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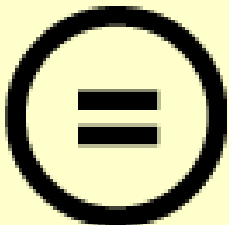
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**Between the Local and the State: practices and discourses of identity
among the Kadazan of Sabah (East Malaysia)**

by

Fausto Barlocco

A Doctoral Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the award of

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Abstract This thesis investigates the effects of the nation-building agenda carried out by the Malaysian state on the sense of collective belonging of the Kadazan people of the Bornean State of Sabah. The thesis includes a reconstruction of the formation of the two most important forms of collective identification, the nation and the ethnic group, and the analysis of the way in which Kadazan villagers identify themselves in relation to discourses circulating in various media and the practices in which they get involved in their everyday life. Kadazan villagers consistently show a rejection of the state propaganda and a general unwillingness to identify themselves as members of the Malaysian nation, which I attribute to their marginal position within the Malaysian state. They more often identify themselves as members of their ethnic group or village, collective forms of identification that seem to allow for a higher degree of participation in their definition than the national one.

The empirical analysis of the everyday self-identification in relation to practices and discourses shows a complex picture, as Kadazan villagers differently situate themselves as Malaysian, Kadazan, Sabahan and members of their village in different occasions and contexts. One of the explanations of this fact lies in the ambiguous character of Malaysian nation-building, promoting unity while at the same time treating citizens differently depending on their ethnic and religious background. The official discourse and practice of ethnic and religious differentiation has been deeply internalised by the Kadazan and has become a primary reason for their opposition to the state, as they feel treated as second-class citizens. Another explanation for the development of a sense of belonging to various collective forms of identification among the Kadazan rests in the fact that their recent history has made these significant as expression of different sets of shared lived experiences, providing the basis for the development of senses of commonality with members of the national, sub-national, ethnic and village communities at the same time.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This research originated as an enquiry into the effects of the state-led process of creating a national culture on a ‘tribal’ Bornean people, the Kadazan of the Malaysian State of Sabah¹. Early findings suggested that, similarly to what was concluded by Postill (2006) for another Bornean people, the Iban of Sarawak, the Kadazan have become deeply ‘Malaysianised’. I also observed, however, a marked contrast between, on the one hand, the relatively successful establishment of a national culture and, on the other, the fact that the Kadazan showed a much stronger sense of belonging to their ethnic group and locality than to Malaysia. This empirical observation echoes Geertz’s (1973 [1963]) point that in post-colonial states conflict arises between the modernising state and the ‘primordial sentiments’ of attachment to language, culture, religion and blood of their population.

This thesis aims to clarify the reasons for the apparent contradiction between the involvement of the Kadazan in the ‘integrated system of cultural institutions and practices’ (Postill, 2006: 15) of Malaysia and the evidence showing an enduring strength of alternative forms of identification apparently at odds with the Malaysian nation-building process. In order to do so it looks at how the Kadazan form and express their sense of belonging to the nation, ethnic group and locality through discourses and practices. By investigating these aspects, this thesis attempts to provide an account of nation-building that ‘break[s] out of the teleological and mono-directional narrative that informs the predominant understandings of nation building’, which only allows to conclude that it either succeeds or fails (Mihelj, 2007).

In agreement with Geertz (1973 [1963]), I consider the attachment to alternative forms of belonging demonstrated by the Kadazan to be a reaction to the processes of modernisation and consolidation of state power. This process mostly coincided with the nation-building project carried out by the Malaysian government, involving the formation of a national set of institutions and practices, but also the establishment of control over the discursive space through the circulation of dominant discourses spread by state-controlled media. These discourses promoted at the same time a

¹ See maps in appendix 1

narrative and ideology based on the notion of modernity, requiring members of minorities to change their ‘mindsets’ and become ‘modern’, and a social arrangement distinguishing citizens on the basis of ethnicity and religion.

My argument is that the attachment of the Kadazan to forms of collective identification alternative to the nation derives from their marginality, a status described by Wenger as a restricted form of participation dominated by non-participation (1998: 164-66) in relation to the Malaysian state. The notion of marginality has been used by various anthropologists (Tsing, 1993; Winzeler, 1997a; Rosaldo, 2003) to describe the condition of hinterland minorities in island South-East Asia. While the conditions generated by the Malaysian state make it possible for the Kadazan and other minority groups to imagine themselves as members of the national ‘imagined community’ (Anderson, 1991), at the same time the lack of power to define the role they can play in it and the lack of participation afforded lead them to identify more strongly with groups over whose definition and destiny they feel they have more control.

In order to understand fully the effects of the conditions brought into being by the inclusion in the Malaysian state and its nation-building project on the formation of collective belonging among the Kadazan, this thesis provides an empirical analysis of the different ways in which the Kadazan position themselves as Kadazan, Malaysian, Sabahan or members of their village in relation to the practices they carry out or the discourses they encounter or produce. In order to do so, I follow two main lines of enquiry: a historical reconstruction of the ‘trajectories’ of the processes, primarily the elaboration of a modern Kadazan and Malaysian culture, through which the generation of a sense of belonging to the ethnic group and the nation has been made possible, and an ethnographic analysis of the way in which individuals situate themselves as belonging to such categories in their everyday life. Such a research project requires the integration of a Malaysian frame of reference with the consideration of other levels of analysis, including the sub-national and local, but also following regional or global connections.

The next sections of this introductory chapter present the theoretical foundations of this research, situating it within debates about the nation and nationalism, nation-building, ethnicity, the relationship between indigenous peoples and the state, and proposing an approach to identity and collective identification based on the work of Richard Jenkins (2008) and Etienne Wenger (1998). The final part of the chapter

provides a discussion of the method used in the research and of the status of knowledge generated through it.

The nation, nationalism and nation-building

The origin and definition of the idea of nation is the object of the debate on nationalism, whose participants follow two main approaches, labelled as primordialist and modernist. The former is currently dominated by ethno-symbolists, who, like the sociologist Anthony Smith (1986, 1995), argue that, while nationalism is a modern ideology, at least some nations have a root in pre-modern cultural groups, which have a primarily subjective persistence, based on things such as memory, values, sentiments and symbols.

The proponents of the modernist approach include Ernest Gellner (1983), Hobsbawm and Ranger (1983) and Anderson (1991), all of whom share the idea that nations are modern creations of the ideology of nationalism. Gellner (1983) defined the nation as a group whose members share the same culture and recognise themselves and each other as members. However, he argued that these characteristics define a nation only in the 'age of nationalism', when 'general conditions make for standardized, homogenous, centrally sustained high cultures, pervading entire populations' (1983: 55). Gellner's definition of nation depends on the concomitant definition of nationalism as 'a political principle', but also 'a sentiment' and a 'movement' associated with it, 'which holds that the political and the national [read ethnic] unit should be congruent' (1983: 1).

Some of the strengths of Gellner's (1983) theories lie in the convincing way in which they clarify the modernity of the idea of nation, the political aspects of nationalism and the importance of the creation of a widely-shared 'high culture' for the existence of the nation, an essential goal in the nation-building agenda of all states (see below). A problem of applicability which is of relevance here, however, is that Gellner's (1983) idea that the national unit corresponds to an ethnic unit does not apply well to the form of nationalism promoted by states that have the coexistence of different ethnic groups as one of their defining characters, as is the case of Malaysia and other South-East Asian and post-colonial states. In order to account for such cases, some scholars have made a distinction between 'ethnic nationalism' and other

forms, referred to as ‘civic’ (e.g. Smith, 1986: 134-40; see Reid, 2001 for a full discussion), ‘patriotic’ (Taylor, 1998, cited in Case, 2000: 132) or ‘supra-ethnic’ (Eriksen, 1993: 118), based on the principle of belonging to the nation by virtue of being citizens of a state, and not members of an ethnic group.

The theories of Benedict Anderson (1991) have the advantage of explaining the way in which the nation emerged as a meaningful and relevant entity allowing people to identify with it. Anderson (1991) defined nations as imagined political communities, imagined as ‘deep, horizontal comradeships’, commanding a sense of fraternity among its members, most of whom will never meet or interact or even hear of each other (1991: 6-7). The notion of imagined communities is useful in its bringing the constructed character of the nation, and similarly of the ethnic group, to the fore, showing how the historical development of certain conditions and sensibilities, such as the development of print capitalism and the establishment of ‘empty homogenous time’ through clocks and calendars, generated the possibility for people to imagine themselves as being part of a community whose existence was not supported by direct experience. Anderson’s (1991) definition of the national community as being imagined does not imply denying its reality but rather stressing that its existence implies an effort of imagination that transforms it from an abstract concept into a significant experiential reality, as in the famous example of a newspaper reader imagining a community of millions reading the same newspaper at the same time. In this thesis I am therefore subscribing to Anderson’s idea that nations and all communities, with the possible exception of ‘primordial villages of face-to-face contact’ (1991: 6), are imagined, and that they are to be distinguished by the style in which they are imagined and by the conditions making such imagination possible and appealing.

One of the most difficult tasks faced by the governments of newly established countries is that of ‘making Italians’ after they have ‘made Italy’ or, as expressed by Postill, to ‘build nations within their allocated territories’ (2006: 1). This task is generally referred to as ‘nation-building’, a term partially contested within academic circles (see Postill, 2006: 5), but which aptly captures ‘the *built* nature of modern state and nation formation’ (Postill, 2006: 6, emphasis in original). An alternative notion to that of nation-building, which I think can be used to complement the former, is that of ‘nation making’ brought forward by Foster (2002) to stress the importance of processes not led by the state – and in certain instances even going against it – such as

commercial culture and other initiatives of the private sector and the wider population in 'materializing the nation'.

Ethnic groups and ethnicity

The term 'ethnic group' was first used in the period following the Second World War as the main way to refer to human populations with a common origin and culture, including both small-scale societies, previously mostly referred to as 'tribes', and larger groups constituting significant components of a state population, previously referred to as 'peoples', or sometimes 'races' or 'nations'. According to Eriksen, while the new conceptualisation did not challenge the discrete character of groupings so defined, it implied that their members were 'aware' and 'in contact with' members of other groups (1993: 9).

The problematic status of considering ethnic groups as bounded entities sharing a common culture was firstly put into relief by Edmund Leach, who, through his study of highland Burma (1970 [1954]), demonstrated the inadequacy of the presupposition that members of an ethnic group or a society necessarily share a set of distinctive cultural traits. Leach's (1970 [1954]) argument that societies emerge out of subjective processes of ascription became the basis of the situational notion of ethnicity that established itself through a collection edited by Fredrik Barth in 1969 (Bentley, 1987: 25). Barth defined ethnic categories as 'organisational vessels that may be given varying amounts and forms of content in different sociocultural systems' (1969: 14), and identified the boundaries of the ethnic groups, which he considered to be permeable to passage of people or cultural traits, as the essential element of their existence. Moreover, he emphasised the idea that the concept of boundaries makes sense only when at least two groups are considered, and that bounded groups cannot exist in isolation. As already mentioned, the approach of Barth and colleagues (1969) also stressed self-ascription as the most important element in the definition of ethnic groups.

In its early stage, the anthropological debate on ethnicity was dominated by discussions about the origin and objective grounding of subjective claims to ethnic belonging. Scholars dealing with these issues mostly followed two main approaches, referred to as primordialism and instrumentalism. The former, under which the

position of Barth (1969) is often subsumed (see Cohen, 1974: xii-xv), viewed ethnicity as a more or less immutable category to which people resort to find solutions to the disruption of conventional ways of understanding and acting in the world caused by social changes (Bentley, 1987: 26). Instrumentalists, on the other hand, considered ethnic groups as being generated under specific circumstances and for specific purposes, either to provide a sort of ‘cognitive map’ needed by recent rural migrants to orient themselves in a novel multi-ethnic setting (Mitchell, 1956) or for obtaining political and economic gains within situations of struggle over resources (Cohen, 1969, 1974). Bentley (1987: 26) criticised both approaches for not standing up well to empirical scrutiny and for not being able to clarify the processes by which collectivities of interests and sentiments come into existence. Moreover, he argued that instrumentalist theories did not deal adequately with the individual level, ‘where ethnic identity formation and manipulation presumably take place’ (Bentley, 1987: 26), therefore not being able to explain why belonging to an ethnic group should constitute an essential element of people’s sense of who they are and how that takes place.

These issues are an essential element in Jenkin’s (2008) ‘rethinking’ of what he calls ‘the basic anthropological model of ethnicity’, which he mostly attributes to the views of Barth (1969). Jenkins presents this model as being based on a series of loosely linked propositions defining ethnicity as: 1) being ‘about’ cultural differentiation 2) being concerned with culture but also ‘rooted in, and the outcome of, social interaction’ 3) not being fixed 4) being collective and individual (2008: 165).

Among the elements of ‘rethinking’ of the ‘basic anthropological model’ proposed by Jenkins (2008), some are of particular relevance to the present thesis. The first of them is the shift from an excessive emphasis on self-ascription present in many previous anthropological notions of ethnicity reached through the appreciation of both processes of ‘internal definition’, the individual or collective self-ascription to an ethnic group, and ‘external definition’, the ascription by others. On the basis of these two forms of definition, Jenkins distinguishes between ‘self-identification’, which takes place both at the individual and group level, and ‘social categorization’, the ‘identification of *others* as a collectivity’ (2008: 56). The understanding of the latter involves the consideration of the power and authority embedded within active social

relationships (2008: 55), which have the capacity to influence categorisation in the specific contexts in which it takes place.

Following Jenkins, I therefore consider that a full understanding of ethnicity is possible only through the consideration of the specific ‘contexts and processes of social categorization’ (Jenkins, 2008: 65) - what Cornell and Hartmann (1998, cited in Jenkins, 2008: 65) called the ‘construction sites of ethnicity’ – in which identification and categorisation take place. Jenkins (2008) situates these contexts along a continuum going from the most ‘informal’, including primary socialisation, face-to-face interaction and sexual relationships, to the most ‘formal’, such as market relationships, employment, administrative allocation, social control, organised politics, social policy.

The importance of primary socialisation in the formation of categories has been influentially considered by Bourdieu through his concept of *habitus*, ‘systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*, [...] principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations [...] objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them’ (1977: 72, emphasis in original). Developing Bourdieu’s (1977) insights, Bentley (1987) has emphasised the connection between primary socialisation and ethnicity, considering the *habitus* developed within primary socialisation to be the source of the recognition of ethnic commonality. While he recognises the importance of primary socialisation as ‘the realm *par excellence* of categorization, setting a template for our receptivity to being categorized in later life’ (2008: 66), Jenkins considers it to be just one of the ‘construction sites of ethnicity’.

Other contexts of ethnic categorisation that, as I will show in the next chapters, are as important as primary socialisation are what Jenkins calls ‘routine public interaction’, the face-to-face interaction involving the use of verbal and non-verbal cues, including both explicit markers and unconscious and involuntary elements, used to assign unknown others to an ethnic category, and communal relationships, ‘the more or less tightly knit networks that evolve over time in residentially shared localities, and membership of informal groups (2008: 66-67).

Among the formal contexts and processes of social categorisation, official classification is particularly significant in Malaysia, where the state officially distinguishes its citizens in terms of their ethnicity, a distinction that has among its consequences different access to certain rights and specific policies aimed at specific

groups, which determine a form of ethnic categorisation that is significant in many aspects of the life of Malaysian citizens.

Another essential point made by Jenkins (2008) is that ethnicity is fundamentally similar to other forms of identification and social categorisation, including the nation and locality, which he refers to as ‘allotropes of ethnicity’, as they share the same basic features (2008: 42-45). Jenkins argues forms of identification and categorisation should be distinguished between each other on the basis of what he calls the ‘virtual’ aspect, ‘the consequences of name and label, what the nominal *means* in terms of experience’ (2008: 43, emphasis in original), as opposed to the ‘nominal’ identification, constituted by name and classification. While ‘nominal’ identification has a hierarchical and segmentary organisation, being constituted by a series of nested categories, these should be understood, at least in part, in terms of their virtuality, in the way in which, for example, national identification can be distinguished from local identification for the different consequences it has in the real world. The nominal and the virtual, moreover, do not necessarily correspond with one another and their relationship is always to be understood empirically (2008: 171).

In the next section, I consider the notion of identity, clarifying the different concepts it expresses and the different usages of the term. Finally, I present some views on identity, primarily in the forms of processes of identification, which derives from complementing Jenkins’ (2008) elaboration of the ‘basic anthropological model of ethnicity’ with the ideas of Etienne Wenger (1998).

Identity and identification

The notion of ‘identity’ was introduced in the social sciences and in public discourse in the 1960s in the United States, being separated from its original psychoanalytical context and linked to ethnicity and sociological role theory. The term soon diffused to other disciplines and regions, establishing itself in social and political practice and analysis (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000: 2-3). The usage of the term in the social sciences is frequent but ambiguous (Brubaker and Cooper, 2000; Byron, 2002), and it is difficult to find a precise definition of the term². Brubaker and

² A search of the encyclopaedias of anthropology found in the Loughborough University Library (*Encyclopedia of Cultural Anthropology*, eds. Levinson and Ember, 1996; *Encyclopedia of Social and*

Cooper (2000: 6-8) single out five main senses in which the term is used: 1) to conceptualise non-instrumental modes of social and political action 2) as a subjective or objective 'sameness' among members of a group or category 3) as the core aspect of individual or group 'selfhood' 4) as an effect of, and a basis, for solidarity and collective action 5) as the 'evanescent product of multiple and competing discourses', highlighting the '*unstable, multiple, fluctuating and fragmented* nature of the contemporary self' (2000: 8).

My discussion of identification and sense of belonging to collective categories among the Kadazan deals primarily with identity as the basis and effect of collective action and as the product of discourses. These notions are based on a constructivist perspective, and mostly belong to what Brubaker and Cooper consider as 'weak understandings of identity' (2000: 10-11), opposing themselves to the essentialist and reified 'strong' understandings. However, *contra* Brubaker and Cooper (2000), I believe that the different phenomena referred to through the notion of identity are so intertwined with each other in their manifestation in the real world that they cannot be considered separately. An analytical distinction between them, therefore, while it is tight and elegant in principle, is not adequate in practice. As a result, while focusing on discourses of collective identification, this thesis considers at the same time their significance to individuals in creating a sense of belonging to these categories and the way in which this belonging is used by individuals who define who they are.

A first essential aspect of my understanding of identity takes the lead from Brubaker and Cooper's distinction between 'commonality', 'the sharing of some common attribute', 'connectedness', 'the relational ties that link people' and 'groupness', 'the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary or group' (2000: 20). According to them, 'commonality' is a necessary prerequisite for 'groupness', whereas 'connectedness' is not. Another element they consider to be an essential prerequisite is the presence of a feeling of belonging together, which depends on the degrees of commonality and connectedness, but also on other factors such as events, narratives and discursive frames (2000: 20).

The way in which a sense of belonging at the basis of a sense of groupness is formed is usefully clarified by Wenger (1998) through the distinction between three 'modes of belonging': *engagement, imagination* and *alignment*. Wenger (1998)

Cultural Anthropology, eds. Barnard and Spencer, 2002; *The Dictionary of Anthropology*, ed. Barfield, 1997) was unfruitful in finding a definition of the term

defines engagement as a mode of belonging, and therefore a source of identity, consisting in the direct participation in social practices and in the constant negotiation of their meaning among their practitioners. Imagination, a concept he derived from Anderson (1991), consists in ‘creating images of the world and seeing connections through time and space by extrapolating from our own experience’ (1998: 173). Similarly to what was described by Anderson (1991), imagination can provide identity by enabling individuals to feel they belong to an ‘imagined community’ of people sharing some common characteristics or practices, even without being involved in the joint development of a shared practice (Wenger, 1998: 181-83).

Alignment is a mode of belonging involving ‘bridg[ing] time and space to form broader enterprises so that participants become connected through the coordination of their energies, actions and practices’ (1998: 178-79). The main characteristic that differentiates alignment from imagination is that it entails a coordination of action, which constitutes its primary *raison d’être*. Examples of alignment provided by Wenger include institutions, religions, political and social movements, but also fashions, artistic genres and educational standards (Wenger, 1998: 181). The theorisation proposed by Wenger (1998) is useful in distinguishing between ways in which the sense of belonging to a group – a ‘community’ as Wenger and Anderson (1991) call it – is formed and sustained. Both the nation and the ethnic group can be considered, according to this typology, as communities of imagination but also, when they become the basis for any corporate form of action, as communities of alignment. The communities based on engagement, on the other hand, are entities of a smaller scale characterised by direct interaction between their members. As I will describe in chapter 5, I consider the residents of the village in which I carried out my fieldwork to be, in certain respects, such a form of community.

While Wenger does not consider any form of hierarchy between these modes of belonging, I follow Vered Amit (2002) in considering communities as being conceptualised primarily in terms of what is held in common among their members, rather than as oppositional categories distinguishing between insiders and outsiders, and as being constituted through the shared experience of participation in particular association and events. Amit argues that, even in the case of ascribed categorical identities, conceptualised as being anterior to actual social relationships that might be attributed to them, and it is actual relationships of intimacy that give them consistency (2002: 60). In a similar vein, Anthony Cohen argued that ‘it is the level nearer to the

experience of the individual [...] that most commonly provides referents to one's identity and that do 'most of the work of identity'" (1996: 804).

Another essential aspect of identity brought to the fore by Cohen (1994, 1996) is the relationship between collective forms of identification such as the nation and the individual. While I agree with Cohen (1996) that the nation can be viable as a source of identity only if it gives individuals a reference that makes sense to their experience, that does not imply subscribing to his conclusion that nationalism or ethnicity can work only as an expression of self-identity. Instead, this thesis follows Jenkins's idea that 'any social identity [...] must mean something to individuals before it can be said to 'exist' in the social world' (2008: 166), and that ethnicity is at the same time collective and individual, 'externalized in social interaction and the categorization of others, and internalized in personal self-identification' (2008: 14). In agreement with Wenger, I think the concept of identity can be used 'to focus on the person without assuming the individual self as a point of departure' (1998: 145), taking a perspective that is neither individualistic nor societal but uses the concept of identity 'as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other' (1998: 145).

This point is further clarified by considering identity as an experience of meaning, a process that involves language, but is not limited to it, and involves social relations even when there is no direct interaction. This process involves, according to Wenger (1998), 'participation', taking part with others in a community of practice through active involvement, and 'reification', 'the process of giving form to our experience by producing objects that congeal this experience into "thinginess"' (1998: 58). The term is used by Wenger also to refer to the product of such process as, he argues, the process and the product are the same in terms of meaning (1998: 60).

Identity formation, considered as an experience of meaning, involves the process of identification, defined by Wenger as 'providing material for building identities through an investment of the self in relations of association and differentiation' (1998: 188) and 'negotiability', 'the ability, facility, and legitimacy to contribute to, take responsibility for, and shape the meanings that matter in a social configuration' (1998: 197). Identification consists of both a process of reification, of 'identifying as' (self-ascription) and 'being identified as' (ascription by others) someone, and one of participation, of 'identifying with' something or someone, by 'developing an association whose experience is constitutive of whom we are' (1998: 191). Wenger's

(1998) notion of identification largely overlaps with those of ‘self-identification’ and ‘social categorization’ brought forward by Jenkins (2008), the former corresponding to the ‘identifying as’ member of a reified category and the participatory ‘identifying with’, and the second with the reified ‘being identified as’ and ‘identifying others as’.

Negotiability, on the other hand, is shaped by relations of ‘ownership of meaning’, a social process in which individuals appropriate their identity by giving it a meaning that becomes part of who they are (1998: 201). Ownership of meaning is defined within the broader structure of what Wenger calls ‘economies of meaning’, the system determining the relative value of specific meanings within which they struggle for the power to define events, actions or artefacts (1998: 198-200). Identification and negotiability are in a state of tension, which can take the form of a struggle for the ownership of meaning within a common form of identification, or, on the opposite, that of identification in a group constraining the negotiability of meanings by imposing some ‘orthodox’ ones. These considerations led Wenger to consider the issue of relationship between identity and power, arguing that power has a dual structure that reflects the interplay between identification and negotiability’, as it ‘derives from belonging as well as from exercising control over what we belong to’ (1998: 207). The concept of negotiability can be paralleled with the dynamics of social categorisation, and their implication with relationships of power and authority in specific contexts, considered by Jenkins (2008).

Following the emphasis on the importance of an explicit understanding of the role of discourse in producing and maintaining broader social relations, especially ones of inequality remarked upon various critiques of Wenger’s (1998) approach (e.g. Barton and Hamilton, 2005; Barton and Tusting, 2005; Tusting, 2005), and the consideration of the importance of power relationships in social categorisation brought forward by Jenkins (2008), this thesis proposes an in-depth analysis of the broader context of the relationships of power and the discourses sustaining them. Such an analysis is possible only through a historical understanding of the processes through which these relationships of power have come into being and the discourses sustaining them have been generated and circulated. Such an approach is in line with the constructivist position of authors (e.g. Barnard, 2004; Benjamin and Chou, 2003; Kahn, 1993, 1998, 2006; Lan, 1998; Reid, 2001; Schrauer, 1998) which Chua defines as locating ethnicity in the process by which fixed entities like ‘identity’ and ‘culture’ are created within state, popular and even earlier anthropological discourses (2007: 262-63). This

approach is well exemplified by Kahn, who declares his approach as focussing on clarifying how subjectivities in the particular case examined are constituted by specific sets of cultural practices and through which social and historical processes these practices have been generated (1998: 17). The understanding of the constructed character of notions such as those of the nation, however, should not obscure that of the effects of such ideas and discourses in the real world (see Kahn, 1993; Banks, 1996).

My approach to identity therefore consists in looking at the way Kadazan individuals identify themselves as Kadazan, Malaysian, Sabahan or members of their village, and how they negotiate the meaning of such belonging within the relationships of power and the dominant discourses, such as those of nation-building and ethnicity, shaping the Malaysian 'economy of meaning'. The next section considers such relationships of power in terms of the relationship between the Malaysian state and the indigenous peoples of Borneo, looking at the way in which the nation-building agenda carried out by the government determined various forms of resistance to what is perceived as a treatment as second-class members of the nation.

