *Melayu*: the quintessential human other.

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