The Malaysian state and the indigenous peoples of Borneo

Talking about the specific case of Malaysia, characterised by a multi-ethnic population, Judith Nagata (1979) described four possible strategies the government could have used to create a national identity: assimilation to Malayness, the culture of the majority; the creation of a hybrid Malaysian culture comprising elements deriving from different ethnic groups; a pluralistic arrangement in which the main communities retain their cultural distinctiveness or assimilation to a 'neutral' Westernised culture transcending ethnic identities. According to her, the first approach was followed in the emphasis on Malay as the national language and Islam as the national tradition, as well as on the choice of other elements such as the sultan as head of state, the national anthem and the Malay kite chosen as the symbol of the national airline. The second was followed in the presentation of a generalised Malaysian culture, in terms of history, cuisine, costume, music and dance, particularly in tourism promotion, and the fourth in the development and modernisation discourse, especially evident in the Westernisation of the political, bureaucratic and business

elites. She concluded that the pluralist model was the prevalent one in the government agenda, and therefore that Malaysian society was still to be understood in terms of interrelationships between ethnicity, class, status and power (Nagata, 1979: 219 ff.).

The pluralist arrangement favoured by Malaysian nation-builders is aptly put into relief by the comparison with neighbouring Indonesia made by Case (2000), who argues that while the latter, being constituted by an even more complex variety of ethnic and religious groups, insisted on the ethnic or racial commonality of all its citizens, forming an Indonesian race; in the former nationalism remained quite 'equivocal' (Tarling, 1998, cited in Case, 2000: 132), being weakened by 'important continuities between indigenous elites and the colonial power, as well as sharp divisions between indigenous and migrant communities' (Case, 2000: 132).

The equivocal status of Malaysian nationalism, and the conflict between the different nation-building strategies, are well exemplified by the position taken by the former prime minister Mahathir Mohamad in his book published in 1970, *The Malay Dilemma*, strongly supporting the idea of the Malays as the 'definitive people' of Malaysia, therefore claiming their status as ethnic core of the state and apparently moving towards an ethnic form of nationalism based on the primacy of the majority ethnic group. In the mid-1990s, Mahathir shifted decidedly towards civic nationalism, declaring the goal of creating a *bangsa Malaysia*, a 'Malaysian nation', as part of the development master-plan *Wawasan 2020*³, an aspiration that, however, at present seems still to be little more than wishful thinking.

All the various strategies to create a sense of nationhood described by Nagata (1979) have been applied to indigenous peoples of Malaysian Borneo in various ways. The state generally allows them to retain some elements of their tradition and identity, as long as these are not perceived as being dangerous for national unity, while some of these have even been incorporated into a hybridised Malaysian culture, particularly with the aim of using them for tourism promotion. The two most applied approaches, however, have been the assimilation to a 'neutral' Westernised culture transcending ethnic identities and assimilation to Malayness. The former is mostly associated with a modernist ideology, expressed in two main connected discourses, that of

³ 'Vision 2020', a project elaborated by the previous Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad, which aims at making Malaysia a fully developed country by that year, and which puts the emphasis on Malaysian nationalism and Islam. By calling for the development of a 'Malaysian race working in full and equal partnership', it implies the subordination of ethnic identity within a national Malaysian identity or 'race' (*bangsa Malaysia*), which asks citizens to see themselves as Malaysians before anything else.

development and that of national unity, which constitute two faces of the same coin of the nation-building agenda and which have often been used by the government to justify its interventions on the life of indigenous peoples, generally represented by propaganda as backwards and in need to change their 'mindset'. The latter (which has been particularly on the agenda in the 1970s, see chapter 3) is source of much ambiguity, primarily because of the way it is intertwined with the legal status of indigenous peoples of Malaysian Borneo, recognised by the constitution (in its post-1969 revised version) as *bumiputera* (M. 'sons of the soil'), a category that distinguishes between citizens indigenous to Malaysia and non-indigenous, such as Chinese or Indians, and that bestows special privileges on the former. As *bumiputera* they have often been conceptually assimilated to the majority of the members of the class, the Malays, an assimilation that has been at times given as implicit and natural and at times forced upon them in a much stronger way than has been the case with non-indigenous peoples.

Rosaldo (2003) argues that, by trying to draw minority groups into nation-building projects driven by ideas of development, modernity, assimilation and nationalism, metropolitan centres ask members of minority groups to stop being what they are and transform into citizens. The hinterland minorities, on their part, struggle 'to be treated with what they define as respect', a struggle that often takes the form of 'cultural citizenship', expressed in claims they make as citizens 'against the state' in terms of formal rights and in terms of recognition as 'full members' against a second-class position (Rosaldo, 2003: 1-3). The relationship between the state and minorities involves differences of power and of perception of one another, as well as conflicts between different projects and cultural conceptions. On the basis of this, Rosaldo proposes an argument that fractures the unity of nationalism presupposed by both classical theorists such as Gellner (1983) and Anderson (1991) and nationalist rhetoric, considering nationalism as 'an ideology that simultaneously includes and excludes by defining certain people as full members and others along a spectrum ranging from second-class citizens to non-members' (2003: 6).

Considering the relationship between the indigenous peoples of Borneo and the states of which they are citizens (Malaysia, Indonesia and Brunei), Winzeler (1997a) stressed the similarity, and sometimes continuity, between the treatment of the colonised peoples by the European rulers and that of ethnic minorities and marginal areas by developing states through the concept of 'fourth world colonialism' or

'internal colonialism'. However, he remarked that while European colonialists limited themselves to pacification and administration, postcolonial governments go much further in their efforts at transforming the indigenous peoples by imposing on them a national culture, religion and language and attempting to eradicate traditional beliefs, customs, lifestyles and modes of adaptation that are seen as backward or savage. Moreover, they regard the interests of indigenous peoples as secondary or null in regards to the use of the natural resources that are present within their region and which are regarded as necessary for the overall development of the country.

The impositions made on them by the state, Winzeler (1997a) argued, provoke diverse and often ambiguous reactions by the indigenous peoples, involving dependency and acceptance but also hostility and resistance. Despite the fact that it usually does not challenge the developmentalist paradigm, resistance derives from the perception of being exploited and of the fact that, despite the proposition of the government propaganda, it is very hard for indigenous peoples to reach the level of wealth and development enjoyed by the dominant groups of their polity.

The struggle between the state and indigenous minorities takes place primarily in relation to matters of religion and culture (Winzeler, 1997a) and language (Postill, 2006), and at different levels, including state-level institutions such as the school and the media (Rosaldo, 2003; Postill, 2006), but also local-level ones such as, for example, ritual speech and village celebrations (Rosaldo, 2003; Postill, 2006). A phenomenon that has constituted an integral part of relationship with the state on the part of the indigenous peoples of Borneo is the 'rediscovering' of their indigenous culture and identity (Winzeler, 1997a, 1997b; Loh, 1992; see chapter 3), a process that involved what Wagner (1981) called the 'objectification' of culture, a process of making previously implicit practices explicit as 'custom'.

Describing its usage in Sarawak, Boulanger, concludes that ethnicity can be considered as a form of resistance to modernity as it 'defies the logic of capital, withholds value from the market, repersonalises exchange and respects subsistence' (2002: 231). Because of this character, Boulanger (2002) argues, ethnicity is generally depicted as a backward, subversive idea by modern capitalist regimes, who attempt to reduce it to a 'guided culture', consisting of superficial elements such as costume and cuisine, to be evident only during events. As a response to the unavoidable calls, linked to the national agenda, to change their 'mindset' to adapt to the 'New Reality', indigenous peoples are constructing 'versions of ethnicity that give

them a degree of control, however minimal, over the process of being overrun' (2002: 231).

Chua describes the 'irksome mutterings and anti-Malay/Muslim sentiments' which constitute the common attitude of the Bidayuh of Sarawak to the Malaysian state as a form of 'low-level resistance' (2007: 275). She concludes, however, that 'it would be injudicious to overstate the reactive character of Bidayuh (dis)engagements with this world', and that talking of it as resistance 'reifies 'the local' as the only plausible option of dealing with the situation' (2007: 275). As an alternative approach, she considers the way in which some Bidayuh deal with one of the aspects imposed by the Malaysian state, ethnic fixity, not by resisting it but by 'harnessing the fixed, *moden* [M. modern] categories with which they have initially been presented' (2007: 275).

As put into relief by the works of the authors I have considered, identity politics, and more precisely the definition of indigenous groups' identity in relation to national identity, is an essential locus of the relationship between the two.

The present research

The present research had two main components: a historical one, trying to reconstruct the processes at the basis of the formation of dominant discourses of collective belonging and of the establishment of the national and ethnic cultures, and an ethnographic one examining the ways in which present-day Kadazan living in a specific location generate and express their sense of belonging to different collective groups through what they do and what they say.

The first component consisted in researching academic and primarily historiographic, materials as well as various types of mediated texts, such as television and radio broadcasts, articles in magazines, literature, public speeches by politicians and authorities, but also in interviewing key media and political figures. Part of the historical research took place in the period preceding the fieldwork, during which I spent about 3 months in the state capital of Kota Kinabalu, taking an intensive course in Malay, the national language and local *lingua franca*. During my stay in the state capital I searched for historical and archival material about Sabah and the Kadazan in local libraries, archives and in the state museum, and collected information by interviewing members of local cultural associations and some radio producers

working for Radio Televisyen Malaysia (RTM) in order to obtain information about media history and present radio broadcast produced in Sabah. Staying in Kota Kinabalu also gave me the occasion to meet some Kadazan living in the city as well as some non-Kadazan Sabahans, giving me some insights into the cultural and social dynamics of the state capital, which provided a valid backdrop to the fieldwork carried out in the following period.

The second element of the research took place during a fieldwork period of 9 months, which I spent living with a Kadazan family in Kituau, a village in the Penampang district (see maps 1 and 2 in appendix 1). The research carried out during the fieldwork can be classified as ethnography, which I understand, following Brewer (2000), not as a particular method of data collection, but rather as a style of research involving various techniques and distinguished by its objectives. The 'critical minimum definition' of ethnography brought forward by O'Reilly also characterises it as 'iterative deductive research', by which she means that it evolves in design during the study, involving 'direct and sustained contact with human agents within the context of their daily lives', and producing an account that 'respects the irreducibility of human experience', and 'acknowledges the role of theory', the 'researcher's own role' and that 'views humans as part object/part subject' (2005: 3). A definition of ethnography that I feel aptly renders my views of it and my experience while carrying out the present research is the one given by Piasere (2002), who defines it as an 'experiment of experience', a voluntary extension of the ethnographer's own experience, implying an experiential eradication bringing the ethnographer from a known and familiar environment to another expected to become such with time.

Following O'Reilly's (2005: 211-17) considerations on the problem of how to obtain the trust of the readers and establish some form of, however contestable and partial, authority and credibility for the ethnographer, I follow her suggestion that they can be achieved by 'explaining one's methodological approach and describing one's method in full detail' (2005: 212). My method consisted mostly of participant observation, complemented by a limited amount of semi-structured interviewing. I did not record conversations outside interviews and generally did not take notes while interacting with people. Throughout all the research I availed myself of the help of two main 'gatekeepers': Jaunis, my host, a man in his early forties, and his sister-in-law, Augusta, in her mid-forties. These two gatekeepers, none of whom has a regular job, took me with them in their visits to other villagers and at times in their carrying

out of daily chores such as shopping at the market. They acted as informants but also as translators when needed.

Through them I met my main informants in a series of different occasions: drinking together in houses or at the village bar, visiting friends at their house, stopping for a drink and a chat at a coffee shop in the nearby town, shopping at the traditional weekly market (*tamu*), participating in prayer groups and attending the Sunday mass in the village church. Other essential occasions for meeting my informants were celebrations held for weddings, engagements, funerals and other life-cycle rituals as well as sessions of communal works. Counting the frequency with which these celebrations take place, I attended an average of one a week, and therefore these occasions were central to my research.

The bulk of my regular informants was constituted by the personal networks of these two very connected and social characters. The most important of them was the more or less regular group of friends of my host, formed by a core of about six men in their late thirties and early forties, meeting for a drink and a chat about twice a week, often in the house where I stayed. Other participants I relied on were a group of men in their forties and fifties going for a drink at the village bar almost every day after work and other middle-aged men I had many occasions to meet. Other, less regular informants were a group of elderly women meeting for a chat and for practising gong playing, a young male school teacher and various women who were friends or relatives of Augusta. Among the family with whom I lived, Jacobina, Jaunis' wife, mostly gave me insights into the views of dynamic, working women, as well as very explicitly formed opinions, and the children gave me the possibility to have an idea of the world of the school-age inhabitants of the village, an age group which, however, remained peripheral to my research. Finally, I regularly spent some time with Judeth, the woman working in the Sabah Museum who had helped me select my research location and find a family with whom to stay, and who also sometimes took me with her to see the performances of the cultural dance group she runs. As I have already mentioned, the various feasts and celebrations that I attended were an essential aspect of my research, and they expanded the range of my informants, sometimes including people living in other villages and parts of Sabah. To give a general overview, this study is mostly based on middle-aged and senior men, and especially from a limited group of them, but also, to a lesser extent, from working women in their thirties and forties and, to a very limited extent, from elderly women.



Figure 1 The author with his adoptive family posing in the traditional Kadazan costume.



Figure 2 A picture taken on occasion of a group interview with some of the senior residents of Kitauau.



Figure 3 The author with the main group of informants.

Reflexive considerations on the ethnographic research

I arrived in Kituau armed with a good deal of knowledge about the local culture derived from the reading of ethnographic accounts, almost no research experience, a very basic level of knowledge of Malay language, and a strong will to immerse myself in the way of life of the people I was researching. My first experiences in the 'field' led me to realise that people were suspicious of my presence, a fact that emerged in the difficulty I encountered in finding a family willing to host me. As I was explained by Judeth and Robin, the people helping me throughout my research, the villagers were reluctant to take me in their house as they felt *malu* ('ashamed', 'shy') of their standards of living, which they felt to be inferior to those of an *orang putih*, ('white man'). After finally finding a host family, my early walks around the village, aiming at getting to know the locals and achieving a comprehension and mastery over the geographic extension of the village, led me to the realisation that I could not just walk around and randomly encounter the villagers. This was because of two main facts: the privacy of the domestic space, which I discovered, to my surprise, to be accessible without prior arrangement only by those who know very well the

owner, and the fact that, another thing I had not considered, most of the residents are not in the village in the morning and early afternoon, as they are at work or school.

These early realisations, and the frustration deriving from them, led me to abandon the idea of carrying out an initial survey in all households and to resort to the help of my 'gatekeepers' to establish a relationship with the villagers. My research plan, therefore, adapted to the issue of accessibility by adopting what seemed the most appropriate solution to the characteristics of the locality: I took the personal networks of my two gatekeepers as my informants and abandoned the idea of gathering information from all the villagers or from a representative sample of them.

I therefore ended up concentrating mostly on middle-aged, and to a lesser extent elderly, people, a fact that provided a perspective that allowed me to look at social change, which was reflected in various narratives. This was partly an advantage, as my research came out to consider primarily the point of view of the groups that are most often left out by the majority of studies on social change, which tend to concentrate on the youth, the most dynamic and change-prone category. Another research strategy determined by the specific characteristics of the setting in which I found myself was that of concentrating on practices taking place during the time in which individuals were free from working commitments. This choice was also determined by issues of accessibility, as I did not have access to villagers during their working time, mostly spent in Kota Kinabalu or Donggonggon. As a result, I concentrated on the practices the villagers were involved in while not working, which mostly take place within the village, offering the added advantage of being able to engage in participant observation with more people at the same time. The fact, however, allowed me to have only a partial access to most of the participants' lives, as their working time remained mostly out of my reach.

My access to informants was also determined by my own characteristics, primarily gender: being male made socialisation with men easier and more likely, in a society in which peer groups tend to be gendered, although there were no cultural sanctions impeding me from interacting with women. My limited knowledge of Malay and total initial inability to speak the language regularly used by adults, Kadazan, also put great constraints on my research. While the great majority of the villagers speak English relatively well, which made it easy for me to communicate with most of them, communicating was more difficult with people who did not speak English, especially children and elderly women. While at times I solved the problem using my limited

Malay or through the help of somebody translating for me, I ended up relying mostly on the knowledge generated through interaction with those who could speak English. Moreover, the language barrier put me in the position of not understanding, or to do so to a limited extent towards the end of the fieldwork, ongoing conversations in Kadazan. My strategy to solve this limitation consisted in regularly asking some of those involved in the conversation in Kadazan to summarise in English what they had just said, which they gladly did, and to rely much on one-to-one conversations in English.

My approach to the ethnographic fieldwork, and my views about the way in which knowledge is, and should, be generated through it (see below) also influenced much of the course taken by the fieldwork and as a consequence, the results of the research. Because of my methodological position, lack of experience and inappropriate fit between my original theoretical agenda of studying the way in which the Kadazan were Malaysianised through the ideologies diffused by the national media, and the reality I encountered while doing the fieldwork, I soon ended up doing what Abramson (1993: 65) called ‘abandoning the field’, finding myself, like him, in a situation in which ‘fieldwork slipped its tight theoretical moorings’. While at times I felt, like Abramson, liberated, often the situation was a source of great concern and distress. Again like Abramson (1993: 66), as a result of the lack of coincidence between my theoretical premises and the reality I found, I ‘postponed the rational pursuit of knowledge’ and, being ‘theoretically liminal’, began to defer to my informants’ sense of what was appropriate. The first manifestation of this ‘abandonment of the field’ took the form of a partial change of method, as exemplified by the decision not to carry out the household survey.

Some ethical considerations are also necessary: after asking the approval of my informants, who seemed to be very happy to appear in the study of a foreign scholar, and considering the issues treated not to be particularly sensitive, I have decided not to change the names of the people and locations mentioned in this thesis. The only exception is constituted by my decision not to mention the name of those expressing their opinions in a discussion about the news described in chapter 4, as I considered it better not to identify the people expressing strongly critical views about the actions of the Chief Minister and other local politicians. On the other hand, as mentioned above, the deferral to my informants’ sense of what was appropriate possibly put me in the position to be able, through my account, to voice, at least to a certain extent, certain

issues they found important and that they have limited possibility to express outside the circle of village and coffee-shop conversations.

Methodological considerations: the generation of knowledge in ethnography

In agreement with Piasere (2002), I consider the aim of the ethnographic ‘experiment of experience’ to be the reaching of an ‘impregnation’ with the host community’s experiences, schemes, analogies and emotions, derived by the latent sitting of various observations in the unconscious of the ethnographer, which constitutes the deepest and most meaningful form of knowledge. The concept of ‘impregnation’ brought forward by Piasere is, similarly to the ‘feeling-thought’ proposed by Wikan (1992, cited in Piasere, 2002), a way of producing knowledge through the will and ability to connect with other people’s experiences and to take part in them, an ability which implies a mutual effort and an anti-utilitaristic human solidarity that unites people across cultural divides. Piasere’s view is also an elaboration of Olivier de Sardan’s (1995, cited in Piasere, 2002) notion of ‘knowing how (to do)’, a form of ethnographic competence that comes through intuition, improvisation and bricolage (1995, cited in Piasere, 2002: 157). In my case, I started as somebody without the necessary competences, the status usually shared by both children and outsiders, in terms of language, social and cultural skills, but also practical ones that are normal to those living in rural, tropical areas and who at least occasionally get involved in some manual work. My attempt to reach the ‘knowing how (to do)’ involved, among other things, learning how to eat and savour very different foods, including some ‘exotic delicacies’, appreciate certain types of actions, colours, smells, sounds, get involved in some form of manual labour such as cutting shrubs or making cement, adapt to a certain rhythm of life and style of social relationship.

Piasere defines the method aiming at reaching such goal as ‘perductive’, consisting in a ‘conscious or unconscious acquisition of cognitive-experiential schemata that resonate with already interiorised ones and is an acquisition [...] that takes place through a continuous interaction, a prolonged co-experiencing’ (2002: 56). He therefore qualifies the knowledge produced through ethnography as synthetic,

partially unconscious, even though it is generated in situations in which the ethnographer pays attention to the events taking place around him/her, based on the acquisition of a practical 'know-how', based on 'perduction', but also on induction and deduction. He also remarks that the acquisition of the 'know-how' as well as more generally the perductive method, take place within the context of schema already formed in the researcher, and are therefore made possible only by the researcher voluntarily putting him/herself in a cognitive and empathic disposition apt at grasping what is not previously known (2002: 166).

These ideas about the generation of knowledge within the ethnographic 'experiment of experience' resulted, for Piasere (1999, cited in 2002: 156) in the elaboration of a method he calls '*vivere-con*' ('living-with'), which considers 'life as a method' and which brought him to the point of even abandoning the use of tape-recorders and taking notes about events while they were taking place.

I share Piasere's position on the status of knowledge generated through ethnography, which, together with a notion of science as producing falsifiable conclusions derived from Popper (1968), leads me to consider the knowledge generated through ethnography as not scientific. This premise makes discussion about criteria, such as those of representativeness, validity and reliability, on how to judge the result of research inapplicable to ethnographic writings, as the knowledge they present is too connected to the unique act of its creation and to the characteristics and aims of the researcher. Rather than looking for objective criteria on which to judge the results of my ethnography I would, following Brewer (2000: 51), ask my readers to apply 'ethnographic imagination', a sort of 'imaginative leap', consisting in judging ethnographic data with openness, accepting as reliable descriptions that, however partial and inadequate to capture the whole of reality, are reflexive, and accepting that observation on the micro level can 'illustrate features of broader social processes' (200:53) and that interpretations of what individuals believe about the social can lead to understanding of the social itself (2000: 53).

Thesis outline

The next chapter situates this research within the context of ethnographic studies of the Kadazan and related peoples of Sabah and of other parts of Borneo. It shows how the approaches used within traditional ethnographic accounts were mostly preoccupied with social structure and with problems of classification of ethnic groups. This literature took into account neither issues of identity nor the relationship between the peoples studied and the states of which they were citizens. I am therefore arguing for the need to apply a national framework in order to be able to look at these issues. I then present accounts about ethnicity in Malaysia, describing how the present Malaysian multi-ethnic system was created by the administrative and political needs of dividing the population into discrete entities, and that it was devised by the British and subsequently adopted and firmly established by the Malaysian state. I also apply analyses of the status of indigenous peoples of Borneo and other parts of island South-East Asia to the situation of the Kadazan, describing the ‘economy of meaning’ (Wenger, 1998: 198-200) within which they attribute meaning to different collective forms of identification.

Chapter 3 delineates the historical trajectories of the two most important contrasting cultural projects, the Kadazan and Malaysian. Through an analysis of media production and other cultural initiatives from the 1950s to present day, the chapter reconstructs the creation and development of cultural material, symbols and ideologies that have established themselves as the essential building blocks of ethnic and national identification. The analysis of the two ‘life histories’ highlights the development of a Kadazan cultural project, based on the attempt to salvage tradition, expressed by a set of objectified cultural traits and customs, while modernising it to adjust it to the needs of Christianity and of life in a modern state, and its subsequent marginalisation after the creation of Malaysia. The period following the formation of Malaysia has been characterised by the hegemony of state-controlled mass media such as radio and television, within which the voices of minorities such as the Kadazan have been marginalised or muted.

Chapter 4 looks at one of the main subjects of the historical analysis of the previous chapter, the state, and attempts to define the extent to which it has become a source of identity in the present day and the way in which it has done so through the analysis of episodes showing the reaction of Kadazan villagers to the development

propaganda and the discourses present in the media. The discussion demonstrates that Malaysia has indeed materialised among the Kadazan through the involvement in the national educational and political system and mediascape but also that the government propaganda is rejected on the basis of its perceived Malayising agenda. Moreover, consumption practices, and the media messages encouraging them, on the one hand constitute a national community of consumers, but on the other encourage identification with a global consumer culture and of novel practices and subjectivities.

Chapter 5 looks at the formation and display of a form of identification alternative to the national one, the belonging to the village, within leisure practices, both constituted by the regular meetings of peer groups and by festive events. The analysis of practices reveals the presence of a powerful and widely spread local ideology, positing the village as the central point of reference for its inhabitants' sense of belonging and as the locus of a traditionalist 'way of life', based on cooperation, sharing and egalitarian principles, and rejecting the modern, multi-ethnic urban world from which the majority of the villagers derive their livelihood. This ideology defines the village as Kadazan and Christian, determining a rootedness in everyday life of ethnic identity as well as a general rejection of government-led nationalist propaganda and of its policies.

Chapter 6 presents an anthropological analysis of the annual Harvest Festival (*Pesta Kaamatan*) focusing on two main celebrations, one organised by the Malaysian federal authorities and one by the most important local cultural association, both of which took place in May 2006. The chapter argues that the celebrations, and the ethnic symbolic markers they display, most of which can be considered 'invented traditions' elaborated from the selection of objectified traditional elements, constitute a primary site of struggle between the state and the Kadazan over the definition of the role the ethnic culture should play in the national culture. While the federal government used the celebration, and its televised broadcast, to advance its project of creating a national culture and identity going beyond ethnic differences, the ethnic elites used the celebration to re-affirm the centrality of certain ethnic cultural traits and the right of the minority to their own cultural specificity, following an established tradition of 'ethno-nationalism'. Many ordinary Kadazan rejected the appropriation and instrumentalisation of their ethnic culture by both the federal and ethnic elites, and its commodification by commercial sponsors, contrasting them with a 'lived culture', constituted by the festive and everyday practices carried out within their villages.

Chapter 7 starts from the description of a significant event, a demonstration organised against the planned relocation of squatters in an area near where I carried out my fieldwork, to analyse the deeper meaning of a widespread opposition to the presence of illegal immigrants, with whom the squatters were identified. By considering the press rhetoric, which has become deeply internalised by the people of Sabah, implicitly equating immigrants with crime, I follow Hall *et al.* (1978) in their analysis of public opinion about crime as expressing widely held and mostly unquestioned presupposition about a society, and as considering crime as the antithesis of a normal 'way of life'. The opposition with its Other, represented by the immigrants, immediately defines the Self as Malaysian, but only in a legalistic way, whose value is limited by the widespread consideration that the government actually encourages immigration, to the damage of its citizens, as a strategy of its Malayising agenda. The present condition, in which immigrants have come to constitute a third of Sabah's population, therefore qualifies the rejection of the immigrants as a rejection of the state's agenda and of the marginal condition of non-Muslim indigenous peoples, an opposition that expresses itself at the cultural and religious levels through a strong attachment to Kadazan-ness, the village ideology described in chapter 5, and to Christianity. Illegal immigration, however, contributes, together with other elements, to make Sabah a borderland, different from the rest of Malaysia. The consciousness of this borderland status, and the experience of conditions of life unique to it, often expressed through a discourse of racial harmony opposed to the perceived intolerance of the Peninsula, constitutes the basis for people's identification as Sabahan.

Chapter 2

Situating the Kadazan

This chapter situates this thesis within the field of anthropological and ethnographic studies of Borneo, Malaysia and island South-East Asia. My consideration of the literature starts from the outline of the main ethnographic writings about the Kadazan and the wider population group to which they belong. These works (see below) adopted a structural-functionalist perspective and dealt with the themes dominating the wider field of ethnographic studies of Borneo in the period between the 1950s and the 1970s. The preoccupation with the social structure of clearly defined indigenous groups characterising the approach, however, channelled the attention of the anthropologists away from considerations about social change and about the relationship between the indigenous peoples and the state. The Bornean framework used in these studies had the great advantage of allowing comparison between societies in terms of specific social forms such as, for example, household structure or social stratification, using the heuristic device of positing a Bornean type of society with certain characterising features (King, 1994 [1978]). In order to be able to understand the modern conditions, which is to a great extent dominated by national institutions, policies and agendas, in which the Kadazan live at present, however, I am arguing, in agreement with Postill (2006: 44) for the need to apply a Malaysian frame of reference.

The other limitation of most traditional ethnographic studies of Borneo is that they did not pay any attention to identity. The issue started being considered in the context of debates about ethnicity, which in Borneo were triggered by the empirical observations showing the complexity of the phenomenon and the inadequacy of traditional models of bounded groups. The empirical problems of studying ethnicity led to the realisation that ethnicity was not a natural property of groups, but was a reification expressing and influencing relationships between people and groups and that it was modified, at least to a certain extent, in the process of being practically used.

The last part of the chapter looks at the way in which ethnic categories, which are labels used in the process of 'social categorisation' (Jenkins, 2008), emerged out of

colonial practices of classification mostly aimed at defining bounded groups for the purpose of administration (King and Wilder, 2003; Chatterjee, 2004). While these categories later became the basis of the official classification of the Malaysian state, they also slowly became internalised by the Malaysian citizens (Shamsul, 1998), who started using them as forms of self-identification and categorisation in their everyday life. In the final part of the chapter, I look at some empirical examples described in the ethnographic literature (Nagata, 1974; Boulanger, 2000, 2002; Chua, 2007) describing the way in which these categories are used and made meaningful by individuals in their everyday life, and how their political and personal significance is produced and reproduced through processes of ascription and appropriation.

The Kadazan and the Dusunic peoples

The Kadazan of the Penampang district, also known as *Tanga'ah* (in their own language) or *Tangara* (in neighbouring dialects), are a subgroup of a wider population, labelled Dusun, Kadazan and Kadazandusun⁴ in different periods (see below and chapter 3), and which I will refer to as Dusunic peoples. The Dusunic peoples constitute 17.5% of the state population numbering 527,660 individuals⁵ (Malaysian Department of Statistics, 2005, cited in Leete, 2007), spread throughout Sabah, with a higher concentration in the area of the west coast. They are divided into subgroups differentiated by dialect, traditional customary law (*adat*) and other cultural traits such as festive dress and forms of dance.

The Dusunic groups were egalitarian, cognatic societies whose subsistence was traditionally based on rice cultivation supplemented by rearing domestic animals, hunting, river fishing and collecting edible and non-edible forest products. Rice was cultivated through a swidden technique in areas of forest cleared by slash-and-burn on the hills and, in Penampang and other plains of the west coast area, through wet technique, in individually-owned fields, surrounded by muddy banks and irrigated through a system of dykes and aqueducts. The traditional form of residence of the Dusunic peoples was the longhouse, but, differently from other Bornean peoples, they

⁴ For a detailed discussion of the issue see the next chapter. I opt here for the expression 'Dusunic peoples', favouring classification based on linguistic elements, to refer to the complex of peoples identified by the various names 'Dusun', 'Kadazan' and 'Kadazandusun'

⁵ Here I give the number of people listed under the census category Kadazandusun in 2005.

had mostly shifted to single-family residence already in the 1920s according to Rutter (1985 [1929]). An exception is constituted by the Rungus Dusun, who have retained longhouse residence to a certain extent until the 1980s and still do in a few cases. The major social groupings among the Dusunic peoples were the domestic family and the village⁶ and, where present, the longhouse. There was no political unit beyond the village, and the decisions affecting it were made in gatherings attended by all adult males. This assembly, within which an informal council of elders was particularly influential, also chose the primary political figure of the village, the headman, whose role was to settle disputes and claims through the application of *adat*, of which he had to be an expert (Glyn-Jones, 1953). Everyday life was regulated by *adat*, which consisted of a corpus of customary laws passed orally from generation to generation that, together with religion, ‘sanctioned, legitimised and regulated social relations and behaviour’ (Ranjit Singh, 2003: 34). The prescriptions of *adat* dealt with relationships between individuals and individuals and the village, including incest prohibitions, rules for marriages and inheritance regulations. The regulations of *adat* were integrated in the traditional religion and spiritual beliefs, according to which improper behaviour would create a state of spiritual heat, *ahasu*, which was dangerous and which had to be ‘cooled’ down by paying an appropriate compensation, the *sogit* (‘cooling’) to the aggrieved party, usually an animal to be sacrificed during a ritual feast in which the whole village participated. The Dusunic people had a class of ritual specialists, the *bobohizan* (in Penampang, *bobolian* in other areas), usually female, but in some areas also male (see Williams, 1965), who carried out the rituals connected with the traditional religion, including ceremonies to propitiate the spirits, calling the spirits of the deceased to ask them questions, curing sickness through shamanic healing rituals, interpreting dreams and omens. The most important ceremonies carried out by the *bobohizan* were those connected with the key moments of the growth cycle of rice, especially at harvest (Glyn-Jones, 1953).

⁶ It must be noted that Rutter (1985 [1929]), in apparent contrast to the other authors, did not mention the village, and described the longhouse, or a cluster of neighbouring ones, as the basic political unit provided with a headman. This difference could be attributed to the fact that many of Rutter’s descriptions are about a general ‘pagan’ way of life, which he mostly modelled on the Rundum Murut, a non-Dusunic people of Sabah.

Ethnographic writings about Dusunic peoples

The earliest ethnographic accounts about Dusunic peoples were written in the second half of the 19th century, often being situated within more general descriptions of the areas, from geographic or naturalistic points of view. Two authors stand in this early period for their more detailed description of the customs and way of life of the indigenous peoples of Sabah, Owen Rutter (1922, 1929) and I.H.N. Evans (1922, 1953). Both of them were colonial administrators working for the British North Borneo Chartered Company⁷ and not trained in anthropology. Their works are interesting for their detailed description of the *adat* of various Dusunic groupings from various districts, which allow us to appreciate differences and commonalities between them.

A later generation of ethnographic accounts started with Monica Glyn-Jones' *The Dusun of the Penampang Plains* (1953). Based on fieldwork carried out between 1949 and 1951 in the Penampang district, this research was commissioned by the Colonial Social Science Research Council, sponsoring many studies done in various parts of Borneo, among which are the famous and influential ones by Leach (1950) and Freeman (1970 [1955]). Glyn-Jones (1953) had a pragmatic approach, focusing mostly on economics and land tenure, which might have derived from the interests of the commissioning body or from the perceived need to generate knowledge that could be useful in improving the situation of the people studied.

The main ethnographic descriptions belonging to the period, all produced by professional anthropologists, include the collection *The Dusun* by Williams (1965) describing the Tambunan Dusun generally, but paying special attention to religion, child-rearing and psychological aspects, the unpublished thesis *An Analysis of Variation Among Ranau Dusun Communities of Sabah, Malaysia* by Harrison (1974 [1971]) and the early works by George Appell (1967, 1968, 1983, 1994 [1978]), the most prolific author writing about Dusunic peoples. The works of Harrison and Appell⁸ can be placed in the tradition of the main interests dominating anthropological

⁷ The North Borneo Chartered Company, a private company controlling present-day Sabah through a British Royal Charter between 1881 and 1943.

⁸ More recent works by George Appell have considered different issues, including consequences of development on health (1986) sexuality among the Rungus (1991), and the consequences of conversion to Christianity (1997).

writings about South-east Asia, and more specifically Borneo, in the late 1960s and 1970s. As remarked by King (1994 [1978]: 8), most scholars of Borneo 'have assessed at least some of their findings in relation to Freeman's observations on such features of Iban society as the *bilek-family* (or household), the kindred and the longhouse. The work of both authors, like those of others writing ethnographies of Bornean peoples, dealt with the description and analysis of the social structure and relationships within cognatic societies, attempting to elaborate a model to properly account for the characteristic features of this type of societies (see below).

Glyn-Jones and Penampang in the colonial times

Glyn-Jones's account (1953) concentrates on the Kadazan, which she referred to, according to the colonial usage, as 'Penampang Dusun', providing details about some of their unique characteristics as well as a description of the situation of the area in which I carried out my fieldwork at the beginning of the 1950s, not long after what is today Sabah had become the Crown Colony of North Borneo.

In the late 1940s and early 1950s, the main economic activity was the cultivation of wet rice, which was harvested 5 or 6 months after planting, while the remaining time was traditionally occupied by cultivating other crops - garden vegetables, sweet potatoes, betel nut and coconut palms - hunting, fishing, collecting forest products or carrying out various other activities, including being employed in salaried labour. The villagers also raised animals such as pigs and chicken, and buffaloes, which were used to work in the rice fields, especially for ploughing. The buffalo was also a traditional form of wealth, necessary for *berian*, the traditional bride price paid to the parents of the woman to be married among the Dusunic peoples, and was killed to hold feasts in particular occasions. Since its diffusion in the 1920s, tapping rubber had also become an increasingly important and profitable activity.

Land, apart from the common areas on which villages were built, was traditionally privately owned, officially by individuals but practically by households, and was inherited, according to the local *adat*, only by sons, the eldest receiving two shares. Although the majority of rice farmers owned at least part of the land they cultivated, there were considerable differences in the size of the holdings and some were even landless. However much land they owned, most families worked an area that they

could manage without outside help, although *mitatabang*, the exchange of labour between members of a group formed for that purpose, was practised by all families, especially at the time of harvest. The development of rubber plantations exaggerated the differences between rich and poor, as land was granted by the government only to those who theoretically had time to tap it, therefore excluding those who worked for a salary in other people's lands. As a result a class of landowners living by renting their land and one of salaried rubber-tappers started emerging while a few people, mostly landless, started counting on salaried labour for their subsistence.

The main changes brought by colonialism described by Glyn-Jones include the establishment of a local administrative system, the building of infrastructure and the conversion to Christianity. The first catholic missionaries started converting people at the end of the 19th century and, according to Glyn-Jones, nearly half of the Kadazan of the Penampang plains were nominally Catholic by the 1950s, although a great deal of syncretism was present, with the identification of the Christian God with the Kadazan Supreme Being, the belief in spirits, and the continuation of various 'pagan' practices, such as divination, the belief in omens, the interpretation of dreams, and the use of a 30-days calendar divided in 'good' and 'bad' days. While traditionally there were a few *bobohizan* in each village, the training of new initiates had ceased in most cases by the 1950s because of the diffusion of Christianity, even though at least one of them was still present in most villages.

According to Glyn-Jones (1953), the power of the headman was greater in the least educated villages, but in general he was not seen as being in any way part of the government, which was seen as a remote 'them', chiefly represented by the District Office 'where taxes are paid and cases heard in the courts, and where many forms are filled in' (1953: 111). The general attitude towards the official power was summarised by a phrase by a Sino-Dusun reported by Glyn-Jones: 'We are like children, the Government is our Father. If we do wrong, it is proper that we should be punished, but we must be told why we are wrong, so that we may not do it again' (1953: 111-112). The power of the headman became, in many villages, overtaken by that of the police, deriving their authority from being seen as representatives of the Magistrates' Court.

According to Glyn-Jones' (1953) account, before colonisation all contact between Penampang and the outside world was by sea and all local transport and communication took traditionally place by river or in land, either on foot or riding

buffaloes, but the situation changed with the establishment of a rail connection with the capital, calling at the station of Putatan, on the coast, in 1905 and of a road, from Jesselton (Kota Kinabalu) to the Putatan (Moyog) river in 1932. The construction of the road shifted the centre of the district from the village of Inonbong to the place where it ended, where a village, 'Penampang proper', was established with the District Office, the main church and the Mission School, as well as a police station and Government rice stores. The road was mostly used by public transport such as buses and taxis as well as by lorries, while private transport initially remained mostly by river in the plains.

The first school, run by the mission of the Mill Hill Fathers, opened at Inobong in 1896, substituted then by another one opened at Dabak in 1898, the famous St. Michael. Thanks to the Catholic Mission School, Penampang was the most educated rural area during the colonial times, with 470 boys and 230 girls attending school in 1951. Children started schooling at the age of 7, or even 9 or 10 if they lived very far from the school, and, while few of the boys at St. Michaels stayed long enough to complete primary education, most learned to read and write in their language, as education was in Kadazan in the first 3 classes and then mostly in English. Secondary schooling began in Penampang in 1949 (Glyn-Jones, 1953).

Glyn-Jones (1953) argued that the introduction of school, whose teachings many pupils had not time to assimilate as they left it too soon, encouraged many of them to develop a sense of superiority towards their illiterate parents, which led them to question traditional authority, and made them grow a series of new expectations and desires for consumer goods such as a bicycle or smart clothes. She concluded her study by arguing that the Dusun, being in 'a difficult stage of transition from primitive culture to Western civilisation', needed 'not merely scholastic education and material improvements but a determined fight to restore the people's own faith in themselves – their pride in being Dusun' (1953: 113).

Glyn-Jones's (1953) account is particularly interesting in the way in which it describes the changes that were taking place in the Penampang district in the post-war period as a consequence of the increasing integration of the area in the colonial state. The most important of these changes were the erosion of the authority of the traditional village institutions, the headman and the *bobohizan*, as well as the growing importance of two elements that were to prove fundamental in the following period

and in the relationship between the Kadazan and the post-colonial state: formal education and Christianity.

Appell and Harrison: social structure

The works of Harrison (1974) and Appell (1967, 1968, 1983, 1994 [1978]) share a common interest in the description and analysis of the social structure of, respectively, the Ranau Dusun and the Rungus Dusun of the Kudat district. Both authors looked at the societies they studied as examples of cognatic or bilateral societies - those in which kinship ties are traced equally through the maternal and paternal sides – and connected some of their characteristics with this particular descent system, as previously done by Leach (1950) and George Murdock (1960). Starting from these premises, Harrison denied the applicability of models derived from the study of unilineal descent systems, such as descent or alliance theories, arguing that in cognatic societies membership in groups does not depend on consanguineal ties (1974: 56). Both authors described residence rather than kinship as the relevant criterion for ascribing membership to any social group and for enjoying rights of access to common resources. They also stressed the fact that the consanguineal ties that existed did not produce any actual social group, such as the kindred, but they remained, at the most, simple social categories, and the only social group based on such links was the family. Appell (1967) has also attempted to define observational procedures to define kindreds, concluding that the Rungus do not have such a concept and, in later papers, has given a tentative ethnic classification of Dusunic peoples derived from linguistics (1968) and examined concepts such as ‘corporation’ and ‘corporate social grouping’ (1983).

Both authors identified the main social groupings of the societies they studied to be the domestic family and the village, which they also referred to as ‘community’, together with the longhouse in the case of the Rungus. Both authors described in very similar ways, and with a similarly Freeman-influenced terminology, the domestic family as ‘the only production, consumption and asset-accumulating social isolate’ and ‘the most important corporate entity in the economic, jural and ritual realms’ (Appell, 1994 [1978]: 188). Appell (1994 [1978]) defined the family as a social unit usually formed by a married couple and their unmarried children and residing together in a longhouse apartment with a life cycle starting when a newly married couple takes

separate residence and terminating when they move with the domestic family of a married child and all the family assets are divided. Harrison (1974) described the family as responsible for all its dealings with the administration, other villages and any other entity, and directly subordinated to the 'community' only in swidden villages where, the property of land being common, each decision made by the majority was binding upon all the members. It was also the main unit for accumulating assets by converting agricultural surplus into traditional forms of wealth (buffaloes, jars, brass gongs and cannons), or, more recently, cash, necessary to pay bride price and ritual fees (Appell, 1994 [1978], Harrison, 1974).

Both authors defined the village as the fundamental political unit and 'jurally and ritually corporate unit'. Appell (1994 [1978]: 210) however noted that its rights and duties were less developed than those of the domestic family. Harrison (1974) defined the village, as the 'residence and agricultural unit controlled by one headman'. A central organisation belonging to the village level was the *tabang*. The 'community' was, at some level, 'a labour aggregating mechanism and a subsistence unit', and the same values supported, through the institution of marriage, the family and the village at the same time (Harrison, 1974). Appell (1994 [1978]) described how the village, formed by one or more longhouses, held what he called 'residual rights' over the land within the surrounding area, where domestic families residing in the village could carry out cultivation or, in the case of forest reserves, gather natural products, but where families from other villages could do so only if granted permission by the headman. Appell (1994 [1978]) also considered the status of the longhouse, absent among the Ranau Dusun, whose members had no form of corporate action in the economic sphere, but had forms of 'collective' action in the ritual realm, in which the rights to ask for compensation for a ritually dangerous act were held by each member family individually, nevertheless action could be taken by a member on behalf of all the others. Harrison (1974 [1971]) described the village as the lowest order of ascription for the Ranau Dusun, followed by that of the area, indicated by a monolexic indicator, such as Bundu, based on the dialect spoken, the form of cultivation and common *adat*; and finally that of the larger area, usually corresponding to the district, as for example Ranau or Penampang, which he considered as a group whose basis for identification was the reaction to a commonly shared, complex political structure.

An element of analysis that partially differentiates the work of Harrison (1974) from those of other coeval Borneo scholars is the consideration of differences between villages determined by the agricultural technique practised - swidden, wet rice or cash crop. Harrison (1974) considered a developmental framework in which the adoption of a different form of agriculture initiated a series of processes that caused further changes. He also considered the effect of the establishment of an external administrative control over the area from about 1920 onwards, which had various practical effects on the subsistence of communities through the application of various policies and the establishment of Administrative Centres by the Chartered Company, which were followed by Chinese shops. The work of external forces acted also in more direct ways: after entering in contact with them, communities became more and more dependent on shops, schools and wage employment. Shops offered the villagers living nearby the possibility to optimise the output of their crops. Wage employment on the one hand lessened the families' dependence on customary subsistence goods and on the traditional social patterns utilised to produce and acquire them, while on the other it modified people's behaviour in order to adjust to it and created 'a new metaphor for labour relations which can be utilised within the village to avoid over-committing oneself to reciprocal labour organisations' (Harrison, 1974: 530). Nevertheless, it must be noted that the change described by Harrison was mostly synchronic rather than diachronic, as it mostly took the form of differences between villages at the same time, while the description of diachronic processes, such as those deriving from the influences of the administration and of changes in the economy were relatively limited.

The description of the way in which the village constituted the essential unit at the political level and at that of enforcements of the prescriptions and sanctions of *adat* provided by the accounts of Appell (1967, 1968, 1983, 1994 [1978]) and Harrison (1974 [1971]) provides the foundation for situating the ethnographic part of the present research in a village context. While I follow the insights of previous anthropologists in considering the village a relevant unit, I am not considering it to be bounded, but only as a context within which to empirically situate an enquiry that looks at the interconnection and interrelation of processes taking place at different levels.

The issue of ethnicity in the Bornean and Malaysian context

Anthropological studies of Borneo and, more generally, of South-East Asia, have found particular difficulties in defining ethnic units (King and Wilder, 2003). King (1982) argued that, while the assumption of a correspondence between a certain sets of cultural traits, especially language, and a 'society' might be appropriate in certain cases, it is inadequate for many peoples of Borneo. While some anthropologists reacted to that realisation by concentrating on self-identity and 'folk' models of ethnicity, this solution also presents some problems when applied in Borneo (King, 1982; and more generally, see Jenkins, 2008 and chapter 1). This is due to the continuous processes of cultural exchange taking place within neighbouring groups, involving the adoption of various cultural traits, forms of subsistence, language and religion. The latter, in particular, is a very important means of ethnic change, as people adopting Islam become assimilated to Malays and usually considered as such even if they retain some or many of their original cultural elements. Another problem, discussed by King through the analysis of his ethnographic material on the people of Western Kalimantan he labels as 'Maloh', is constituted by the fact that those that are considered or consider themselves as ethnic groups are often heterogeneous and that boundaries are often not sharply defined, which leads him to conclude that 'society and culture are the consequence of complex multi-dimensional processes' (1982: 30). Moreover, self-identities are often formulated in opposition to other people and, as remarked by Rousseau (1975), people using categories to define themselves might not be able to list the defining features of the ethnicity to which they ascribe themselves.

In a later paper, King defines folk taxonomies of Borneo as comprising 'overlapping yet often conflicting sets of ethnic categories, labels and defining criteria, [which] constitute indigenous attempts to comprehend and bring order to complex and dynamic local social and cultural relations' (2001: 3-4). These taxonomies, he argues, are usually extended to a broader context in a piecemeal way. On the basis of these considerations, King (2001) argues for the need to study the dynamics of ethnic identity and nomenclature in the context of a social system or of the complex of social relationships taking place within a region rather than concentrating on single defined and autonomous ethnic groups.

The problem of ethnic labelling is particularly relevant in regards to the Dusunic peoples, described by Dunn as 'a congeries of separate, named groups speaking

closely related languages but differing with respect to social and cultural usage' (1981: 29). These peoples were referred to by the exonym Dusun (*Orang Dusun*, means 'people of the orchards' in Malay) by the Muslim neighbours, in particular the Brunei Malays (see Evans, 1990 [1922]; Rutter, 1985 [1929]), during pre-colonial times. The label was used also by the British colonialists for all purposes, including census, and in ethnographic accounts, such as that of Evans, who in 1922, stated that 'The Dusun are not a single tribe, but an assemblage of tribes, or rather the appellation embraces large numbers of village communities' (1990: 35). The term Dusun was therefore what Jenkins (2008) calls a form of 'social categorisation' generated in the context of the attribution of exonyms by neighbouring peoples and then by the colonial administration. The members of the group, on the other hand, did not use the term Dusun to refer to themselves, and in fact they had no name for the overall group, but referred to themselves only through river-based autonyms.

From the linguistic point of view, these peoples speak languages that belong to two families: the Dusunic and Paitanic. The Dusunic family, by far the larger of the two, being distributed in almost all regions of Sabah, is considered by linguists to be formed by a chain of dialects which become less and less mutually intelligible with the increase in geographic distance (Annual Report of Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1980: 1-2, cited in Ranjit Singh, 2003: 13).

In the 1950s, however, in the climate of politicisation and growth of ethnic awareness inspired by the prospect of a possible independence in the near future (see chapter 3), the leaders of the Dusunic peoples established the autonym Kadazan, traditionally a label used to refer to the subgroups of the Penampang and Papar districts, as the official label for the whole of the Dusunic peoples. The term has been used officially until the 1980s, when the dissatisfaction with its connection with the people of a certain area, led to the elaboration of the compromise term Kadazandusun (KD), still officially in use.

The history of the elaboration of a label for the Dusunic peoples shows a typical example of the problems connected with ethnic naming in Borneo in the shift from an ethnically unconscious position, in which people define themselves at a local level and are categorised by neighbouring peoples through the use of an exonym, to the acquiring of political significance of a more inclusive ethnic label. The new label established itself as an official categorisation but also, at least partially, as a form of group and individual self-identification, and it was instrumental in the generation of a

sense of common identity turning an ethnic category into a politically significant 'community of alignment' (Wenger, 1998), acting as a group with common goals in the political arena. The adoption of the name Kadazan is, like the establishment of the category Dayak (King, 2001), an example of the recent creation of broader ethnic identities as an aspect of political and economic change.

The consideration of ethnicity in the context of Borneo, however, can only take the enquiry this far: as politics takes place at the national and, to some extent, the sub-national level a proper understanding of the political significance of the usage of ethnic labels and of the drawing of boundaries can be reached only by widening the frame of analysis to Malaysian and Sabahan society.

The development of the Malaysian ethnic system

While anthropologists dealing with Borneo concentrated on ethnographic descriptions of 'tribal' peoples, the study of metropolitan colonial societies was carried out by social scientists and administrators applying a wider-scale analysis. The most influential early model used to describe Malaysian society was that of the 'plural society', elaborated by a British scholar and administrator, Furnivall, (1939, 1956, cited in King and Wilder, 2003) to describe colonial Burma [Myanmar] and Dutch East Indies [Indonesia]. He considered the members of various 'races' as constituting 'economic castes', serving different functions within the society and interacting among each other only in the marketplace, while in every other context, such as family and religion, the relationships were only intra-ethnic.

The model was revised and applied to Malaysia by Judith Nagata (1979), who attempted to join the 'ethnic' and 'class paradigm' by contrasting 'objective' distinctions, constituted by emerging class relationship that cut across ethnic boundaries, with subjective ones, based on ethnic, religious and other traditional differences. She described how the three main ethnic groups present in the Peninsula – the Malay, Chinese and Indian - had their own different status systems as well as different perceptions of the overall Malaysian social structure. As a consequence, inequality was not perceived in class terms but in individualised terms within patron-client and ethnic relationships (1979: 127).

Building on models of ethnicity like that proposed by Nagata (1974, 1979), and in line with a constructivist and post-colonial approach dominant in contemporary anthropology, a later generation of scholars have focused their enquiry on the process through which ethnic identities have been and are created. Most contemporary scholars seem to agree that the ‘racial communities’ that constitute modern Malaysia and Singapore have been constructed by colonial and subsequently nationalist discourse (Kahn, 2006: 1). One of the most influential Malaysian scholars within this literature is Shamsul (1996, 1998), who locates the origin of the present ethnicisation of discourses in Malaysia in the collection of information – in the form of censuses, maps and ethnographic accounts – carried out by the British during colonial times, which resulted in what Cohn (1996, cited in Shamsul, 1998) called the ‘colonisation of epistemological space’ and Dirks (2001, cited in Chatterjee, 2004: 37) the ‘ethnographic state’. The categories so established were necessary for various technologies of governmentality (Chatterjee, 2004: 36), policies and bodies targeted at specific racial groups, which determined the consolidation of these categories. In terms of ethnicity these classificatory efforts determined a simplification that brought a multitude of ethnic groupings together into a limited number of major categories, defined by stereotyped characteristics that, however, obscured intra-ethnic divisions between, for instance, those characterised as Chinese, Indian, Malay or Dayak (King and Wilder, 2003: 203). These data-gathering efforts found their scholarly avenues in the sociological model of the ‘plural society’ as well as in the ethnographic descriptions of the early explorers, missionaries and administrators writing about the customs of ‘tribal peoples’. The structural-functionalist approach of the early professional anthropologists (e.g. Leach, 1950; Glyn-Jones (1953); Freeman, 1970 [1950]; Appell, 1968; Harrison, 1974 [1971]) can also be situated within this mapping enterprise, even though they aimed at answering questions that arose from the theoretical developments of their own discipline.

Nagata (1975) described how a ‘plural society’ was created by the British in the colonies that were to become Malaysia through the establishment of an ethnic division of labour, an ideology of racial, ‘innate’ differences and a system of economic and administrative division and indirect rule in which the colonisers were the ultimate inter-ethnic arbiters. A similar process is described by PuruShotam (1998) for Singapore, where an extremely diverse population was circumscribed into four discrete racial groups on the basis of an ‘orientalist’ classificatory system constructed

by, mostly British, ‘experts’, and this arbitrary system was over time internalised by Singaporeans.

As argued by Shamsul (1998), over time, partly thanks to the division generated by separated education in vernacular for different ethnic groups, these categories became meaningful to the social actors, a process that involved the transformation of a mostly ‘nominal’ category (Jenkins, 2008) into a form of collective identification and belonging. King and Wilder (2003: 203), on the other hand, argue that the cultural differences fully crystallised into ‘macro-level ethnic categories’, the *bangsa*⁹, only relatively recently, within the climate of politicisation of ethnicity and emergence of political organisations that took place in the two decades before the Second World War, a process I will describe in detail for Sabah in chapter 3.

The process of ethnicisation described by previous authors and its present ubiquitous effects seem to confirm Banks’ argument that ‘the manifestations of ethnicity we study today contain within them the ghosts of previous academic formulations’ (1996: 189) and that the concept has ‘escaped academia and spread into the outside world’. In this line, Dentan (1976) has argued that the concept of ethnicity was alien to South-East Asian peoples and that it was a concept derived from Euro-American racism and nationalism exported to the area by colonialists and scholars. He considered applying it to the South-east Asian context to be a sort of Procrustean act, moreover one that has negative ethical implications for the way it can be used by interested parties.

The fact that the present ethnic system is a product of colonial and postcolonial practices, including scholarly models, however, should not lead into overlooking the relevance it has for people and the way in which ethnic groups are perceived as being real and based on real differences. It is important to consider that, as stressed by Kahn (1993), while all the practices and cultural traits that are conceived as traditions are created in social and historical contexts, they are experienced as authentic or ‘real’ by those who practice and carry them, and they are not simply the creations of outsiders, but also of the active contributions of the locals.

As I will demonstrate in the next chapters in relation to the Sabahan context, ethnicity has become such a powerful discourse in Malaysia that its citizens, Kadazan included, have learnt to express in an ethnic idiom a whole series of constituent

⁹ *Bangsa* is a Malay term that can be translated as ‘race’, ‘ethnic group’, or ‘nation’ and constitutes the term through which the concept of ‘ethnic group’ is usually expressed in Malaysia.

elements of their identity connected with familiarity, locality, tradition that are not necessarily connected with belonging to a certain ethnic group.

The everyday usage of ethnicity in contemporary Malaysia

Nagata (1974) analysed the situational use of ethnic categories made by Malaysians, arguing ethnic groups to be 'special kinds of reference groups, the invocation of which may vary according to particular factors of the broader social situation, rather than a fixed anchorage to which the individual is unambiguously bound', noting that the same cultural features could be used in certain occasions to express differences and in others to express commonality of membership (1974: 333). She also argued that some individuals may oscillate rather freely from one ethnic reference group to another, without becoming involved in role conflict or marginality, that certain cultural items and behaviours are not uniquely and inalienably attached to a certain ethnic group, but can be manipulated according to the choice of reference group; that in some cases ethnic bonds can be subordinated to other linkages, such as common religion, and finally that there is no perfect correlation between census categories of ethnicity and actual social usage of ethnic categories (1974: 333).

She found ethnic categories to be the most relevant form of self-ascription for Malaysians, whom she described as, first and foremost, members of their 'race' and only secondarily Malaysians. She found ethnicity to be dominant not only as a form of subjective classification, but also in the public definition of individuals and groups, and found it to be such an ubiquitous category that she concluded that 'currently, no "neutral" or "nonethnic" role or culture yet exists for Malaysians, and this is reinforced by government policies of identifying all individuals and situations in ethnic terms' (1974: 347).

She located the most important pressures involved in the selection of ethnic reference groups in: (1) the desire to express either social distance or solidarity; (2) expediency, or the immediate advantages to be gained by a particular reference group selection on a particular occasion; and (3) consideration of social status and upward or downward social mobility (normative reference groups) (1974: 340). On the basis of her own research experience in the Malay Peninsula, she concluded that 'none of the many cases observed showed the remotest symptoms of personal insecurity or

marginality arising from the lack of firm identity. On the contrary, such easy switching of ethnic identity seems to be of positive value in enabling the individual to avoid tensions due to inconsistencies of role expectations in any given set of circumstances' (1974: 343). Nagata, therefore, argued that, while individuals exploit the imperfections of the ethnic classification system, ethnic identity constituted 'a deeply-felt and often essentialized aspect of being human for the vast majority of my participants' (1974: 343). These views are in line with those of Dentan, who argued that 'multi-culturation provides people of South-east Asia, and especially minorities, with a series of identities which they can switch and manipulate depending on the circumstances and necessities of particular interaction (1976: 78).

Boulanger (2000, 2002) offers interesting case studies dealing with the everyday use of ethnicity in Sarawak in the urban context, a topic unfortunately still under-researched in Borneo. She describes how members of indigenous groups living in Kuching manipulate the system of ethnic categorisation for reasons that are primarily political, especially according to the perceived advantages of being part of a larger group, but also personal, as in the case of children of intermarriage, who might label themselves with a supra-ethnic term such as Dayak to 'resolve what is perceived as a personal dilemma' (2000: 60), as not to favour the ethnicity of one parent over the other. While she argues that the manipulation of ethnicity for personal reasons is increasing, and might even eventually become the most important, Boulanger thinks that even the attempt to find solutions to problems involving ethnic identity on a personal level have political implications (2000: 62). The main issues connected with ethnicity she describes include the concern about the weak political position of ethnic groups with a small population, what she calls the 'numbers game' (2000), the attempt by urban individuals to preserve their sense of belonging by making their culture in some way 'portable', for example through the use of names (2002: 227), the erosion of traditional culture and its replacement with a generic 'modern' culture promoted by Malaysia (2002).

Chua, analysing the results of the official ethnic and legal classifications on the Bidayuh of Sarawak, stresses the fact that 'official labels are highly pertinent to Malaysians in general, for there are economic and political reasons for [...] minority groups to work with and through them' (2007: 266) as tapping benefits of *dunia moden* (M. 'modern world'). While Bidayuh are 'fully aware of the relative newness and external origin of national ethnic identities, they also acknowledge their

significance and effect as *recognised* idioms and channels which mediate (even create) their relations with *dunia moden*' (2007: 266). Joining Malaysia has brought the material benefits of *dunia moden*, but also increased needs and often not provided enough means to fulfil them, as Bidayuh are mostly at a low socio-economic level. Many Bidayuh attribute this to Malay domination and to the fixity of the ethnic system the Malay exported to Sarawak, which requires conforming to a fixed system of ethnic-based categories and privileges originally defined in relation to Malay and *bumiputera* dominance. Bidayuh, like Kadazan, consider themselves second-class *bumiputera* as they know that Malays and other Muslim *bumiputera* have a greater share of benefits than they do. Chua then concludes that rather than trying to 'preserve' or 'construct' a distinctive 'Bidayuh identity', her informants are more interested in maintaining a certain freedom of movement which they *associate* with being Bidayuh' (2007: 279, emphasis in original).

Conclusion

The analysis of the traditional ethnographic literature on the Dusunic peoples has shown a lack of consideration of two aspects: social change and relationship with the state and identity. This research is attempting to fill this knowledge gap by concentrating on identity and considering the state as a powerful agent in its making. Malaysia, which, in agreement with Postill (2006), I consider to be a 'thick culture area' with a relatively established, though partly contested, national culture, appears as the necessary context within which to situate the present research. Within this frame of reference, in the second part of this chapter I have briefly outlined the emergence of the ethnic discourse and system within the British territories that were to become Malaysia and shown how it constituted an essential element of the establishment of colonial control by means of techniques of governmentality.

While it supported the control of the British, the ethnic discourse has become the rallying point of groups resisting the state in post-independence Malaysia, as I will describe in the next chapter. Nevertheless, the Malaysian state and the Kadazan and other indigenous minorities, despite their struggle, share the same ethnic discourse.

Chapter 3

The formation of Kadazan and Malaysian cultures in Sabah (1953–2007)

This chapter reconstructs the history of the formation of a modern Kadazan¹⁰ culture, starting in the late colonial period, and its progressive replacement by the Malaysian culture promoted by the state through the use of various media. This reconstruction involves narrating the history of two often conflicting cultural projects and contextualising them within the relationship between the Kadazan and the government's nation-building agenda.

The modern Kadazan culture was created through a process of 'objectification', transforming implicit customs into a conscious and explicitly defined set of 'traditions' (see Winzeler, 1997b: 202). This process emerged out of the efforts of a 'Kadazan intelligentsia' (Roff, 1969), who selected elements of rural Kadazan culture, elaborated them and spread them through the emerging new mass media, primarily radio and newspapers, and through the efforts of an association, the Society of the Kadazan. Similarly to what happened in Sarawak (Postill, 2006), the development of a modern, objectified Kadazan culture was part of an indigenist project of preserving indigenous traditions while modernising them through the infusion of Western, and primarily Christian-inspired, values and principles. This process went hand-in-hand with the generation of a sense of unity among an indigenous population that was deeply divided by differences in dialect and *adat* and that had only a vague sense of belonging to an ethnic and cultural unit beyond the level of local river-based groups. These developments created the circumstances for indigenous peoples of Sabah to imagine themselves as members of a single community, the Kadazan, sharing a common culture but also similar life experiences. The formation of a Kadazan culture was closely associated with a political movement, termed 'Kadazan nationalism' by Roff (1969), which aimed at obtaining a greater recognition for Kadazan interests within the colonial state and, once it became clear that the British were about to grant independence, to mobilise and unite the Dusunic people to prepare for self-rule. The efforts of the 'intelligentsia', therefore, generated the conditions for the creation of the

¹⁰ Here I use the term Kadazan to refer to the Dusunic people more generally, following the usage of those involved in the early elaboration of the cultural project I am describing, as well as of various authors describing it (Loh, 1992; Luping, 1994)

Kadazan as both a ‘community of imagination’ and one of alignment, imagining themselves as a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ (Anderson, 1991: 7) but also acting as a group with a common aim.

While it is likely that the members of the ‘Kadazan intelligentsia’ envisaged the prospect of leading a majority within an independent, multi-ethnic Sabah, soon the situation changed with the constitution of Malaysia in 1963, and the Dusunic peoples found themselves to be an ethnic minority with a small demographic weight¹¹. The Malaysian government has since used the media, and primarily what Postill calls the ‘foundational media forms’ of ‘state propaganda, writing (literacy), television and clock-and-calendar time’ (2006: 3), to pursue its nation-building agenda.

The discussion of this chapter focuses primarily on media production for two main reasons: on the one hand I consider, following Postill (2006), the media to be the most important means through which the Malaysian government has been building a nation within its territory; on the other, the media provide a useful resource to reconstruct cultural events of the past. My discussion of this history is based mostly on secondary sources written by academic historians and political scientists (Roff, 1969; Whelan, 1970; Reid, 1997; Loh, 1992) and by a former politician and cultural activist directly involved in the events I am describing, Herman Luping (1994), as well as on interviews I carried out with political figures, former media producers and ordinary Kadazan villagers.

The early days of ‘Kadazan nationalism’ (1953–1967)

The late colonial period in Sabah saw, almost simultaneously, the birth of the first local media – a daily newspaper and radio - and the awakening of political consciousness in North Borneo. The process of development of a political consciousness among the indigenous peoples of Sabah was particularly prominent among the Kadazan, leading to a cultural and political movement termed ‘Kadazan nationalism’ by Roff (1969), through an analogy with the similar movement that took place among Malays in Malaya before World War II. Luping (1994) argued that the formation of a political consciousness was accompanied by the forging of a common

¹¹ They constitute about 2% of the total Malaysian population.

identity, developed on the feeling, based on linguistic and cultural similarities, of belonging to a larger group, which had gradually grown out of the changes that had already taken place in pre-colonial times under Brunei domination.

The protagonists of the process were those Roff (1969) called ‘Kadazan intelligentsia’, educated in the Catholic mission schools, fluent in English, able to write their own language using romanised script, and many of whom had pursued their higher studies overseas. The fact that the majority of the members of this elite came from the Penampang district, where the first mission schools outside urban areas were established, gave predominance in all media to the dialect from that area. Two of the most important members of this ‘intelligentsia’ were Joe Manjaji, the person behind the decision to use the term ‘Kadazan’ as a label to unite all the Dusunic people (P.J. Granville-Edge, personal communication), and Fred Sinidol, who was active in Kadazan radio broadcasting; both were from Penampang. The most publicly prominent figure, however, was Donald (later Tun Fuad) Stephens, who had mixed European, Kadazan and Japanese ancestry, the editor and publisher of the *Sabah Times* and, later, the first Chief Minister of Sabah. The members of the ‘intelligentsia’ were strongly influenced by the values promoted by the Catholic mission schools in their upholding of, at the same time, traditional culture and modernity, seen as synonymous with the civilisation of the *orang putih*, the ‘white man’, characterised by technology, literacy and Christianity. The majority of the mission-educated Kadazan shared (and still do) an ideology that attempts to reach a modern Kadazan culture, a blend of Catholicism and *adat* from which certain elements not compatible with modernity and Christianity have been discarded. Similarly to later state propaganda, Catholic modernist ideology showed in a short time the positive effects of formal education, which could give access to a fraction of the power of the *orang putih*. Thanks to its contribution to the education of rural Kadazan, the appeal of its modernist ideology and its defence of the Kadazan language and of some of its traditional customs, Christianity had become, by the 1950s, an essential element of the fabric of Kadazan culture and way of life. Christianity has since become extremely important in Kadazan identity and in the feeling of radical difference between the Kadazan and the national majority, the Malays (Luping, 1994; Reid, 1997).

The politicisation and the elaboration of a common form of identification for the Dusunic peoples were both based on the elaboration of a modern, objectified and – to

some extent – standardised Kadazan culture, developing the sense of common origin and common purpose necessary to the formation of a community of alignment, able, in the projects of the ‘intelligentsia’, to have an essential political role as well as to develop economically and culturally.

Kadazan associations

In 1936 Lothar Manjaji, with the help of the Reverend Antonissen, the compiler of the first Kadazan/English dictionary who was nicknamed ‘the sporting padre’ for his passionate involvement in football, founded the Penampang Sporting Association. The Association, which organised sporting events and annual competitions during Easter holidays at St. Michael's School, Penampang, was led by prominent educated Kadazan working for the Chartered Company (Luping, 1994: 100).

While there had been a precedent during the celebrations for the royal birthday in 1939, when traditional dances were performed and, for the first time, separated from their ritual context, the Association was instrumental in providing the occasion for another early objectification of Kadazan cultural traditions during its 4th convention, held in 1940, when the dances were performed in the context of a fund-raising variety show (Hiroyuki, 2002: 11). While the older generation initially disapproved of the public performance of the dances, in 1940 they were finally convinced, and the event attracted so much attention that an interview with the Native Chief Lajunga from Penampang about the performance was published in the *British North Borneo Herald*, a weekly paper published by and for the colonial elite. Traditional ceremonies provided an excellent opportunity for individual members and for the Kadazan as a whole to be spotlighted and to obtain recognition from the colonial government. This, according to Hiroyuki (2002: 11) ‘explains’ the emphasis placed by Kadazan leaders of the time on maintaining their traditional culture while modernising it.

In the period after World War Two, the Sporting Association was reconstituted as the Society of Kadazan, registered on 24 August 1953 in Penampang, with the declared objectives of taking care of the culture and language of the Kadazan and raising their standard of living (Luping, 1994: 100). In 1954, the Penampang Kadazan Native Chief, Tan Ping Hing (a Sino-Kadazan), became president of the Society of Kadazan, and in 1957 Donald Stephens first attended the annual meeting. He was

immediately elected vice-president, and in 1958 he took over as president. According to his niece, P.J. Granville-Edge (personal communication), when Stephens joined the society, he had already been indirectly participating in it and 'working behind the scenes'. From its beginnings, the Society joined cultural and political objectives, as shown by its mission statement as well as by the fact that it soon became an avenue for voicing concerns the Kadazan felt important. Among these were the recognition of native land reserves – as the land available for cattle in Penampang had become scarce since it had been taken by outsiders and used for planting rubber or developed in other ways - support for their language and the government's recognition of the Kadazan Harvest Festival (Luping, 1994). According to another veteran politician, Marcel Leiking (personal communication), most of the society's founders were Sino-Kadazan whose primary aim was to obtain the right for people of mixed origin to own and inherit land. The Kadazan, who felt the colonial government was not paying any attention to their interests, were eager to have Stephens as their leader as he was quite influential among the colonial bureaucrats, was a member of the Legislative Council, and had obtained widespread fame through his newspaper.

Stephens was successful in obtaining the consideration of such issues by the colonial authorities, and when he reported at the annual meeting on 21 February 1960 that the Harvest Festival had been approved as a recognized public holiday, those present were so pleased that the Kadazan elders conferred upon him the title of *Huguan Siou*¹², 'brave leader' (Luping, 1994: 101). Herman Luping (1994: 33) defined the *Huguan Siou* as a traditional institution, a 'descent group chief', guiding war and head-hunting raids. Reid (1997: 132) argued that the title was used to refer to a 'supernaturally powerful warrior' and that it was 'rediscovered by the Kadazan nationalists' in the 1960s to be conferred upon a sort of 'paramount chief', probably influenced by similar titles used in Sarawak since the Brookes' times.

By 1960 a network of Kadazan associations, all independent from one another, had been established in various parts of the country by people from Penampang living in different districts, where they were mostly employed in the public sector because of their higher level of education. As a result of the prospect of North Borneo becoming an independent country and especially after the proposal by Tunku Abdul Rahman to

¹² The title was, however, officially bestowed upon him only in 1964, by the Central Executive Committee of UNKO for political merits.

join North Borneo, Sarawak, Brunei and Singapore with Malaya to form Malaysia, the Society increased its political role as a representative of the political interests of the Kadazan. Eventually, it transformed itself into the first political party of the colony, the United National Kadazan Organisation (UNKO), in 1961. Later, the realisation of the need to distinguish between the political and cultural aspects, led to the creation of a new association, only active in the cultural field and taking responsibility for the organization of the Harvest Festival, the Sabah Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA), or Sinompuuvan Koubasan Kadazan Sabah (SKKS), formed in 1964 and registered in 1966, with Sinidol, the director of the first Kadazan service radio broadcast (see below) as chairman (Luping, 1994).

Ethnic naming: the 'victory of the Kadazan'

One of the issues involved in the creation of unity and a shared form of identification for the Dusunic peoples was that of establishing a common ethnic label. While the members of the 'intelligentsia' and of the Society were mostly from Penampang and called themselves Kadazan, the British officially called all non-Muslim indigenous peoples of North Borneo - with the exclusion of the Murut (Reid, 1997) - 'Dusun', a term they had inherited from the Brunei Malays and which they used in both everyday and official contexts.

The connection between the establishment of a common ethnic name and the formation of an ethnic group acting as a 'community of alignment' (Wenger, 1998) is demonstrated by the fact that the discussion about the issue of ethnic labelling was an essential part of the first UNKO congress on 6 August 1961. 'Kadazan' was unanimously endorsed as the official name of the ethnic group by the delegates, including Murut leaders, who were then in some way subsumed under the category 'Kadazan'. The decision was a result of the prevailing of the views of leaders such as Stephens who, in the pages of his newspaper, the *Sabah Times*, had campaigned for the use of 'Kadazan', arguing that the term was used to 'give a 'local flavour' to the name of the same speech people - the Kadazanic people', and that it could make the people proud of belonging to the race, while the term 'Dusun' had been imposed by the Malays (Luping, 1994: 103). According to Reid (1997: 126–127), the Penampang leaders interpreted the term as meaning 'our people' and as being the autonym once

used by all the members of the group, but which had fallen out of use because of pressures from the British, who tried to put obstacles in the path of achieving unity among the peoples of Sabah.

The exact origin of the label 'Kadazan', however, was not agreed upon, and is still a subject of much debate. Reid (1997) provided three possible etymologies: the first would have it deriving from the indigenous word *kakaadazan*, meaning 'town', and therefore designating semi-urbanised coastal people as opposed to the *liwan*, the upcountry people. The second argues that 'Kadazan' - and the interior equivalent 'Kadayan' - is simply the autonym of the people of Penampang, Papar and other nearby areas. Another etymology, as for example that reported by Glyn-Jones (1953), would give it the meaning of 'landspeople' as opposed to 'sea-farers'. Lastly, some indigenous opponents of the term consider the label as a recent creation deriving from the Malay *kedai*, 'shop', and therefore referring to people living in urban areas, where the shops are located.

There were, however, some reservations, such as that of leaders from Ranau, in the interior, who said that many of the people of their area thought of themselves as 'Dusun'. Moreover, there was also some open opposition, such as that led by the Native Chief of Tuaran district, Indan Kari, who did not attend the meeting and refused to accept the label 'Kadazan', preferring 'Dusun', a position that he expressed by forming the Dusun Lotud (the name of the sub-group in the Tuaran district) Association. That sowed the first seeds of disagreement over the label to be used. According to Luping (1994: 104), Indan Kari's reaction was caused by the fact that he perceived the chosen label as a form of recognition of the superiority of the people of Penampang, who had a long history of enmity and feuds with the Lotud of Tuaran. The split was further exacerbated in 1967, when the advocates of the label 'Dusun', such as Indan Kari, formed the United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA). Nevertheless, the term Kadazan became officially endorsed, and was used for all those people previously categorised as 'Dusun' (excluding the Murut) in the first Census after independence, in 1970.

The difficulty encountered in reaching an agreement over the label to be given to people previously known as Dusun shows yet another example of the complexity of ethnicity in Borneo. This was because neighbouring groupings often traditionally had different classification systems to define themselves and their neighbours, which were generally extended in an *ad hoc* fashion to more distant groups, often using a mix of

indigenous and exogenous labels, which often have problems in fitting with one another (King and Wilder, 2003: 208).

The label Kadazan served the same purpose as the term Dayak in Sarawak, which, according to King (2001), was appropriated by the indigenous political elites to distinguish non-Malay¹³ natives and to generate a wider political consciousness and union. While the indigenous Sarawakians chose to use the label Dayak, which was a pejorative used by coastal dwellers to refer to the indigenes of the interior, the people of Sabah took the opposite choice, rejecting the term Dusun, which carried the same connotations, in favour of the local term Kadazan. The importance of the debate is testimony to the significance of naming in the constitution of a modern culture and of the political implications of the choice of labels, which are often implicated in relationships of power (see below).

The media: early radio

Radio Sabah, set up with the assistance of the BBC, started regular broadcasts in 1953, using English, Malay and Chinese to an initial audience of 2,163 licence holders. In 1953, out of a total of 424 hours of air time, 120 were locally produced, while the rest were from BBC transcripts, a proportion that remained unchanged until 1957 (*North Borneo Annual Report*, 1954). In 1954, Radio Sabah started an occasional broadcast in Penampang Kadazan (which was, however, called Dusun Section, following the colonial usage), which reached an airtime of 3¾ hours per week in 1955 and 45 minutes 6 times a week, in the evening, in 1957.

While both the English and Malay sections used BBC material extensively - the Malay section also produced more serious local programming, such as 'Forum of the Air', giving profiles of famous men - the Kadazan section mostly broadcast Kadazan music, and in 1958 it started the programme 'Down Your Way', written by Fred Sinidol (Reid, 1997: 126). In August 1960 talks about old customs and beliefs and a programme giving reports about Kadazan communities outside the Penampang area, began to be broadcast in the Kadazan section. General knowledge quiz competitions among schools and weekly dramatic sketches of village life were also introduced. By

¹³ The status of the Muslim-majority Melanau is, however, ambiguous, as they are sometimes included under the label Dayak and sometimes assimilated to Malays (see Boulanger, 2000; 2002)

1961 the Kadazan section consisted of interviews, music, talks on *adat*, folk stories (broadcast in edited versions), talks on health and agriculture, women's programmes to instruct them on their role and duties in the family, educational programmes for children conducted by a teacher, as well as interviews with students returning from overseas. Another essential part of the broadcast was constituted by the news, which was largely based on information provided by the Information Department, which had to approve all the news to be broadcast, but also collected by the radio's reporters and by listeners. The radio also covered important public events, sending reporters to the scene (Peter Lidadun, personal communication).

The Kadazan radio broadcast played an essential role in elaborating and spreading the modern Kadazan culture, as its programmes, like those of the Iban section of Radio Sarawak (Postill, 2006), mostly consisted of cultural material collected from rural areas, re-elaborated in an urban context and spread again to the rural areas. Its staff, moreover, was mostly made up by members of the 'Kadazan intelligentsia' such as its director Fred Sinidol, Justin Stimol, Wilfred Mojilis, Claudius Sundang Alex, Steven Sipaun, Basil Molujang, Vincent Jubilee, as well as various part-timers such as Peter Lidadun. All came from Penampang and had been educated at St. Michael's or Sacred Heart mission schools, and all knew one another as they came from the same village, had attended the same school, or were relatives (Peter Lidadun, personal communication).

The response of the Kadazan to the programme was very good and the radio started to build up a library of music recorded in the studio, which reached about 400 items, as there were no commercial records available. Village music groups were eager to go to the studio to record, as exemplified by the case of a group of nine people who walked all the way from Ranau to the capital (more than 100 km) just to record their music (*North Borneo Annual Report*, 1957). Following the success of the radio programmes, in 1958 RS Recordings began producing commercial Kadazan records; nine were produced that year.

In 1962 and 1963, much attention was given to the Malaysian proposal by all sections of Radio Sabah, including the Kadazan, and Malaysia Day's events on 16 September 1963 were transmitted in relay from Kuala Lumpur. From that time Radio Sabah, re-named Radio Malaysia Sabah, started regular news broadcasts in relay from Kuala Lumpur. The Kadazan section was the only one that did not experience such realignment, as the majority of its content remained locally produced.

Following the Kadazan example, other indigenous groups obtained broadcasts in their language: the Murut in 1963 and Bajau in 1967.

The media: the press

In August 1953, the same year that saw the beginning of radio broadcasts, the first English daily, the *Sabah Times* (*North Borneo News and Sabah Times* after a merger in 1954), started publication, and by the end of the year it was already selling 1,000 copies daily (Whelan, 1970). The newspaper used all the languages spoken in the colony (apart from Chinese) in order to reach as many people as possible and to make those living in one area aware of what was happening in other areas of the country. All the sections featured the same news, including elements of local interest, such as births, marriages and reports on the price of rice. Because of a lack of reporters, the *Sabah Times* depended on press releases collected daily from the Information Department and from the news collected by radio reporters as well as voluntary contributions from readers. The newspaper often reported news about local social events, such as village and private celebrations, often using freelance reporters.

The *Sabah Times* featured a section in romanised Malay as well as the famous 'Kadazan corner', a section using the romanised written version of the Penampang dialect developed by the Mill Hill missionaries. Donald Stephens justified the choice of using that dialect with the fact that it was the most developed in its written form, and therefore best suited to serve the aim of unifying all the Kadazan people by standardising their language (Reid, 1997: 126). Among the contributors to the newspaper were many members of the 'intelligentsia' and founders of the Society of Kadazan (Reid, 1997: 126) such as Fred Sinidol and Herman Luping. It was from the columns of the newspaper that Donald Stephens gained his popularity. Due to the lack of personnel, he monopolised most of the writing, being the main reporter, and articles or photographs highlighting his participation in various events and his political role were often published.

In 1963, the year Malaysia was formed, the number of English dailies increased to three: the *Sabah Times* and *Borneo Times*, both with Malay and Kadazan sections, and the *Daily Express*, with a Malay section. A newspaper written entirely in

Kadazan, the *Kadazan Times*, was also started in the 1960s, but ceased publication in the 1970s¹⁴.

The media: books

The earliest publications in a native language of Sabah were the religious books produced by missionaries using the Penampang dialect. The missionaries always favoured the standard everyday form of the language to the arcane, ritual one, which they saw as having strong pagan implications. The published books were a prayer book, *Vazaan doid Surga*, three scripture books, *Testamentum Haid*, *Koimaan Ngaavi di Tuan Jesus* and *Suat Ngaavi do Tadau Minggu om Tadau Tongobitua*, as well as a catechism. The author of the catechism, Fr. Antonissen, was also the author, in co-operation with F. Verhoeven (another missionary), of the famous *Kadazan Dictionary and Grammar*, published in 1958, which established what became the standard orthography and grammar of Kadazan language and was readily accepted by the government and the press (Rooney, 1981: 144).

The production of non-religious books started with the founding of the Borneo Literature Bureau, an organisation set up in 1958 by the governments of Sarawak and Sabah to promote literary production within the two colonies. The first Kadazan book, *Tanong do Kadazan* ('Kadazan stories'), by Samuel Majalang, was published by the Bureau in 1962, followed by *Nipizan do pololou* ('Daydreaming') by Peter Lidadun (1968), an autobiography about the author's youth indirectly giving moral teachings about etiquette, proper behaviour and encouraging young people to try to achieve something even if they are poor. The Bureau production went on during the 1970s, with two books in 1970, *Nososu do atagakan* ('Born loser') and *Singonuon do poguhu* ('Abandoned once possessed'), both by Donald Melinggang, and, in 1972, *Buk mangasak om kotoinaan do tanak*, ('A cooking and childcare book') by Scholastica Lanjuat De Harpporte.

As was the case for the Iban (Postill, 2006), the majority of the writers were teachers - such as Majalang, Lidadun and De Harpporte – and, moreover, they were all connected. Majalang was the teacher of Lidadun who in turn taught Melinggang

¹⁴ I was not able to gather information about the content or the reasons why publication of the newspaper was discontinued. I can hypothesise that it was suspended as a result of the language policies of the Mustapha government (see below).

who, however, was not a teacher but a government servant. All were from Penampang and had studied at St. Michael's Secondary School, apart from the only woman, De Harpporte (who studied at St. Francis Convent girls' school), and those who were teachers had trained at Gaya College in Jesselton¹⁵.

The history of the Bureau finished in 1977, when it was taken over by the federal body Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, a take-over that determined the end of all publications in indigenous languages different from Malay, while the Bureau books written in Bornean languages were allegedly buried and then burnt in Kuching (Postill, 2006: 59). This strong opposition was part of an agenda of assimilation of the indigenous peoples of Borneo that became established in the 1970s, an agenda that, as I am showing in the next section, involved the imposition of Malay and Islam.

Before concluding the section, I would like to consider the limited importance and output (five books) of the Bureau production in Kadazan, especially if compared with that in Iban (over a hundred titles, see Postill, 2006: 50-58), which leads me to the conclusion that literary production constituted a relatively minor aspect of the production of a Kadazan culture in the early period in comparison to the radio and the press.

The demise of 'Kadazan nationalism' (1967–1985)

The first state elections of Sabah history, in 1967, saw the explosion of the divisions between the Muslim and non-Muslim factions of the indigenous population of Sabah, who had been until then politically united in the Sabah Alliance. After obtaining a limited majority, the United Sabah National Organisation (USNO), which represented the Muslim indigenous population, was able to take control of the State Assembly, sidelining and expelling Stephens' Kadazan-led UPKO from the Sabah Alliance, determining the 'demise of Kadazan nationalism', and having its leader, Tun Mustapha Harun, nominated Chief Minister (Roff, 1969).

With the support of Kuala Lumpur, Mustapha's government practised a 'one language, one culture, one religion' policy, attempting to assimilate all Sabahans to Malayness by imposing the Malay language and culture and Islam, which had its

¹⁵ The name of Sabah's capital until 1963, when it changed to its present name, Kota Kinabalu.

climax between 1970¹⁶ and 1973. The policies dealing with language comprised the suspension of all Kadazan language teaching from 1970 through the ‘upgrading’ of the Native Voluntary schools, which were made part of the national education system, followed in 1973 by the establishment of Malay as the sole medium of instruction and by the National Language Act, which increased the use of Malay in the legislature, bureaucracy and, to some extent, the courts. The imposition of Malay involved also the radio, which in 1973 suspended broadcasts in languages other than English and Malay and started relaying broadcasts from Kuala Lumpur. Radio Malaysia Sabah was re-organised into two networks: National Network, in Malay, and Blue Network, in English, for a total of 154 hours a week (Angrick Saguman, personal communication).

In 1973 Islam was declared the state religion, while the State government used its authority to encourage Sabahans to become Muslim through various strategies, including the expulsion of the majority of foreign priests and missionary workers in the period 1970–72. While Mustapha seemed successful in ‘removing the key markers of KD¹⁷ identity’, the decision to expel the foreign priests and missionaries had the opposite effect as it crystallized the KD forces and the conviction that KD identity was alien to Islam (Reid, 1997: 130).

Eventually, Mustapha’s increasingly authoritarian style and strong stand for autonomy became unacceptable to the leaders in Kuala Lumpur and the then Malaysian Prime Minister, Tun Razak Hussein, personally encouraged the formation of a new multi-ethnic party, Berjaya, led by Mustapha’s deputy, Harris Salleh, and including KD leaders such as Tun Fuad Stephens, Peter Mojuntin and James Ongkili. The support of the Dusunic peoples, and in particular of the Christians, was pivotal in the new party’s victory in the 1976 state election, which resulted in the formation of a new government with Stephens as Chief Minister. However, he died mysteriously in a plane crash with other leaders such as Peter Mojuntin shortly after the election and was replaced by Harris Salleh (Reid, 1997; Luping, 1994).

Reid (1997: 131) characterises the Harris government between 1976 and 1984 as seeing much of the ‘federally driven modernization’ of Sabah as well as the rise of ‘a

¹⁶ There might be a connection between the climax of the project of Malayisation and the ‘race riots’ that had taken place in 1969 in Kuala Lumpur

¹⁷ Here I follow Reid’s use of the acronym KD, standing for ‘Kadazandusun’, which he uses ‘in a studied attempt to avoid taking sides’ in the debate about the label to be used for the Dusunic peoples (1997: 121). I use the term KD as an alternative to ‘Dusunic peoples’ throughout the rest of the chapter

much larger group of educated KDs who could be considered middle-class'. Loh (1992), on the other hand, characterises the Berjaya era as seeing the erosion of the Twenty Points agreements¹⁸ and the continuation of the process of Malayisation and Islamisation. In 1976, all government-aided schools were required to use Malay as the sole medium of teaching. In 1978, they were required to organise Islamic religious classes if at least 15 students in the school asked for them, and teaching of the Christian religion was banned in all schools, including mission schools. Sabah's state bureaucracy, as well as police and education, were absorbed into their corresponding Federal departments in 1977. On the other hand, under the Berjaya government, Radio Malaysia Sabah revived the Kadazan, Bajau, Hakka and Cantonese broadcast (Angrick Saguman, personal communication).

Attitudes of the Berjaya government that caused dissatisfaction among the KDs were the favouring of Muslim over non-Muslim in all the public service positions and the lack of response, often amounting to tolerance or even encouragement, to the settling of large numbers of illegal immigrants from Indonesia and the Philippines. This appeared as clearly aimed at reinforcing Muslim domination in the state by allowing Muslims from outside the country to settle and, in many instances, also to become citizens and to gain the right to vote (Reid, 1997: 131).

Among the effects of the increased Federal investment in the State and economic growth was the increased funding available for education, which resulted in a twofold increase in the number of students enrolled in secondary schools between 1971 and 1978, reaching 100,000 by the early 1980s. This was accompanied by an increase in indigenous graduates from two in 1960 to 2,338 in 1980. Many of these people were employed in new statutory and quasi-government enterprises, which provided unprecedented opportunities for the emergent indigenous middle class and provided the facilities for many indigenous politicians to set up their own business (Loh, 1992). According to Loh (1992: 237), the rapid economic growth was accompanied by an expansion of patronage and the increase of cronyism, nepotism and corruption.

In the 1980s it became harder to accommodate the needs of all the members of the 'Bumiputera intelligentsia' because of their increasing numbers and expectations and also the economic crisis of 1982. The situation created particular dissatisfaction

¹⁸ The agreement made between the colonies of North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak and Malaya establishing some safeguards for the protection of the Borneo territories' interests and particularities, including autonomy in the control of immigration and language and religion policies.

among the new graduates who had enjoyed the benefits of the increased access to education, as they began to encounter difficulties in finding a job commensurate with their qualifications. They started developing the feeling of being ‘colonised’ by the Peninsula as well as of being discriminated vis-à-vis Malays from the Peninsula and local Muslim *bumiputera* in the assignment of government positions. The Kadazan intellectuals ‘did not voice their dissatisfaction in terms of their own socio-economic discrimination but in terms of the Federal and Sabah governments’ neglect and discrimination of the Kadazan community as a whole’ (Loh, 1992: 240), and in so doing they also brought to the fore the problems faced by the Kadazan rural poor. It was true that poverty was more common among the Kadazan, as in 1978, while 42.6 per cent of the rural households lived in poverty, 62 per cent of the rural Kadazan households were below the poverty line (Loh, 1992: 240).

Summing up, this period saw the decline of Kadazan control over Sabahan politics in favour of the Muslim/Malay indigenous group and the Malaysian federal government. The situation resulted at the State level in the strengthening of the nation-building agenda, which took the form of assimilation to Malayness in the period of Mustapha rule (1967-1975) and then in a less extreme yet more pervasive Malaysianisation, mostly based on increased federal intervention in the economic and political sphere and total control of the broadcast media in the Berjaya era.

The Kadazan Cultural Association and the ‘cultural revival’

The economic, political and social conditions described were at the basis of what has been described as a ‘Kadazan cultural revival’ (Loh, 1992) in the 1980s, a movement dominated by the KCA, which increased the number of its members as more and more young educated Kadazan joined, as well as its relevance, to the point that ‘any Kadazan who aspired to lead the community could not afford to ignore it’ (Loh, 1992: 241). The KCA committee included among its members, and still does, Cabinet ministers, members of the State Assembly and Federal Parliament, top civil servants, professionals and business people (Loh, 1992: 241).

Through their participation in the KCA, young city-based members of the Kadazan intelligentsia became interested in ‘some of the old oral myths of ancestry and historical memories of their people’, such as the common myth of origin of all the

Dusunic peoples, that of Nunuk Ragang. These were then recovered from their oral sources, 'written up, disseminated among themselves, and sometimes published' (Loh, 1992: 241). Traditional music, instruments and dance were also promoted, a 'recovery process' that often involved what Loh (1992: 242) calls a 'measure of reshaping what was the traditional', as songs, tunes and dances were divorced from their original ritual context and myths were changed and selected for their relevance to the present situation. The format was also changed through a mixture of old and new that can be found, for example, in songbooks and cassettes, including a few new tunes elaborated by the intellectuals together with the traditional ones.

The KCA was particularly instrumental in promoting and channelling the reactions to the two most controversial policies of the Berjaya government in the 1980s. The first was the reclassification, in the census and for all official purposes, of all indigenous peoples of Sabah as *pribumi*, a term used to designate all those of 'Malay stock and related groups', in line with the agenda of the main Malay ruling party, the United Malay National Organisation (UMNO), which wanted all *bumiputera* to identify themselves as a single people with a single culture. Especially resented was the fact that the category also included some recent migrants from the southern Philippines and Indonesia, equating them with indigenous peoples (Reid, 1997: 131). In this instance KCA was used as a forum to debate the issue, resulting in overt political action against the government (Loh, 1992: 244). The second, and ultimate, cause of dissatisfaction with the State government was the appropriation of the Kadazan Harvest Festival and its reclassification as a 'people's festival', named with the Malay term *Pesta Rakyat*, in 1981 (see chapter 6). This was followed, in 1982, by the taking over of its running by the government, the shortening of its length to one day and the removal of the ritual performed by the *bobohizan*. As a reaction, the KCA, guided by its president Joseph Pairin Kitingan, organised an alternative celebration following the traditional format, in Tambunan, strongly demonstrating its stand against the government's decisions. Despite the government boycott of the event, this alternative celebration attracted thousands of participants and marked a historic step in the rise of a new consciousness among the KDs (Reid, 1997: 132).

The imposition of national mass media

The USNO and Berjaya eras were characterised by the continuous presence of the media born in the previous period, Sabahan newspapers and Radio Malaysia Sabah, and by the arrival of television.

The new medium made its advent through the setting up of Sabah TV, an independent Sabah television station, which started broadcasting on 21 December 1970, with a limited day service and coverage. In the following year the airtime increased to 35 hours a week, the coverage was increased, and Malay became the only language used, in line with the language policies of the government. Most of Sabah TV's programmes consisted of imported films, local documentaries, children's programmes, local songs (mostly from Kadazan-Dusun singers) and the promotion of Sabah talents, with a local focus and attention paid to the local ethnic groups and to tourism (Angrick Saguman, personal communication).

In 1975 Sabah TV was joined by the first national channel, broadcast from Kuala Lumpur through a land satellite by RTM (Radio Television Malaysia), and TV Sabah became TV Malaysia Rangkaian Ketiga, being broadcast also to Sarawak. In 1983, state-run RTM TV2, which had been present in the Peninsula since 1969, arrived in Sabah and Sarawak, and the Sabah station saw its broadcast shortened and then terminated in 1984. Since 1984 the RTM centre in Sabah has been entirely devoted to broadcasting the national programmes (TV1 and TV2) and has not produced any programmes of its own.

While television soon came under national control, Sabah retained some radio production. Broadcasts in languages other than Malay and English were suspended in 1971 as part of the language policies of Mustapha's government, but were reinstated in 1976 with the victory of Berjaya, and in 1978 a new Dusun language broadcast, using the dialects from interior areas, was started by Radio Malaysia Sabah. This increased the presence of Dusunic languages in the radio, but it fragmented the cultural production in Dusunic languages (Rafael Monuil, personal communication). Radio remained a bastion of Kadazan and Dusun language and tradition, while at the same time updating with more modern content, such as the programme 'IT and You', teaching listeners the basics of using computers.

This difference between radio and television should be attributed to the fact that while the presence of Kadazan language and culture in the radio would remain mostly for internal consumption, their presence in television would have, in the eyes of Malaysian policy makers, constituted a breach on the 'tolerable difference' (Rival, 1997: 138) allowed to the Kadazan and indigenous peoples of Borneo.

The period of 'KD power' (1984–1994)

Following the success of the alternative *Kaamatan* festival, in March 1984 Joseph Pairin Kitingan was nominated *Huguan Siou*, the title previously conferred on Donald Stephens. This time the conferral was followed by ceremonies conducted by traditional priestesses, the *bobohizan*, to strengthen the new leader in various districts, which in turn united the Dusunic peoples in more remote areas. After resigning from Berjaya, and winning a by-election for the Tambunan seat in 1984, the following year Joseph Pairin Kitingan formed Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), a multi-ethnic party mostly controlled by Dusunic people, and in particular by a new intelligentsia from the interior district of Tambunan, Kitingan's home district. After a clear victory in the state elections of 1985, Kitingan became the new Chief Minister, despite being strongly opposed by Kuala Lumpur for various reasons, including his being Christian.

The policies of the PBS government included the cancellation of the *pribumi* category in censuses, the restitution of the organisation of the Harvest Festival (for which a two-day holiday was conceded) to the Kadazan Cultural Association, which also had new, grand headquarters built in Penampang. It is interesting to note that the re-instatement of a Sabahan television broadcast was an important part of the electoral manifesto of PBS (Jawan, 1994: 220-21, cited in Postill, 2006: 88, n.31), but the project was never realised.

The new political situation of the period, characterised by the ascendancy of leaders from the interior, generated the fragmentation of the Kadazan imagined community, which, significantly, took the form of a re-opening of the debate over the labelling to be used for the Dusunic peoples.

Struggle over ethnic label resurfaces: the birth of the Kadazandusun

Since the decision taken in 1960, more and more indigenous peoples from the interior, especially Ranau and Tambunan districts, started resenting the label ‘Kadazan’ as a symbol of the political domination of the Penampang people, whom they saw as more educated, sophisticated but also arrogant (Reid, 1997). Language was the main field of contention, as the people who liked to call themselves ‘Dusun’ started rejecting the spelling conventions used in the press as they were based on the Penampang dialect, which had been established by its long use but which was recognised in the 1980s as constituting only one end of the chain of dialects that form the Dusunic family. The struggle acquired great relevance in 1988, when the announcement by the Federal Education Minister that ‘Kadazan’ was to be taught as part of the school syllabus provoked a strong reaction by USDA, who demanded that the label ‘Dusun’ be retained to refer to the language. Their position was expressed by organising a separate Harvest Festival in 1989, an action that was highly symbolic and which seriously threatened the unity of the ‘Kadazan’ and ‘Dusun’ (Reid, 1997).

In response, the Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA) changed its name to Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA) in 1989, clarifying, however, that their position was that the ‘Kadazan’ and ‘Dusun’ are one and the same people, and that the two labels were just two different names, the use of which depended on personal preference (Reid, 1997: 135).

On 24 January 1995, during a conference held in the State capital, USDA and KDCA reached a historic official agreement that the people known as ‘Kadazan’ and ‘Dusun’ belonged to a single ethnic group and spoke dialects of a single language, and that the name of both is ‘Kadazandusun’. The *Constitution and Rules* of KDCA define the term in Article (6)(1) as “... the generic and overall ethnic label to encompass and cover the following dialectical and tribal groups ... [followed by 40 tribal group names] ... and of a person whose mother tongue is any of the above dialects and who habitually practises and expresses the traditions, custom and other cultural manifestation of the same” (pp. 5–6, cited in Stephen, 2000).

From the fall of PBS to the present (1995–2006)

The slim majority obtained by the PBS in the 1994 elections made it unable to resist the alleged buying of assemblymen by the federal government-supported Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition in 1995, leaving only three assemblymen standing with Pairin in the end, and therefore causing the collapse of the government. The electors punished these defectors in the following federal elections, but the state was nevertheless lost to the Sabah allies of Kuala Lumpur: UMNO and other BN parties. However, the new government, keeping one of its electoral promises, allowed the teaching of the Kadazandusun language in primary schools in 1997 (Reid, 1997: 135).

Reid (1997: 136) argues that in the present phase, as in other periods in which they lacked political power, the KD intellectuals are encouraged to seek unity and to work together in the defence of their language, of Christianity and the preservation of some of their cultural symbols. As is normal in the development of modern identities, Reid argues (1997: 136), ‘a few attractive modernised elements of ‘traditional’ culture are made to carry a heavy symbolic burden’. In the case of the KDs, the famous black costume, the myths of origin, the Harvest Festival and some other ritual events would be the favourite identity markers, while the ‘traditional’ inclination to get drunk would be taken out as it embarrassed urban leaders.

A new standard language: in search of a ‘literate high culture’?

One of the results of the ‘cultural revival’ of the early 1980s was the growing awareness of a constant loss of mother-tongue proficiency among the new KD generations. This was a direct result of the establishment of Malay as the sole medium of instruction, as well as to its general promotion within all media, during the 1970s. The use of Malay as the medium of instruction had further-reaching consequences than might be expected, as it encouraged many Dusunic-speaking parents to speak to their children in Malay with the perceived aim of improving their skills in the national language and therefore their performance at school (Lasimbang *et al.*, 1992).

Reid (1997: 120) described this situation affecting the KD as common to many other ethnic groups of the Malay archipelago, where the two largest nation-states occupying the area, Indonesia and Malaysia, have been imposing two standardised

forms of Malay, Bahasa Malaysia and Bahasa Indonesia, as their national language through a compulsory education system, with the aim of redefining the identities of their citizens. He argued that, as a result, most of the hundreds of indigenous languages of the area, including Kadazan, are now endangered. This is especially true for those which have no written tradition or a very recent one, and are not used in modern printed or electronic media.

In 1994, there were public expressions of the KD's desire to have their languages taught in schools, which led to the setting up of a Kadazan Language Centre (KLC), which elaborated a syllabus and carried out a teacher training workshop and a pilot language class. The KLC, which became the Kadazandusun Language Foundation (KLF) in 1995, worked at the elaboration of a standard language for all Dusunic peoples. The standard language, whose name was chosen as Kadazandusun by the 1995 joint conference of KDCA and USDA, was based on the interior Bundu and Liwan dialects, arguably spoken by the majority of the KD, with the notable sidelining of the Penampang dialect, which had been the unofficial standard of the media. New media were prepared in the language: a language syllabus, a teacher's guidebook and student's workbook (Lasimbang, 2004). Eventually Kadazandusun was introduced in Sabah schools in 1997 as a complementary subject. In 2001, it was taught to 30,000 children in grades 4–6 in 435 primary schools in 23 districts. Since 1998 Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS) has been offering Kadazandusun language as an elective subject (Lasimbang, 2004).

The teaching of Kadazandusun in schools encouraged the resurgence of publishing of literature, mostly for children, in the language, carried out primarily by KDCA and KLF. The latter had published 35 titles by 2004, consisting especially of folktales and short stories, partially selected through a yearly writing competition, as well as a new trilingual Kadazandusun/English/Malay dictionary (Lasimbang, 2004).

The importance of language for an ethnic group's sense of identity has been noted so many times, both by scholars and lay people, who - like most Kadazan parents I encountered during my fieldwork - lament every day that their people will be no more once their children are not able to speak their language, that it seems unnecessary to consider the argument here any further. Just to quote some Sabahan leaders:

Language is one of the chief factors for the awakening of nationalism among the Kadazan people (Peter Mojuntin, *Sabah Times*, 11–12/10/1967).

If the Dusun language is lost, this means the loss of Dusun identity which forms the basis, the source and the spiritual repository for Dusun culture (Tombung, Secretary General of USDA, 1988, cited in Lasimbang *et al.*, 1992).

There is a general concern, about both leaders and common people, that the future generation will be Kadazan/Dusun only in name if they cannot speak their mother tongue (Benedict Topin, Secretary General of KDCA, cited in Lasimbang *et al.*, 1992).

The importance of language is also stressed by Postill (2006), who considers it as one of the chief areas of struggle between the dominant and peripheral ethnic groups in Malaysia, and it seems relevant to ask whether the developments just described give a completely different picture from the one Postill gives when he says that the 'Iban and other indigenous peoples of Sarawak are losing out to the politically stronger Peninsular Malays and their local allies' (Postill, 2006: 46).

While they claim that they strongly value knowledge of the mother tongue as a necessary condition for the survival of their people, most parents are very practical. They are interested in direct advantages for their children, which can be obtained by knowing 'knowledge languages' such as English. As there seem to be no practical advantages deriving from knowing a language such as Kadazandusun, they are not so committed to helping their children achieve proficiency. Moreover, in areas like Penampang, they are often unwilling, or even unable, to speak the standard language, which is derived from Dusunic dialects that might be very different from their own, and which are felt to be partially alien.

With the socio-economic conditions favouring the use of the national language and of world languages such as English and, increasingly, Mandarin, Kadazandusun can hardly be more than a 'language of sentiment' and the literary production more than a curiosity or object of affection, unable to pose any threat to the primacy of the national language and culture, a threat which, however, might come from sources beyond Malaysia, in today's world centres of cultural production.

The further fragmentation of ethnic labelling: post-ethnic groups?

The situation of ethnic labelling in Sabah was further complicated by two events in the late 1990s. First, the Rungus, a group speaking a Dusunic language, have expressed their wish through their own cultural association, SAMORA, not to be part of the Kadazandusun (*Daily Express* Forum, 1/8/99) despite being one of the member groups according to the KDCA Constitution.

Secondly, the media - in particular the press - began using a new term, 'KadazandusunMurut', also shortened as KDM. The label was first used in the weekly 'Ground View' column by Raymond Boin Tombung in the *Borneo Mail* (11/3/99) and it has created a trend in the press that has been followed by various journalists. As there have been no official reactions by official bodies such as KDCA, there are countless speculations on the actual definition, meaning and validity of this new label (Stephen, 2000: 8). Stephen (2000: 9) underlines the dubious value of this new term by noting the lack of clarity about whether it 'refers to the language(s) of the community or communities, to the ethnic race(s), or both the language(s) and the ethnic race(s)'. Although coming from the Borneo stock of group of languages the Kadazandusun and the Murut languages are linguistically distant.

The last development was the creation, on 27 January 2007, of the Kadazan Society Sabah (KSS), which gives a new meaning to the term 'Kadazan' by defining it as 'any indigenous Malaysian from any of the ethnic group of Sabah origin ... who has assumed and acknowledged his ethnic origin and identity is a member of the Kadazan community' in their inauguration ceremony booklet (p. 4). The definition given by KSS is very significant as it seems to view the term 'Kadazan' not as the name of an ethnic group but as that of a category composed of indigenous peoples of Sabah, or individuals who have a mixed origin, who are defined by their will to be ascribed to the group by virtue of 'acknowledging their ethnic origin and identity'. This definition seems a post-ethnic definition of a grouping, not based on ethnic criteria but rather on political ones.

Conclusion

This chapter has told the history of the creation of the modern Kadazan culture through a mediated objectification of a traditional way of life. This process, which took place in the late 1950s and again in the 1980s, bears many similarities with that carried out by European nationalists in the construction of a nation (Gellner, 1983; Eriksen, 1993), involving the selection of certain elements and the discarding of others as well as the invention of new ones (Hobsbawm and Ranger, 1983). The result of this process was the constitution of an objectified Kadazan culture and the development of a sense of commonality among previously divided groups. The process was arguably determined by political motivations of greater control over the resources and the administration of Sabah.

The most important result of the history I have described in this chapter, however, is the fact that it generated the conditions for the Kadazan masses, at least those living in Penampang, but most likely also in other areas, to *imagine themselves as Kadazan*. As is generally the case with ethnicity, the Kadazan identity was based on notions of common descent, common myths of origin, and local cultures and dialects that were variations of the same language and cultural matrix.

This identity acquired some unique characteristics out of its history, which made it strongly imbued with Christian and modernist values, strongly politicized and opposed to the Federal Government and its Sabahan allies. In particular, the latter element was determined by the resentment provoked by what was experienced as a strong repression exercised by the Mustapha government - through forced conversions to Islam, expulsion of foreign missionaries, exclusion of Kadazan and English language - and by Berjaya - taking over of the *Pesta Kaamatan*, collapsing of all ethnic categories under the label *pribumi*, and the apparent exclusion of non-Muslim *bumiputera* from a fair share of the State's resources and of important posts.

This history associated Kadazan (and Kadazandusun) identity with an oppositional stance towards the federal government, and more generally the state, the Malays and Islam, which often results in the refusal to identify fully as Malaysians, despite the success of the Malaysian nation-building and the establishment of a national culture and identity through various means, the main of which has been control of the media.

The main reason for the continuing significance and appeal of Kadazan identity lies in the fact that the modern, objectified culture on which it was based was well attuned, through an efficient feed-back mechanism, to the lived experiences of the (mostly rural) masses at whom it was directed and by whom it was absorbed through the early media. Thanks to the correspondence between their lived experiences and the culture that was being promoted, as well as to the actual political advantages and sense of dignity it seemed to provide, the term Kadazan – or Kadazandusun - became the one most people started finding the best to express who they think they are.

However the controversies over the ethnic name represented since the period of the birth of this identity the symptom of deep divisions between the indigenous people of Sabah, divisions that mostly had to do with the direction they should take and the goals, political but also cultural and economic, they should pursue.

In the rest of this thesis I will consider these struggles and divisions as part of the empirical analysis of their present life of the Kadazan and Malaysian forms of collective identification, based on the premise that, once come into being, these have acquired a momentum and a life of their own, going beyond the circumstances that generated them and their original meaning.

Part II

Kituau

I was sitting on a sofa covered with sheets made of rough cotton and decorated with typical Bornean designs within the office of Judeth in the Sabah Museum. Judeth, whom I had met through my contacts in the local university, had immediately taken the responsibility to help me with a readiness that really took me by surprise, used as I was to the slow response of many civil servants I had met up to that point in Sabah. She had taken me around the area of Penampang plains, showing me various villages and giving comments about them, trying to help me make up my mind about where I wanted to stay during the next months. I had chosen one of the villages she had shown me for no other reason than it looked more open, more spacious than the others I had seen, the nature there seemed to have a different quality, it looked more rural, which was more in tune with my expectations of the kind of location where I would have stayed. Moreover, in the village lived a *bobohizan*, a traditional Kadazan shaman whom Judeth knew well, whose presence made me feel the place had preserved more traditions than many others.

Now I was sitting, waiting while she was calling by phone the village headman to explain to him that I would have liked to reside there and to arrange a meeting with him. At the end of the conversation, which I listened to with trepidation trying to understand the answers she was giving in Malay, I found out that I had an appointment for that night and that Robin, who also works in the museum and whom I had met through Judeth, was the nephew of the headman and was going to accompany me.

Later that night they picked me up from my lodging in Kota Kinabalu and took me to a house in the village, which I found out belonged to Robin's sister and to Jaunis, her husband, who was sitting at a table with about ten men, waiting for me. The introduction to the group, and my first experience of the village, was a cheerful one, as I was invited to eat and drink with this group of friends and to take part in jokes and in the usual exchange of information about the respective cultures and languages that usually takes place when people from different countries meet. Like the other people I had met before in Kota Kinabalu, all these men spoke very good English, which made things unexpectedly easy for me.

After I had eaten and had a few rounds of beer, I was informed it was the right time to go to the headman's house and to be prepared to drink *talak*, the traditional Kadazan rice spirit that I had already had occasion to taste in the past.

At the house of the headman, where a small birthday party was taking place, I was warmly welcomed and, after being offered the expected *talak*, made by his wife, I attempted to explain to the headman and his son the reason for my being there, what the aims of my research were and why I had chosen that particular village. I ended up receiving the permit to stay and do my research in the village by the headman, who seemed at the same time very happy to have a foreign scholar taking interest in his village and slightly suspicious and possibly happy to divert the nuisance to somewhere or somebody else. With a mixed feeling but a certain degree of hope I was taken back to Jaunis's house for more rounds of beer and chat and then, completely drunk, to my guest house in Kota Kinabalu.

In the following days I accepted Judeth's and Robin's offer to move to their house and headquarters of their cultural association, located at the borders of the village I had chosen, to stay there until I could find a host family willing to take me in their house. The search, carried out by Jaunis, took almost a month, during which I discovered that, while the villagers were very hospitable, much more than I had experienced anywhere else, they were also suspicious and unwilling to take me in their house due to a feeling I soon learnt to know: *malu*, 'shame', consisting in the fact that they were ashamed to show what they felt to be their inferior standard of living to a prestigious *orang putih* doing research for 'London university'. The whole month, during which I was establishing some form of relationship with the villagers, thanks to Augusta, who took me with her when visiting friends and relatives, and Jaunis, who invited me to drink with his friends, was one of extreme frustration, as I felt all the difficulty of being accepted and of moving myself around in unknown territory. Moreover what had looked like a positive characteristic, the geographical width of the village, showed its downsides: the distances and lack of concentration of houses made walking around relatively difficult, and I soon realised that I could not 'pop up' in the house of somebody to ask questions as I liked, as houses constituted a sort of 'private space' access to which had in some way to be negotiated.

At the end, out of frustration, Jaunis and Jacobina resolved to offer me to move to their house, an offer that I gladly accepted as it gave me the opportunity to live with a 'normal family' located within the centre of the village. Moreover, the fact that it constituted an almost daily meeting point for Jaunis group's drinking sessions would have given me the possibility to have a direct and easy access to a network of 'natives'.

So I started moving my first steps within the new reality of the village, equipped with an insufficient knowledge of Malay and total ignorance of Kadazan, armed with a knowledge of anthropological theory and methodology that soon appeared to lose all their effectiveness once I was ‘in the field’ doing ethnography rather than reading it. The holistic bias and that search for a well-defined group of informants, unconsciously identified with ‘the village’ on the one hand, and the critical approaches deconstructing such objectives and methodology on the other, left me, so I felt, lost in a sea in which only my ability at establishing relationships could save me.

Kampung Kitauu

The village has a population of about 1,050 permanent residents, living in 132 houses, mostly located on two main roads, one of which, constituting the original nucleus, runs along the river Limbanak, a stream not deeper than a metre. Around 35% of the village population is below 18 years old, while the voters (21 and above) are about 40%; more than 10% of the population comprises pensioners, while 60% are employed in the public or private sector. All of those employed work either in Kota Kinabalu or Donggonggon, as there are no economic activities in the village apart from a grocery shop-cum-bar. Some of the residents (around 20) work as unlicensed taxi drivers between Donggonggon and the nearby villages¹⁹.

The whole population is ethnically Kadazan, apart from a few Chinese and foreigners from Indonesia, mostly Bugis, who live in huts in the forest and tap rubber, and others (*Timur*), who work and live in rented vegetable gardens. The population is mainly Roman Catholic, with only 5 Muslim families and 2 practicing the traditional religion. The village still has a chief *bobohizan* and two apprentices, all of them more than 60 years old.

All houses have piped water, only 3 houses do not have electricity and use kerosene lamps; refrigerators, television and radio are present in all houses with electricity. Poverty is rare, with only 3 families applying for support as they fall below the poverty line. Almost all residents (90%) have title to some land, which is used to build houses or to grow vegetables or rubber trees; the amount of idle land reaches a

¹⁹ All of the data presented in this section were provided by the former JKK chairman of Kitauu, Louis Jalin, or derive from direct observation

staggering 30% of the total area, due to the fact that rice is not planted any more. The village receives no funding for agriculture, apart from some subsidies available for planting rubber trees; the community has been successful only twice in applying for federal funding to sponsor projects and infrastructure, and it has a very low level of federal and state development investment as compared to other villages.

Many of the people still of working age hold at least a Form 5 title, while some hold a diploma and about a dozen are degree holders. The village is well provided with educational facilities, as there are a kindergarten run by *Kemas*, a government agency which has its regional headquarters here, and a primary school, formerly a mission school now run by the government, in the contiguous village of Limbanak, while Kituau itself has a secondary school since 2003, which attracts pupils from various parts of Penampang as well as parts of Kota Kinabalu.

The institution of the village headman seems to have lost much of its importance as many domains traditionally regulated by *adat* have become secondary to the life of most villagers. The significance of the village headman, moreover, has been reduced by the increasing power of politics - the *ketua kampong* (headman) of the village was appointed by the local assemblyman - and of the judiciary system. I would argue, in conclusion, that the village economic, political and jural autonomy has been greatly reduced by the inclusion within the reality of the nation-state.

Other characteristics of the present situation of the village are the shift away from agriculture to a total dependency on salary, or some form of self-employment, for livelihood, the almost total reliance on immigrants in certain sectors – vegetable agriculture and rubber tapping (Indonesians), construction (Filipinos), domestic work as maids (both) – the economic independence of the elderly given by receiving a pension.



Figure 4 A view of the village from above.



Figure 5 the river flowing through Kituau.



Figure 6 The mosque attached to the local secondary school. Despite the fact that it is not normally used, the crescent on its top can be seen from almost every part of the village.



Figure 7 The church of the nearby Limbanak village, the spiritual centre of Kituau's Christian community.

Chapter 4

Media and belonging to the nation

Chapter 3 described how, starting from the late 1960s, the new Malaysian state enforced its nation-building project through the control of the most important media, namely the radio and, from the 1980s, television, while seriously limiting the possibilities of development of a Kadazan culture and its access to the media. The present chapter builds on the insights of the previous one by considering concrete examples of the way in which Kadazan people situate themselves in relation to the nation-building process carried out through these media. More specifically, I consider how Kadazan villagers situate themselves in relation to the discourses spread by the media and how their responses to them takes the form of an identification with the nation or with other collective forms of identification. While the last chapter provided a diachronic account, the present one, together with the following chapter 5, takes a synchronic approach, based on the ethnographic material gathered in the fieldwork. Differently from the previous one, this chapter considers the media primarily from the point of view of their consumers, drawing closer to ‘audience studies’ and to media anthropology.

I am following the approach used by Mirca Madianou in her study of reception of television news in Greece (2005), taking identity at the centre of her research project, and ‘follow [ing] the circulation of meaning in the context of discourses and practices about the nation and belonging’ (2005: 51), focusing on media and consumption in the context of everyday life. Finding no causal correlation between media and identity, a conclusion confirmed by my empirical findings - as will be evident from the reading of this chapter - Madianou (2005) argues that the media contribute to shifts from open discourses of identity to closed ones, characterised by the essentialist idea of a homogeneous culture and identity, and to the erection of boundaries around it excluding outsiders and stereotyping minorities.

This approach is an attempt to solve the apparent inadequacy of positions that assume a priori either the power of media to influence culture and identities (e.g. McLuhan, 1964; Dayan and Katz, 1992; Morley and Brundson, 1999) or that of culture to influence media consumption and interpretation (e.g. Caldarola, 1990; Liebes and Katz, 1993), and is in line with that of media anthropologists such as

Mankekar (1999), Peterson (2003) and of the contributors to two seminal media anthropology readers (Askew and Wilk, 2002; Ginsburg *et al.*, 2002).

The discussion of the relationship between the media and the positioning in collective forms of identification provided by this chapter starts with an analysis of one of the main ‘foundational media forms’ considered by Postill (2006), state propaganda. Starting from Doolittle’s (2005) description of the responses of Sabahan villagers, showing some important forms of resistance to the penetration of the ideas and practices promoted by government propaganda, I partly question its success in the case of Sabah. The chapter then follows with the analysis of another essential medium, television, expanding on Postill’s (2006) discussion of the form of resistance, which he considered as ineffectual, inherent to the rejection of Malay soaps by the Iban. The section is complemented by a case study analysing the reactions to a very popular Malaysian programme broadcast by satellite television, *Akademi Fantasia*, and highlighting the way in which Kadazan viewers identify themselves as a different group within the national imagined community and how this position is connected to the perception of exclusion and second-class status described by authors such as Winzeler (1997), Boulanger (2000; 2002) and Rosaldo (2003). The following section provides three case studies of the readings made by the Kadazan of three news items published by the newspapers, showing the coexistence of dominant, essentialist readings and of another essentialist oppositional discourse of belonging to an oppressed Kadazan and Christian, imagined community. Finally, the chapter ends with the consideration of an example of the development of a new sensitivity connected with the exposure to different ways of life afforded by the ‘glimpse into other worlds’ (Thompson, 1995) provided by foreign, transnational media forms.

Theoretical approaches to media and identity

Madianou: the news and discourses of belonging

In her analysis of the mediation process, Madianou (2005) concentrates on the way in which audiences react to the discourses presented by the media and the way in which they stimulate discourses of identity. Starting from previous works on

audiences, she elaborates a set of categories for defining the readings made, distinguishing between critical and non critical readings of the news in relation to both the news form and its conventions and to its content. She further divides the readings critical of news content between those accepting the 'dominant, official discourse about the nation and its 'culture'' (2005: 102), which, following Hall (1980) she calls 'dominant' decodings, and those contesting these dominant decodings. Madianou defines these readings as 'demotic', taking the term from Baumann (1996, cited in Madianou, 2005: 25), who used it to refer to the discourses challenging reifications of culture and identity he found in the multicultural London area of Southall. Madianou (2005) also classifies as 'contextual' those decodings that interpret the news through a knowledge of the context in which they are placed, 'historical' those that interpret the news in the light of knowledge of previous events and 'analytic' those in which audiences 'attempt to read through the events and provide reasons for their presentation – or not – in the news' (2005: 102-103). Madianou (2005) also considers the essential interaction between the news content and personal experience of the viewers, determining shifts from news to context in which identity discourses and experiences are articulated in an essential way.

Madianou (2005) concludes her analysis of television news' reception in Greece by arguing that the news provides a common point of reference for the majority of those watching, circulating constantly in people's everyday lives and therefore emerging beyond their informational dimension to become a wider socio-cultural phenomenon (2005: 134). Moreover, she argues that the news broadcasts, through their essentialist discourse based on an 'us and them' dichotomy, contribute in certain cases to the shift from an open to a closed discourse identifying the nation as a culturally and ethnically homogeneous group, therefore excluding minorities and obliterating internal differences. That is especially the case in relationship to international issues in which people feel the need to defend their identity by essentialising it and to mute any internal dissent in order to present a united image of the nation outside its boundaries.

Foster: nation making through media and consumption

Robert Foster (2002) brings forward the notion of nation making to refer to the role played in 'materializing the nation' by non-state agents such as commercial media and consumer culture. His stress on the importance of mass-mediated commercial culture is derived from the specific case he studies, Papua New Guinea (PNG), a 'weak' postcolonial polity in which, he argues, the nation has nevertheless come into existence, often not through state intervention, and in certain cases even against the state, as in the case of discourses about corruption in which citizens thought of themselves as members of the nation betrayed by the state apparatus. Following Anderson (1991), Foster considers the nation as a modular entity, replicated around the world on the basis of 19th century models. He argues that his study of PNG offers comparative material useful to understand the adaptation of the nation to different historical and geographical conditions and to clarify some universal characteristics of the nation, such as the ideological and ontological similarities and connection between the nation and consumerism. He therefore considers advertisements as particularly important in creating the sense that commodities sold at the national level are embodiments and possessions of 'the nation', as well as a vehicle for imagining a community of consumers - a situation that, however, applies mostly to members of an 'emergent urban consumer culture' - 'whose shared consumption practices and ideals put them in experiential unison with each other' (2002: 64).

While I agree with Postill (2006) that the Malaysian state seems much more powerful and more in control of the 'materializing of the nation' than in Papua New Guinea (PNG), I think Foster's insight can give us clues to one of the ways in which a national frame of reference for identity materialises through everyday consumption practices. The availability of the same products, the wide circulation of discourses dealing with their economic, social or health value, the common understanding of notions of distinction connected to the consumption of different commodities, and the exposure to the same media messages promoting the values inherent to such commodities are all experiences shared by the great majority of the citizens of a country, constituting banal, but nevertheless significant, presences.

Thompson: self and experience in a mediated world

Thompson argues that, as the self is a ‘symbolic project that the individual actively constructs [...] out of the symbolic materials [...] available [...] which the individual weaves into [...] a narrative of self-identity’ (1995: 210), this process of self-formation becomes increasingly dependant on mediated symbolic materials in modernity. Two of the effects of such increased importance of media in the ‘reflexive organization of the self’ discussed by Thompson are of particular relevance here: the ‘mediated intrusion of ideological messages’ and the ‘double-bind of mediated dependency’ (1995: 212-13). By the former he refers to the instrumentality of the media in creating ‘the conditions for the intrusion of ideological messages into the context of everyday life’, a process given in-depth consideration by Postill (2006). However, Thompson has a contextual approach to ideology, arguing that whether mediated messages are ideological depends on the way in which they are received by individuals and incorporated reflexively in their lives, becoming part of their projects of self-formation. The second effect of the increased ‘mediation of culture’ considered by Thompson is that the more mediated symbolic forms are used in the process of self-formation, the more the self becomes dependent on media systems behind its control. This double-bind goes beyond the realm of the media, including the educational, labour and welfare systems, with which individuals become increasingly involved yet which they are mostly unable to influence (1995: 214-15).

Another essential effect of the media considered by Thompson is the possibility they provide to experience events that would otherwise not be experienced, either because they occur in a different place or time, or because they have become ‘sequestered’ from everyday life, as in the case of crime or mental insanity, therefore detaching experience from direct encounter. Thompson therefore distinguishes between lived experience - which is situated, continuous and, to some extent, pre-reflexive - and mediated experience. The two have a different ‘relevance structure’, a term Thompson, following Husserl (1970, cited in Thompson, 1995: 229) and Schutz (1974, cited in Thompson, 1995: 229), uses to refer to the relevance of experiences for individuals on the basis of the priorities determined by their project of the self. While lived experience has a direct and unavoidable relevance, the relevance of mediated experience is much more variable, having a ‘rather tenuous, intermittent and

selective relation to the self' (1995: 230). The relevance of this form of experience varies between individuals and between situations; individuals, according to Thompson, tend to integrate mediated experiences more in their daily schedules the more relevant they are perceived to be to the self (1995: 230-231).

Summing up

This section has introduced the main theoretical approaches I am following in the analysis of the relationship between the media and the identification with collective forms of belonging among the Kadazan. Starting from Postill (2006) my discussion sets itself to investigate the effects of the formation of a 'thick' national culture in Malaysia, both through the efforts of state-led nation-building and through the establishment of local configurations of consumerism (Foster, 2002), on the way in which the Kadazan identify themselves. The first part of the analysis, following Madianou's (2005) conclusion that there is no direct connection between the media and identity, examines the way in which the readings of the news made by my informants show a complex engagement with discourses about the nation, often involving shifts to closed discourses which at times correspond to a sense of belonging to the nation but often situate individuals within oppositional categories that are, nevertheless, equally essentialist. The nation, however, appears often as an essential frame of reference (Foster, 2002; Madianou, 2005). Moreover, following Thompson (1995) I consider the symbolic material provided by the media to be used by individuals to create self-narratives that encompass the various frames of reference and discourses by combining lived and mediated experience in a whole that has a form of coherence despite the disparate experiential material used to construct it and its seemingly incoherent applications.

The next section deals directly with one of the 'foundational media forms' through which Postill argues the Malaysian nation has been built, development propaganda, which consists of both discursive and non-discursive elements and which clarifies the political context influencing Kadazan reactions to the media.

‘Sustainable propaganda’

Postill stresses the use of development made by the state as a tool for nation-building by considering it, following Ramakrishna (2002, cited in Postill, 2006: 89-90), as a non-discursive form of propaganda putting into practice the words of the discursive part. He uses the term ‘sustainable propaganda’ to refer to the fact that government propaganda on security, development and national integration presents itself, according to him, as a form of sustainable development (2006: 89).

He argues that the propaganda coming from the political and cultural centres has rapidly reached even remote areas, where it has become integrated with local ideals, giving birth to what he calls an ‘ideolect’, a sort of ideological dialect of Malaysia’s nationalist ideology, and shaped the people’s worldview to such an extent that it has become hardly distinguishable from the views of people from all backgrounds. Postill found a striking similarity between the ideolects of Iban of different areas of Sarawak, which seems to stand in contrast to the quite marked differences in media practices among different Iban localities (2006: 91-93).

In his analysis of the ideolect of the Saribas area of Sarawak, he singles out two primary loci in which state propaganda has effectively shaped the local ideology: the school and the longhouse. The former is the site in which the moral order of children is most explicitly and repeatedly articulated through media practices. Essays and coursework are analysed by the author as the best way into the children’s moral order, and as giving insights into the way hegemonic ideology is internalised by them. Some discourses, such as the preference of many boys for becoming policemen and girls to become teachers, are highly prevalent, as they are supported by a number of entwined social formations, agents and media. Postill (2006) explains this phenomenon arguing that the school experience of the almost totality of the Iban children he encountered in his research elicited only what Rorty (1991, cited in Postill, 2006: 101) called ‘paradigms of inference’, which tend to confirm existing beliefs and encompass a minimal degree of transformation when new knowledge is acquired. At the level of the longhouse, the traditional form of oratory has dramatically declined and, when public speeches are often given through public-address system, the speakers are generally caught between the knowledge associated with literacy and Malaysia and the local and oral Iban one, without being able to bridge the gap between the two (2006: 93-105).

Postill (2006) attributes the success of the state's sustainable propaganda in shaping the local idiolect to its strong resonance with traditional values, such as the respect for the elders, and to its apparent effectiveness, as deed actually follows word, and messages have usually proved to be right, as in the case of education, which really gives better opportunities of employment and career. The reality of the state's propaganda derives also, to an important extent, from the Iban's lack of access to any alternative source of information, such as non-government media, which might challenge these representations. The problem, however, goes beyond accessibility, as most rural Iban, according to Postill, do not have the habit of considering or discussing interpretations of events alternative to that provided by the government.

Sabah: a failure of 'sustainable propaganda'?

Similarly to Postill, Doolittle (2005) argues that development is used in Sabah as 'a central strategy for building a modern nation in which Federal ideologies are integrated into local life' (2005: 1), and for increasing the political, economic and cultural domination of the Malay-Muslim central and local ruling elites. Rather than, as officially declared, alleviating the lower strata's poverty, development practices, according to Doolittle legitimise the government and 'facilitate the expansion and entrenchment of the ruling, national ideology at the local level' (2005: 2). The development agenda, as expressed by the official literature of the *Gerakan Desa Wawasan* ('Village Movement toward Vision', GDW) - the rural development program which is part of the *Wawasan 2020* master plan - aims at transforming rural agriculture from subsistence-aimed to commercial, a transformation based on the ideology of 'productive', 'orderly' rural management and on 'highly disciplined working habits' (expressions quoted from official propaganda). The GDW official propaganda also has a strong Islamic colouring, calling for 'spiritual awareness' and for 'spiritually uniting people with Allah' (1996, cited in Doolittle, 2005: 8).

Doolittle, however, concludes that development programmes in Sabah are 'only partially successful at legitimizing state authority at the local level' because of the resistance of rural populations, able to demystify the ideology and refuse their support to the actualisation of the state agenda. In the case analysed by Doolittle (2005), the residents of Tempulong, a village in Sabah's interior, questioned and even rejected the

development programme brought forward by the federal agencies and federal involvement in local affairs, not being convinced that it would bring benefits to themselves or to the village as a whole. Moreover, ‘recognizing the political message behind the rhetoric of rural development, residents did not fully embrace UMNO ideology, the Islamic religion, or Malaysian nationalism as a result of GDW’ (2005: 31). The villagers reacted in a mixed and confused way to the overall project: while the appeal of modernisation and development was strong to them, they contested many of the propagandistic elements. The reactions included laughing, mockery, contempt and statements showing a deep animosity toward the Malay Peninsula (*Semenanjung*), the federal government and its alleged taking over of Sabah government. This failure of propaganda was, however, not complete according to Doolittle, as a partial bureaucratic reach to the village was obtained by the federal agencies and their local UMNO ally strengthened his political base by being able to attract the development funds. The government acknowledged the failure of GDW projects in the majority of the villages, but, taking an attitude described also by Postill (2006) blamed the villagers’ ‘mindsets’ for that.

The issue of development has a different significance in the Penampang plains than in other areas of Sabah such as the one considered by Doolittle (2005), as the area, being relatively developed and close to the State capital, is not an object of plans from the government. The idea of development, therefore, is not connected with rural plans, but with a more general idea of benefiting from education, employment, infrastructure and other services.

The inhabitants of the Penampang plains, as I will show throughout the chapter, have a very critical stance towards the state and federal government and, similarly to the residents of Tempulong, identify development projects as instrumental in establishing Malay-Muslim control and in furthering a Malayisation agenda. As described by Doolittle for Tempulong (2005: 23), Penampang Kadazan from all backgrounds regard allegiance to UMNO as a betrayal of their ethnic identity, and openly acknowledge the use made of development to get votes for UMNO and for expanding the federal power. The marginal status of the Kadazan within Malaysia, in my view (see also Winzeler, 1997, Rosaldo, 2003), explains the apparent lack of success of development propaganda and the rejection of Malay(sian) media -and not only- products (see below), without unwarrantedly ‘elevating marginal viewers to interpretive parity with the intelligentsia’(cf. Postill, 2006: 9). Differently from the

situation described by Doolittle in Tempulong in the mid-1990s, however, most Kadazan of Penampang in the mid-2000s share a lack of trust also in their own leaders and in previously cherished institutions such as PBS and KDCA.

In the next sections, after briefly describing the patterns of media consumption in Kituau, I provide a discussion of the way in which the village residents position themselves in relation to dominant discourses present in the media.

Media consumption in Kituau

Television is a very common medium, as all the households with electricity own at least a set. Satellite television has also become very popular since the setting up of the Malaysian provider ASTRO in 1996, with more than half (around 65%) of the households with television subscribing to it. Currently, the service provides 68 television, 17 radio, and 5 pay-per-view channels plus various interactive services. Many of the villagers also have a DVD player for watching DVDs or Video CDs, which they can buy at low price from street vendors and exchange with friends and relatives, though they most often watch television.

Television is the main form of evening entertainment for the majority of the villagers, and people generally tend to stay in the house watching it with members of their family. Some informants told me that when they had no television they would go to bed early or spend time chatting with their family and friends, a fact that bears many similarities with the shift of evening activities from the public area, the 'gallery', to the private apartments (*bilik*) in Iban longhouses (Postill, 2006: 19). While television is on most of the times in Kadazan houses, very often people just keep it on as a background to their activities, and just get a glimpse of the images and the sounds being broadcast, as described by Bausinger (1984), that is especially the case for women preparing meals.

Excluding the illiterate minority, the majority of my informants considered the newspapers as their favourite source of news, arguing that they are more independent and reliable than television and radio. While both locally produced and national newspapers, coming from the Peninsula are available in Sabah, all of my informants and acquaintances always read Sabahan newspapers, choosing among one of the three, the *Daily Express*, *New Sabah Times* and *Borneo Post*, published in a tri-lingual

- English, Malay and Kadazandusun - version. They justified their preference for Sabahan newspapers, and in particular for the *Daily Express*, considered the most independent, with their focus on events often not reported in the national media. A good knowledge of either English or Malay provides a full access to the news, while the Kadazandusun sections only consist of two pages, and therefore include only certain items, while they also have some unique contents, such as village news and letters or poems sent by readers. Retired men and those not working at the time also often meet at some coffee shop in Donggonggon and discuss the news they have just read as well as local events which have happened to members of the family, friends or other villagers.

Radio is, at present, less of a favourite medium than television, but it remains, together with tape player, the preferred medium used while driving to work or to the shops, and is also often played at full power in the public buses. There are only two Sabahan stations available, both run by the public broadcaster RTM, but various commercial stations from the Peninsula can also be received. Most of my informants, however, told me they were mainly interested in the Kadazan broadcast, which can be heard in the early mornings and between 2 and 4 in the afternoons.

The Kadazan Section of Radio Malaysia Sabah constitutes the main medium using the language, which makes it suitable for those who prefer media in their mother-tongue. People told me they were interested in the Kadazan broadcast because it provides local news about Penampang and nearby districts as well as entertainment in the form of Kadazandusun music, both traditional and modern. People who listen to the Kadazan Section often do so animated by a sense of nostalgia for the old times, especially satisfied by 'classical' Kadazandusun music recorded by famous stars of the past, as well as by an interest, coupled by a sort of pride, in things that are peculiarly Kadazan and that, among the media, can be found only on the radio. Among those are discussions about *adat*, the traditional customs, as well as traditional myths and legends belonging to Kadazan oral literature as well as - the one to which people listen with most care - the announcement of somebody's death, accompanied by the sound of Kadazan flute, the *tuahi*, which some people even use as a ring tone for their mobile phones, which carries an emotionally reassuring sense of continuity with a traditional, pre-modern condition.

In rural Penampang only a minority of the population regularly accesses the internet or acquires much information through it. The situation can be attributed to

the fact that the only internet connection available within the village was, until very recently, a dial-up one, which was comparatively slow and quite unreliable. The lack of access to the internet, however, cannot be attributed solely to problems of access, as many of those working in Kota Kinabalu have some access to it – though limited by working constraints –from their offices. The majority of the adult population just does not seem very interested in using the internet or in learning about it, and the internet remains mostly a domain of youth in their teens and twenties, who usually access it in internet points located either in Donggonggon or, more rarely, Kota Kinabalu.

The mobile phone, on the other hand, is very common and it is the most used and valued interpersonal medium, and its use spans from the exchange of funny SMS chains or the making of arrangements for the time at which to meet at a pub to the circulation of SMS asking for support to an anti-government protest campaign and soliciting participation in a huge popular demonstration against a resettlement scheme. Moreover, the mobile phone has substituted the wristwatch as the primary time-keeping medium, incorporating two different functions into a single object. Mobile phones are used by the majority of adults and increasingly by teenagers, while the elderly are usually not attracted by this relatively new technology, which has become a vital possession for all those who learned how to use it and have quickly become used to it.

A site of contestation? Reception of Malay TV dramas and films

When asked about television programmes, villagers consistently, across distinctions of age or gender, replied giving negative opinions about Malay TV dramas. A recurrent discourse expressed dislike for Malay soaps dismissing them as *Malazu* - (Malay in Kadazan) an expression often used with some sort of disdain by the Kadazan – implying that they were made by *Malazu* for *Malazu*, therefore catering for the tastes of the Malays and only representing their lives and their experiences.

This identification of the soaps with Malayness is arguably based on the main features common to the genre, which Anuar and Kim (1996) identified in the use of

Malay language, the almost totally Malay casting and setting in locations such as Malay villages or neighbourhoods. Moreover, these dramas mostly focus on the socio-cultural implications of modernisation upon certain members of the Malay community, generally presenting successful Malay professionals, while sometimes expressing concern over certain elements of a modernised society, proposing recourse to the Islamic values promoted by the government as a solution to the contradictions emerging. They rarely represent non-Malay characters, distancing themselves from the everyday life of Malaysians, which involves constant inter-ethnic encounters, and marginalising members of other ethnic groups. They also represent women in a very limited way, as wives and mothers, or, rarely, when involved in business, as unable to look after career and family at the same time, bringing negative consequences to their family (Anuar and Kim, 1996: 270-72).

The dislike of Malay soaps I found among the Kadazan corresponds to what described by Postill (2006: 107-110), who found that Malay soaps ranked very low in a survey about the popularity of television programmes he carried out among the Iban in the Saribas region of Sarawak. Postill (2006) explains what seems to be a 'collective rejection of an entire television genre on their basis of their being 'full of rich people eating in expensive restaurants' (2006: 108) by arguing that Malay soaps constitute an irritating anomaly, a 'matter out of place' like dirt in Mary Douglas's (1966) famous conceptualisation, in the Saribas Iban's idiolect. The soaps, while they belong to the 'ideolectally-correct' genre of television drama, by presenting 'urban Malays flaunting their wealth on television' (2006: 109), would be at odds with the Iban egalitarian principles that form part of the Saribas idiolect. At the same time, they would also belie the propaganda ideology, internalised in the idiolect, according to which all Malaysian races, Iban included, are simultaneously developing towards prosperity. Another relevant aspect of Postill's discussion (2006) consists in the explanation he provides for the apparent contradiction between the rejection of Malay soaps and the positive reaction reserved for Western soaps such as *Dallas* or *Dynasty*, similarly portraying the rich and the famous. Postill argues that Malay soaps would be part of a 'system of commensurate difference' (Gewertz and Errington, 1991, cited in Postill, 2006: 108-109), constituted by the Malaysian inter-ethnic frame of reference, while the world of the *orang putih*, would be beyond such a system and incommensurate to it.

This interpretation seems valid for explaining the preference for Western media products expressed by the majority of my informants, based on the widespread opinion that their much higher quality – in terms of actors, make-up, costumes, special effects, directing – cannot be equalled by Malaysian ones. As described by Postill for the Iban, aesthetic accomplishments and race seem to be inseparable, as the products of the *orang putih*, ‘the most advanced race on earth’, are well shot and acted and ‘have logic’ (2006: 109), while Malay dramas are pale imitations of them. The same sense of ‘incommensurate difference’ between the West and Malaysia was expressed by some of my informants, especially the elderly, through a different attitude towards violence and other ‘immoral behaviour’ when portrayed in Western and Malaysian media products. An example is given by the village *bobohizan*, who, like other villagers, argued that Malay television dramas present an excessive level of violence and other ‘bad behaviour’, encouraging negative attitudes in the youth, but, when asked about whether the same problem was true for Western products, replied that ‘these things are part of the culture of the *orang putih*, so it is normal that they show their society as it is’.

It must be noted, however, that most villagers also appreciated soap operas from other non-Western countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia and Mexico, despite the fact that their lack of production resources is similar to that of Malaysian ones. These products are usually appreciated on the basis of seemingly completely different aesthetic criteria: as expressed by Judeth, an avid viewer of Indonesian soaps, ‘Indonesian soaps are better than Malaysian ones, as they have good acting and imaginative plots. Yes, they are unrealistic, but they are not meant to be realistic as the Malay ones, they are set in sort of magic world, a fairyland’. Again, we can see a system of incommensurate difference (Gewertz and Errington, 1991) in which, despite a lack of hierarchy as that perceived between the West and Malaysia, other foreign media products are judged according to different canons from those applied to the Malaysian ones. Another essential aspect of the interest of many Kadazan in foreign media product is constituted by the possibility it gives to get a ‘glimpse of other worlds’, to vicariously experience life in other places and other times through them (Lull, 1991; Thompson, 1995: 212). Western films and soaps, moreover, have the added educational value that, as told me by Jacobina, they offer the possibility to improve one’s level of English, a fact that is much appreciated by parents, considering

the high value put on knowing the language and the predominance of Malay in the national education system.

Postill considers the rejection of Malay dramas as one of the ‘key tensions and contradictions in some of the media practices that shape the maintenance of the idelect’ (2006: 105), but concludes that it constitutes an ‘ineffectual form of resistance, for it perpetuates the illusion of a nationwide equality despite mounting evidence to the contrary’ (2006: 110). Considering that the dislike of Malay dramas was never explicitly expressed by my informants in terms of disapproval of the way of life of the rich and the powerful, however, I would explain such attitude through a lack of fit between the life experiences portrayed in such media products and those of the Kadazan viewers, conferring a low position in the ‘relevance structure’ (Thompson, 1995) of Kadazan viewers. The life experiences encountered through foreign media are certainly even more alien, but being part of an incommensurate system are not questioned and appreciated because they provide the knowledge of other worlds and, in certain cases, some skills necessary to understand and imitate the ‘most successful race in the world’, whose way of life is becoming, thanks to the media, less and less foreign. The Malay soaps, on the other hand, show the experientially far, yet familiar, world of, mostly urban, Peninsula from the point of view of the Malays, an experience to which the Kadazan cannot and do not want to relate. The lack of interest in relating to this world should be attributed to the general resentment of Malay domination within Malaysia and to the consciousness of the second-class status of the Kadazan vis-à-vis the politically dominant Malay and economically powerful Chinese. From such a perspective, the Kadazan are encouraged to make an ‘oppositional’ reading of Malay media products, including soap operas, identifying, often unconsciously, a propaganda element promoting a national culture based on Malay and Islamic values.

Akademi Fantasia

The television programme *Akademi Fantasia* (AF), broadcast since 2003 on the satellite channel Astro Ria and reaching its fifth edition in 2007, was, at the time of my fieldwork, one of the most popular among my informants who, like many other Malaysians nationwide, followed regularly its Saturday night broadcast and daily

repetitions and updates. The programme, whose format was first developed in the Mexican show *La Academia* (www.wikipedia.org), is Malaysia's first reality show, in which young aspirant singers, stay in a house called 'Akademi', are imparted daily singing lessons and perform on Saturday night in a prime-time show at the end of which a contestant is eliminated every week.

What is unique about Kadazan people's relationship with the programme is that they seem interested only in the performance of Kadazandusun or Sabahan contestants. As expressed by Denis (40 years old), who said 'I watch it just to see how our kind does', by which he meant Kadazandusun contestants, Kadazan people seem to be interested in the programme mostly as an arena for their own 'kind' to show their worth at the national level. The interests they put in the way Kadazandusun and Sabahans perform seem to derive from the unconscious desire to 'beat the Malays' in their own field: the national arena and especially the media, strongly controlled by the centre, thanks to their skills, in this case singing, an activity Kadazandusun are very fond of and in which they pride themselves to excel. In so doing, Kadazan seem to want to dispel some prejudices held by the people from *Semenanjung* according to which Sabahans would be unrefined country-bumpkins or even savages, 'still living on the trees'²⁰. This reading seems to be confirmed by a statement by the same Denis, who lamented that one of the contestants, Velvet, was very rough and unrefined and gave a bad image of the Kadazan. This interest for Kadazan and Sabahan participants, which is shared also by non-Kadazan Sabahans I have talked to, is often associated with a dislike for Malay participants, especially exemplified by Mawi, the winner of the third edition and now a famous singer and public character, often labelled as 'a fanatic from Kelantan'²¹, and 'a negative model they are trying to promote, just because he is Malay':

An important recurrent topic of conversation and discourse relating to AF was the one about how, during the third edition a Kadazandusun finalist, Marsha, had been eliminated from the programme despite the fact that she had received many votes, allegedly because the reception of SMS from Sabah had been disabled, and therefore the votes of her supporters had not been counted. While the event had later been recognised as a technical fault, and Marsha had been re-entered in the

²⁰ That is what more than one Kadazan told me Peninsula people think of Sabahans

²¹ A State of Peninsular Malaysia known for the very Islamic attitudes of its majority and for being ruled by the Islamic opposition party PAS

competition, the organisers made sure, according to those exposing this sort of 'conspiracy theory', that she would not win against the Malay Mawi by manipulating the votes during the final. This 'conspiracy theory' is in tune with the feelings of being sidelined by the state establishment, as well as misrepresented and mostly left out from the media, that appeared to be common among Kituau residents. On the other hand, it must be acknowledged that AF is a particularly Malaysian phenomenon in which, despite their opposition, Kadazan are still situated, and situate themselves, as consumers of a national media and political arena and whose rules they follow.

The circulation of discourses in the news

Most of my informants, and particularly the males, seemed to be very interested in all types of news, and they generally had a highly politicised and critical approach (see below). The press arguably has a strong agenda-setting role, as news items very often trigger conversation about the reported issues, and the knowledge about the facts reported by the newspapers is often an implicit prerequisite for much conversation.

In the following sections, I analyse three case studies constituted by three debates among some of my informants triggered by their reading of three news items in the national press, the favourite source of news. The issues reported by the news were not particularly important, but I have chosen them as relevant examples of how my Kadazan informants react to the discourses present in the media by situating themselves within particular frames of reference and projecting themselves into collective forms of identification.

The Singapore bridge issue

On 13th of April 2006, the newspapers (e.g. *Daily Express*, 13/4/2006) reported that Malaysia had decided to stop the construction, started in 2003, of the 'scenic bridge' meant to replace the existing causeway between Malaysia and Singapore. The decision was justified by the arising of 'legal implications and complications' as well as by the fact that, according to the prime Minister, Malaysian people were unhappy

with the conditions posed by Singapore as a prerequisite for their acceptance of the project. Later, the press reported criticisms moved by former PM Mahathir Mohamad, the ‘mind behind’ the project, who said that Malaysia should not have bowed to Singapore’s pressure. The criticism was one among various moved by the former PM to the present government since he has retired (*Daily Express*, 14/4/2006).

As is usually the case with news items from the press, the issue became a topic of discussion among a group of people sitting outside Jaunis’ house chatting and drinking some beers. The people taking part in the conversation divided themselves between those agreeing with the decision and those agreeing with Mahathir’s position.

None of the participants in the discussion made a reading critical of the news as genre or of the journalistic conventions, nor did they make what Madianou (2005: 102-103) calls analytic readings, ‘attempt[ing] to read through the events and provide the reasons for their presentation – or not – in the news’. The readings of this item of news, on the other hand, was contextualised with previous knowledge derived from previous media reports, most likely other newspaper articles but also television news, which provided people with the basis on which to form their opinion about the present and former PM and Cabinets and their way of working. Some people criticised the bridge project as another result of Mahathir’s politics of grandeur, while others like Jaunis argued that criticising this type of project was short-sighted, as in the case of the construction of the Formula 1 circuit at Sepang, initially criticised by many as another unnecessary ‘show-off’ by Mahathir, which not only ended up being a commercial and economic success, but it gave Malaysia fame and renown by putting the country on the map of one of the world’s most popular sports and therefore giving it international visibility and respect.

In this case the readings of the news were articulated in a way not directly informed by personal experience or by alternative sources, but rather on personal opinions derived from the previous mainstream news.

The readings of news contents by all discussants, whether they took a pro- or anti-government position, should be considered as dominant, as neither of them challenged the official discourse about the nation and the presupposition that all readers belong to it. The readers did not contest or seem aware of the ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig, 1995) identifying the readers as naturally belonging to the nation, and as being part of the Malaysia to which the article attributed the decisions and actions taken by the government. Moreover, the people participating in the discussion not only took for

granted the fact that the issues discussed in the paper involved, despite the lack of any direct connection with their life, them as Malaysians, but also that, within the international order constituted by a world of states, states should try to increase their political, economic and symbolic power vis-à-vis the others.

The Danish cartoon events

In February 2006, Malaysia was involved in the worldwide controversial issue regarding the reprinting of cartoons allegedly representing Prophet Mohamed by the Danish *Jyllands Posten* and then by various European dailies. The reaction of Malaysian Muslims was not as strong as in other countries such as Indonesia, and it did not escalate into acts of violence. The Malaysian public opinion was further stirred when the *Sarawak Tribune*, Sarawak's oldest daily, published some of the Danish cartoons. Many Muslims reacted with outrage and the government called the paper's editor for questioning and eventually revoked the *Tribune*'s publishing licence (*Daily Express*, 9/2/2006; 23/2/2006).

The stir created by the news reached Sabah, where people, like all Malaysians not living in Sarawak, had no occasion to see the cartoons under discussion, a fact that created much curiosity about the cartoons that could determine such a strong reaction around the world, and the issue became subject of discussion among the villagers of Kitauu. The reading made by those I discussed the issue with, as in the case previously examined, was critical neither of the news as genre nor analytic. The reading they made was dominant as it did not challenge the Malaysian state ideology that issues such as religion and ethnicity are sensitive and the media should therefore avoid offending sensitivities at all costs. This principle is not only completely internalised by the media producers, who consistently practise a form of self-censorship, partly as a result of fears of having their newspaper's licence revoked, but also by Malaysian citizens such as my Kadazan informants who took it for granted that issues of religion and ethnicity are sensitive and should therefore be treated with the maximum caution or even not treated at all.

The issue triggered a reflection on the different reactions to issues of this type between Muslims and Christians and on the different protection of the two groups' sensitivities afforded by the Malaysian government and media. One of my informants.

Jacobina, expressed this view saying that ‘Muslim sensitivities are much more easily hurt than those of Christians’ and that if such cartoons had been published about Christian religion nobody would have protested with such strength, nor would have the Malaysian government. She supported such view by citing the example of the debate on the controversial *Da Vinci Code*, which was condemned by the Catholic Church as presenting a false view of the life of Jesus Christ and of the history of the early Christian Church, but which did not determine any reaction in the Malaysian government. Moreover, she argued, ‘we Christians did not make a big fuss as the Muslims did about the Danish cartoons’.

This kind of reaction should be read as deriving from the experience of being a Christian minority within a Muslim country, and to the deriving feeling, reinforced by the memory of the various policies of Islamisation and Malayisation described in the last chapter, of not being fully accepted by the government as such.

While various villagers expressed the curiosity to see the cartoons in order to judge for themselves whether the reactions were justified or not, implicitly agreeing with the *Sarawak Tribune*’s choice, they did not have such a chance. Among my informants only Martha, one of the few people who obtain a significant amount of information through the internet, was able to see the cartoons through a website, and she told me she thought the reaction to them was excessive, as the mocked character was never directly identified as Prophet Mohamed.

My informants, therefore, got involved in the series of international events started by the publication of the ‘Danish cartoons’ through the media, not challenging the dominant position demanding to avoid ‘sensitive issues’ but also interpreting the debate in the light of their unique, local, condition, opposing themselves as a perceivedly oppressed minority who feels they are not being treated with respect (Rosaldo, 2003) by the Muslim-dominated state. This reading, while challenging the implicit depiction of Malaysia as a Muslim country, and implicitly asking for recognition of the rights of minorities to equal treatment, responded with another closed, essentialist discourse of identity, confirming Arendt’s argument (1968, cited in Madianou, 2005: 137) that upholding an identity is a usual reaction to the feeling of it being under attack through defamation and persecution.

The Sipadan incident

On the 17th of May 2006, the Sabahan newspaper reported the collision of a large barge, loaded with building materials, with the coral reef of Sipadan island, a national park and one of the main tourist attractions of the State, attracting a great number of divers from all around the world (*Daily Express*, 17/05/2006). After the incident, many official sources and NGOs called for a review of the proposed RM5 million project (about 700,000 pounds) to construct a restaurant/club house, dive shop and staff quarters, possibly using concrete materials and apparently involving heavy machines. Sabah's chief Minister intervened in the matter ordering the suspension of all construction activities and a full probe on the destruction of corals. He also decided that projects carried out in environmentally sensitive areas should have prior Cabinet approval in the future (*Daily Express*, 17/6/2006; 18/6/2006). The press later reported that the State Minister of Tourism replied to a question from a local MP by saying that the project carried out at Sipadan was aimed at providing basic facilities like toilets and a resting place for tourists and divers, following the Government's decision to cease the operations of resorts there. The project also included the construction of quarters for 12 army personnel, seven police personnel and eight Sabah Parks' staff who are on duty there (*Daily Express*, 1/7/2006).

My informants made an analytical reading of the news regarding these events, attributing the incident to the desire of the politician and businessmen involved to make the highest possible profits without taking care of the measures necessary to safeguard safety or the environment. This reading identified this way of acting as the deep, real cause of the incident, and was critical of the journalistic conventions not reporting the real causes of certain events when these go against the interest of the powerful. In this reading, similarly to what was described by Madianou (2005: 105-106), my informants referred to the journalists, media owners and politicians through the pronoun 'they', implying a symbiosis between the media and politics to cover up the real facts in order to defend the interests of the powerful. From this point of view, one of my informants argued that, considering the Chief Minister is from an area of the East Coast very near Sipadan and that he owns or participates in most of the companies of the area, it was very likely that he had a personal interest and some stake in the business causing the incident. My informant therefore considered the

stance of the Chief Minister to be hypocritical and argued that he had stopped the building on the island only because of the negative local and international reaction – some international diving blogs reported the incident – and that he might re-start the operations once the fuss calmed down.

This attitude is often corroborated by personal experience, as exemplified by the great amount of wealth amassed by a villager who was involved in politics and has bought a great amount of land and built an extravagant villa on top of a hill dominating the *kampung*. The same informant who accused the Chief Minister of being hypocritical told me that, while visiting the local MP at the State assembly to discuss a project, he saw many people going to him asking for money, even as little as 20 ringgit. He described the event as normal, arguing that the life of the MP is much about managing people who come to ask for something, providing a view, which I found to be widespread among the villagers, seeing the relationship between politicians and voters as one in which the former act as patrons, getting votes from their clients and then redistributing the resources, deriving from people's taxes, either in form of contracts or even in cash. While the villagers seem to accept this patron-client relationship as a normal component of politics, they are, on the other hand, as shown by the reactions to the Sipadan incident, ready to denounce, and even to infer without concrete evidence, the misconduct and corruption of politicians.

This attitude is expressed through an essentialist discourse that identifies politicians, of all parties and ethnic origin, as being primarily moved by self-interest and as putting such interests before those of the people they represent. Nevertheless, this attitude provokes an ambiguous moral stance mixing condemnation and the idea that the behaviour of the politicians is intrinsic to the exercise of power.

Subjectivities for the new modernity

Postill argues that television plays, together with the Malay-medium school system, an essential role in the 'double westernisation' of Sarawak and Sabah, a term by which he describes 'the two-step flow of ideas, images and practices from the Western world (especially the U.S.A.) selected and recycled in West Malaysia and then re-exported to East Malaysia' (2006: 84).

The advent and widespread diffusion of satellite television have arguably reinforced this flow while limiting to a great extent the control the state exerts on it. Satellite television is in fact the ultimate vehicle of the spread of the global modernity linked to consumerism. This is a type of modernity which is, however, different from, and at times at odds with, the one promoted by both Malaysian and Kadazan modernists. The main carriers of this global consumerism are foreign-produced television programmes, going from films to television show formats (e.g. AF) to advertisement to 'lifestyle' programmes and documentaries. The latter, in particular, showing people going around the world visiting attractions or sightseeing, going to restaurants and hotels, showing dream houses or world cuisine, by appealing to viewers' interest in glimpsing at other worlds and having vicarious experiences (Thompson, 1995), spread a global form of consumerism and the appreciation for features of different places and activities seen as possibilities for almost limitless spending and consumerist pleasures, encompassing all aspects of life, from leisure to working, from everyday life to vacation.

In disagreement with Foster (2002), I would argue that the form of consumerism promoted by these commercial media, despite their being a Malaysian configuration of global ones, does not generate a national frame of reference, but rather a global one, which Kadazan individuals seem to find highly appealing, possibly for the promises it bears of direct access to the culture and way of life of the *orang putih*, bypassing the control and limitation imposed by the Malaysian state and by its Malay ruling elites.

The new form of modernity promoted by the media has slowly been penetrating urban Sabah and spreading from cities, modifying the lifestyle of many of the relatively well-off and modernised inhabitants of Penampang, especially those who have a direct contact with its practical embodiment in the working and shopping practices of the State capital. Young and early-middle-age women, in particular, tend to be more attracted by this ideology because of their often most dynamic role and because these messages focus more on elements belonging to the feminine sphere: ways of keeping the house and cooking, household products, raising the children, beauty, and products offering to obtain it. Young Kadazan women also seem to be more involved in another aspect of the consumerist, 'cosmopolitan', lifestyle, travelling and going out to pubs and restaurants, which I would argue is connected to their stronger connection with the urban environment and their more 'modern'

patterns of social interaction, while the men generally tend to prefer more traditional patterns of consumption and of leisure.

The personal experience of one of my informants seems also to suggest the influence of television in the development of new subjectivities, in line with Mankekar's argument that media consumption is 'a contested space in which subjectivities are constituted' (1993: 471). Similarly to what described by Mankekar (1999), representations of family on television caused personal and subjective family experiences to surface. My informant, however, seemed to be able to articulate them by elaborating the discourses about family that were implicit in various media products she had consumed. Jacobina, a 38 year old bank clerk, argued that by watching foreign, and especially American, films she understood the importance of creating bonds within the family by showing affection to the other members and by showing her inner sentiments and teaching her children to do the same. This new subjective position led her to question and criticise the Kadazan – and more broadly South-east Asian – traditional cultural character, which sees expression of inner emotions negatively, a character that she sees as exemplified by her husband, who 'never hugs or shows affection to his children'.

The new subjectivities exemplified by Jacobina, which I found to be common also – although often in a less articulated way – to other young women often involves a discourse paying attention to people's behaviour and mental states and explaining them on the basis of popularised and simplified psychological notions. This psychologistic discourse is associated with a more general medical one, spread by the media, especially through health-related surveys on television or columns of newspapers and magazines, dealing with arguments such as diet, general health, good parenting, solving emotional and relational problems and even horoscopes. The penetration of this medical discourse is evident in everyday interaction, where talk about health in pseudo-medical terms is very common, such as in the very common case of an adult man meeting a friend and asking how he is and being answered 'I am ok, but I have the usual problems with BP [blood pressure], I should do some exercise' or people talking about the cholesterol content of some of their favourite traditional foodstuffs.

This medical discourse can be compared with the discourse of health, communicating ideas of physically strong and morally sound bodies, constituted, according to Foster (2002) by the imagery and exhortations of commercial

advertising. This discourse, which involves the idea of athletic, medically sound and morally acceptable bodies, invokes according to Foster, the dominant themes of Western individualism, considering the person to correspond to the body and to be the individuated and discrete locus of autonomous agency (2002: 88). In one of the adverts that Foster cites as an example, the image presented power as allowing individuals at the same time to make their body more self-controlled and in control of the world as well as allowing them to choose what to incorporate by choosing what products to buy (2002: 95).

This modernity, however, is not sweeping all the discursive space, but rather is confronted with ambiguity and a bifocal approach: on the one hand an inward-looking perspective, looking at locality and local values and practices, on the other an outward-looking one, looking at the world as a global place.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have demonstrated that the Kadazan have a strongly negative attitude towards development and other forms of state propaganda, as well as more generally towards Malay products. This negative attitude is derived from a strong resentment towards Muslim-Malay domination and what is perceived to be a colonisation of Sabah by the Peninsula, as well as from the feeling of being second-class citizens, not enjoying the benefits that official propaganda and policies attribute to the native population. This attitude also informs the reading of the news, in which Kadazan individuals tend to demonstrate a critical stance towards the government and the world of politics. The essentialist discourse of nationhood widely present in the press is therefore generally contrasted through an equally essentialist discourse of ethnic and local belonging.

The reaction to news and other media products is also informed by a local 'relevance structure' (Thompson, 1995) stressing the importance of lived experience and therefore leading to the rejection of Malay dramas on the basis of their lack of fit with it. The reading of the news is similarly influenced by a stress on personal experience (Madianou, 2005) whenever its application is feasible.

On the other hand, even while rejecting the discourse of the nation, the Kadazan do so within the national frame of reference (see Foster, 2002), not having an alternative

one, as exemplified by the reaction to the alleged discrimination within *Akademi Fantasia*. This national frame of reference is not simply discursive, but, as argued by Postill, depends on the fact that Malaysia has come to be, in most regards, ‘an integrated system of cultural institutions and practices’ (2006: 15).

One of the most essential features of this system is the ethnic discourse, which is shaping the relationships within it in a way that has allowed Malaysia to be a stable and relatively successful state, but also determining the continuous relevance, especially in the case of minorities that feel marginalised, of ethnic belonging for individuals’ sense of identity.

Finally, the direct contact with global culture and consumerism seems to offer a possibility to bypass state control on culture and therefore to enjoy a greater cultural and identity freedom, a prospect that seems attractive to the Kadazan, but whose results are still largely unknown.

Chapter 5

The constitution of village belonging through leisure sociality

This chapter analyses the way in which a powerful form of identification alternative to the national and the ethnic ones, that of belonging to a village (*kampung*), emerges out of the continuous interaction between residents taking place during their non-working time. While the previous chapter looked at the way in which the villagers of Kitauu situate themselves, consciously or unconsciously, as members of collective categories in response to the discourses circulated by various media, the present one looks at the way in which they do so through their understanding of a set of practices in which they are involved in their leisure time. In order to understand the way in which a sense of belonging emerges out of practices, I apply the notion of ‘community of practice’, defined by Wenger as a group ‘created over time by the sustained pursuit of a shared enterprise’ and defined by the learning derived from engagement with each other, which results in the development of shared practices (1998: 45). The belonging to this community, deriving from engagement in practice, is substantially different from that associated with the nation and the ethnic group, which depends on imagination and alignment. My argument is that the sense of belonging derived from such practices is significant to the villagers as it allows for a higher degree of participation and ownership of meaning than the belonging to the nation or ethnic group.

While the sense of belonging to the village is generated through engagement in practice, the meaning attributed to it is informed by a local discourse, recurrent in my informants’ expression of their views on the village and its members. This local discourse identifies the village as the centre and archetype of rural life, and as being characterised by different economic and social relationships than those of towns. This discourse, which I should call ‘kampungism’ for want of a better term, declares the *kampung* as autonomous, ignoring its integration within the regional, national and global economic and political system. Kampungism contrasts an alleged sense of closeness and sharing characterising the village with the individualism and social fragmentation of the city.

This discourse has its origin in a dominant national, 'official' discourse about the *kampung*, appearing in urban-dominated media, opposing the village to the city and presenting it as the locus of authenticity, especially for Malays (Thompson, 2002). The Kadazan 'nationalists' have also appropriated this discourse by associating the *kampung* with authentic Kadazan-ness, as is evident from the stress put by the early Kadazan media, especially radio, on the rural origin of the Kadazan culture they re-elaborated and broadcast (see chapter 3). Therefore, while the meaning of the sense of belonging to the *kampung* is created through an engagement in practice over which Kadazan villagers exert a high degree of control, its meaning is negotiated with the dominant discourses and relationships of power forming the Malaysian 'economy of meaning' (Wenger, 1998: 198-200).

Kituau as a community of practice

Wenger (1998) considers the main defining feature of a community of practice to be what he calls 'mutual engagement', being engaged in actions whose meanings are negotiated between members. Together with mutual engagement, he presents other two dimension that are essential in constituting a community of practice: 'a joint enterprise', its *raison d'être*, defined in the very process of being pursued, and a 'shared repertoire', a set of 'routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice' (1998: 83). The notion of community used by Wenger refers specifically to groups that 'arise out of engagement in practice and not out of an idealized view of what a community should be like', and it does not have connotations of mutual support or peaceful coexistence (1998: 76-77).

One of the strengths of the notion of community of practice is that it offers the possibility to define the unit of analysis in terms of what people do and the meaning they attribute to what they do rather than on fixed criteria of belonging. In the case I am considering, the community can be considered to include a subset of the village residents, which however constitutes the majority of the inhabitants, comprising those actively involved in the social life of the *kampung*. This understanding of the community of practice shows a significant correspondence with a folk notion

expressed by some of my informants, who happened to be among those most involved in village sociality, attributing ‘full’ membership in the *kampung* only to those who demonstrated an active participation in the life of the village and a concern about its affairs. This folk notion of membership in the *kampung* was reflected in the scornful attitude demonstrated towards those not participating in other families’ celebrations or simply not buying a round of drinks when it was their turn. An extreme example was offered by the case of a family whose members, because they never attended the celebrations of other villagers, became in fact excluded from the community, a fact that resulted in their having to hire people to participate in the funeral of one of them.

In spatial terms, the great majority of the members of the community of practice live within the geographic boundaries of the village. The practices in which they are involved also take place mostly in Kituau, but also in nearby villages, where residents of Kituau visit friends or relatives or attend their celebrations, and in Donggonggon, where they go to the local market (*tamu*) or to the shops or supermarket, to the *kedai kopi* (coffee shop) or restaurant or, in rare cases, to one of the pubs or karaoke bars. With the notable exclusion of those commuting daily to Kota Kinabalu for work, the horizon of most villagers is mostly limited to the Penampang district, where the majority of their relatives and friends live and where they are able to carry out the majority of tasks necessary for everyday life. Many villagers also tend to express an aversion towards going to the capital, often adducing the reason that it is too busy and hot²² there. A relevant yet extreme example of such attitude towards the city is given by Denis’ mother, an elderly woman who has never been to Kota Kinabalu and told me she saw no need to go there, ‘To find what? Heat, noise and too many people’.

In the next section, I develop the frame of analysis based on the concept of community of practice through the examination of specific leisure social practices I have observed during my stay in Kituau. The cases I am presenting include the occasional informal meetings of groups of friends - especially those of a group of adult males frequently meeting at the house of my host – prayer sessions carried out at people’s houses during Lent and classes of Kadazan traditional dance held for children in preparation for the annual Harvest Festival. Moreover, I also consider the

²² While I heard the Malay term (*panas*) being most often used in this case, it is interesting to note that the Kadazan term for hot (*ahasu*) traditionally also carried the connotation of ‘spiritually hot’, a notion referring to a negative state often caused by the breach of adat that needed to be redressed by appropriate offerings to the spirits.

organisation of special one-off events such celebrations for life-cycle events of some village resident and *gotong-royong*. The *gotong-royong* (a Malay expression common in popular and official use in Malaysia and Indonesia, see Bowen, 1986) is a communal work occasionally²³ carried out by villagers for the maintenance of the local infrastructure, such as roads or bridges, or to clean rubbish from the area. The life-cycle events include the ‘full moon birthday’ – held around the reaching of a month of age of a newborn baby and corresponding, in Kadazan tradition, with the first cutting of the child’s hair – engagements, weddings, funerals and anniversaries of death, house-warmings and birthdays. Considering the number of people each individual is connected with through ties of kinship and friendship, everyone will have an invitation to a party or celebration on most weekends, and at times more than one on the same day.

Mutual engagement

The community of practice constituted by the engagement of residents in village leisure is sustained by a great investment of free time, money and other resources by most of the villagers, which can be considered as one of the main elements of mutual engagement Wenger refers to as ‘work of community maintenance’ (1998: 74-75). This is particularly the case for what concerns the organisation of feasts to celebrate life-cycle events, which constitutes a considerable economic and organisational burden for the families holding them, with an expenditure that goes from as little as 100 ringgit²⁴ for a simple birthday to several thousands for a big wedding or engagement. Guests are expected, if they can, to contribute some money to the expenses for holding bigger celebrations such as weddings and funerals. These are given in the form of *angpau*²⁵, an envelope with some cash, the amount of which depends on the relationship linking the guest to the host and to the economic means of the former. In line with the folk notion of membership I have outlined before, my informants put the emphasis on the social duty of participating in celebrations rather

²³ During the period of my stay in the village I participated in two such occasions, both taking place on a Saturday, once to repair a damaged wooden bridge over the river, once to free the main road from over-grown vegetation

²⁴ Corresponding to about 15 pounds at the time of my fieldwork, but corresponding to 100 pounds if compared to the cost of life in Malaysia

²⁵ The term, and the use of giving money in a closed envelope, usually red in colour, is borrowed from the Chinese tradition

than on contributing economically and stressed the freedom of participants in giving the amount they wanted and could afford.

The importance and character of present-day Kadazan village sociality show important continuities with the tradition of the Dusunic peoples, which involved a great number of religious and life-cycle celebrations (Evans, 1990 [1922], 1953; Rutter, 1985 [1929]; Glyn-Jones, 1953; Phelan, 2001).

Another important form of investment in the community is the offering of free labour in the case of *gotong-royong*, which usually ends with a small feast, in which drinks and food are sponsored by the participants but also by those who have not taken part, who are asked to contribute at least financially, a contribution that is usually also requested from drivers passing by the road or the bridge where the work has been done. On other occasions, also referred to by the term *gotong-royong* or the Kadazan *mitatabang* ('working together'), village residents offer their free help to a single family for some work requiring a great amount of labour. On one such occasion in which I participated, about twenty village men offered their help to build a cement platform on the back of a house so that the owners could have some extra space where to welcome the guests during the forthcoming wedding of a family member. The family benefiting from the work fed the members of the *gotong-royong* party and offered drinks and more food at the end of it. The remark made by one of the participants, who said that, considering the amount of money spent on food and drinks - including expensive whisky - by the host family, it would have been cheaper for them to hire some Filipino workers, shows how 'community maintenance' can be an end in itself as well as a pleasurable and rewarding activity (see below).

The work of community maintenance does not only take the form of special occasions such as feasts and *gotong-royong*, but also takes place in the frequent visiting of villagers, on their own or in groups, to other villagers, and in the facility with which the gathering of one or two friends in a house grows into a small party with the joining of others.

Friendship is one of the main relationships at the basis of the community of practice I am considering, the other being kinship and neighbourhood. These ties between people at the same time give rise to the community of practice and are reinforced through it. As the members of the community of practice interact frequently, and are in many cases related to some extent, they can mostly be considered as connected by what Granovetter (1973) called 'strong ties', that is

characterised by a relatively great amount of time spent together, emotional intensity, mutual confiding and reciprocal services. The predominance of social interaction between people linked by strong ties gives a substantial basis to the contrast between village and urban areas made by the kampungist discourse, differentiating the village social forms from those prevalent in the urban environment and in the workplace, which arguably include a higher proportion of weak ties.

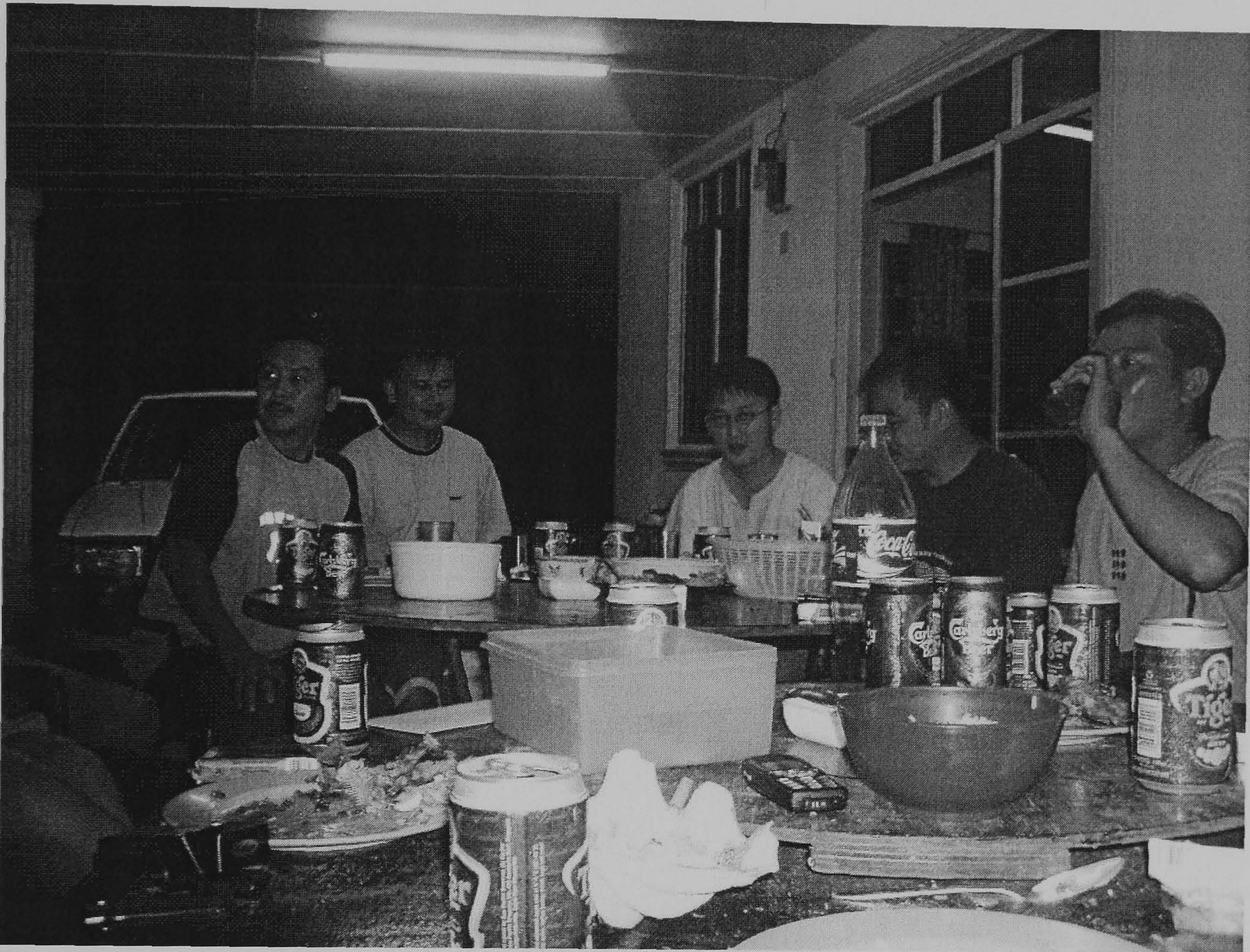


Figure 8 One of the numerous drinking sessions of my main informants, having a few cold beers and eating *pusas* in the table outside the house. At the bottom of the picture a mobile phone: an essential tool in contacting people to join the session, as well as to keep track of the time.

Another essential character of communities of practice considered by Wenger is that their existence does not entail homogeneity, but rather that differences as well as similarities can be created through mutual engagement, and each participant has a unique place and identity within them (1998: 75-76). The unique place and identity allowed to its participants is an element that is stressed by the villagers of Kituau, who often make reference to the unique character and personality of individuals, their 'style' as Jaunis calls it. This 'style' usually corresponds to typical patterns of behaviour or speech, such as that of Sarapine, called the 'loudspeaker' for obvious reasons, or Kenneth, known for his silence, or Jivolin, named 'the starring' for his

frequent attempts to take centre stage, which leads him sometimes in the situation of starting a fight with people who are physically much bigger and stronger than him.

The fact that the community of practice is not homogeneous is aptly shown by the remarks of a Kadazan man in his fifties, George, who, in the course of an interview, talked about what he feels to be one of the main divisions in the village, age. He expressed these differences in terms of a local discourse I have encountered other times in the village, that of the 'generation gap', distinguishing between a senior generation, used to the traditional life and to practise agriculture, and a junior one, grown up in when life had already become 'easy' (*senang*). This is how he expressed the concept:

George: 'In this village there are two different groups, one is the senior citizens, that is all of us here, the other is the junior. The youth are different from the senior citizens.'

Fausto: 'Can they mix together?'

George: 'They can be mixed, but the attitude is different. When there is a gathering all mix, but for what concerns the development of the village they are far different.'

Fausto: 'Why?'

George: 'Because of many changes in the world... Too much TV and they forgot manual work, planting paddy, tapping rubber'.

Joint enterprise

Kituau residents share the joint enterprise, 'defined by participants in the very process of pursuing it' as a 'negotiated response to their situation' (Wenger, 1998: 77), of making their lives better under the conditions in which they live. This involves enjoying themselves in their free time while establishing meaningful and satisfying relationship with other villagers. Reaching these goals gives to the members of the community of practice a sense of fulfilment based on a feeling of belonging and of being rooted in a familiar environment that complements other fulfilments they might derive from other practices and aspect of their lives such as working. This corresponds to what Warde (2005: 142-43) defines as the 'internal rewards' of a practice, in which the fulfilment is derived directly from the practice. On the other hand, Warde (2005: 142-43) argues, practices also provide external rewards, consisting in the prestige, economic advantage or access to privileged social networks

enjoyed by the practitioners. In the case of Kituau residents, the establishment of relationships involving collaboration and mutual help, providing a useful form of local welfare, can be considered as an 'external reward' of sociality practices. Examples of this form of help are provided by the contribution of fellow villagers to the work and expenses needed to organise celebrations and to do some works on each other's houses that I have described earlier.

Another essential enterprise shared by the villagers is that of maintaining what they perceive to be their tradition, such as language, religion, some aspects of *adat* and, more generally their 'way of life'. An example of the efforts to maintain such traditions is constituted by the teaching of *sumazau* to school-age boys and girls. *Sumazau* is the traditional Kadazan dance, formerly used in shamanic rituals connected with traditional religion and with successful return from head-hunting, which has become an iconic marker of the Kadazan, of which they are very proud and for which they are renowned all over Sabah. Boys and girls participated in practice sessions held in the *dewan raya* - a wooden structure standing in the middle of every Malaysian village which is used for any type of village-level meeting or celebration - and were taught the right steps by a local schoolteacher, Benson, who regularly devotes some of his free time to the activity. These sessions took place, in the year in which I was in Kituau, almost every afternoon for about three months in the period before Harvest Festival, preparing the boys and girls to perform in dancing competitions and other events taking place in the festive period.

Learning the beautiful eagle-like arm movements and characteristic foot play and war cry characterising the dance constitutes a significant example of the constitution of ethnicity through primary socialisation (Jenkins, 2008). The form of learning Kadazan-ness constituted by learning *sumazau* corresponds to the *locus classicus* of acquisition of *habitus* considered by Bourdieu, constituting a 'structural apprenticeship which leads to the em-bodying of the structures of the world' (1977: 89), inscribing Kadazan-ness in the children's body. As argued by Bentley (1987) and Jenkins (2008), in their development of Bourdieu's (1977) ideas, primary socialisation is essential not only to the development of categorisation, but also to a sense of self-identity that takes the form of a deep sense of belonging and oneness with those sharing similar early life experiences. In this case, the children learn physically, through their bodies, to be Kadazan by moving as Kadazan, by acquiring bodily skills

that not only make them able to properly court a suitable Kadazan partner, but also unequivocally express their Kadazan identity and distinguish them from outsiders.



Figure 9 A group photo of the children practising *sumazau* on occasion of a district-level competition held during the Harvest Festival period. The children wear the traditional Kadazan costume, including the *sigah* headgear and *hisad* palm leaves bundles for males. The girls are wearing the headgear traditionally used by the *bobohizan* during shamanic rituals.

Another essential element of a community of practice is that the negotiation of a joint enterprise determines relations of mutual accountability between its members (Wenger, 1998: 81). In the case of Kituau, this mutual accountability takes the form of the need to respect the unwritten rules of the community as well as to solve conflicts when they arise. This form of mutual accountability can be attributed to the Kadazan tradition in which, according to *adat*, individual actions could result in a state of ritual danger for the whole village and in which breaches had to be amended with the involvement of the whole community (Harrison, 1974). Despite the erosion of the importance of *adat*, some of these principles are still valid in present-day Kituau. An instance of their application I could observe during my stay there was constituted by the carrying out of a *monogit* or *makan sogit* feast, which consisted in the slaughtering of a buffalo, as a compensation prescribed by *adat* from a young man who had made a young woman pregnant outside marriage. Following the tradition, the buffalo was eaten in a feast held at the house of the aggrieved party at which any

inhabitant of the village can take part, without the need to be formally invited or to contribute to the expenses, which were paid by the family of the offender. The event, which was attended by the majority of the villagers, was a significant example of the role of festive events in creating social cohesion and allowing for the reconciliation of offenders with the community. This traditional approach to the breach of *adat* forms an important aspect of the way Kadazan individuals are mutually accountable for their actions even if all but a few villagers do not - or at least affirm not to - believe in the spiritual dangers connected with the breach of *adat*.



Figure 10 Various villagers get involved in butchering of the buffalo for the *makan sogit* feast

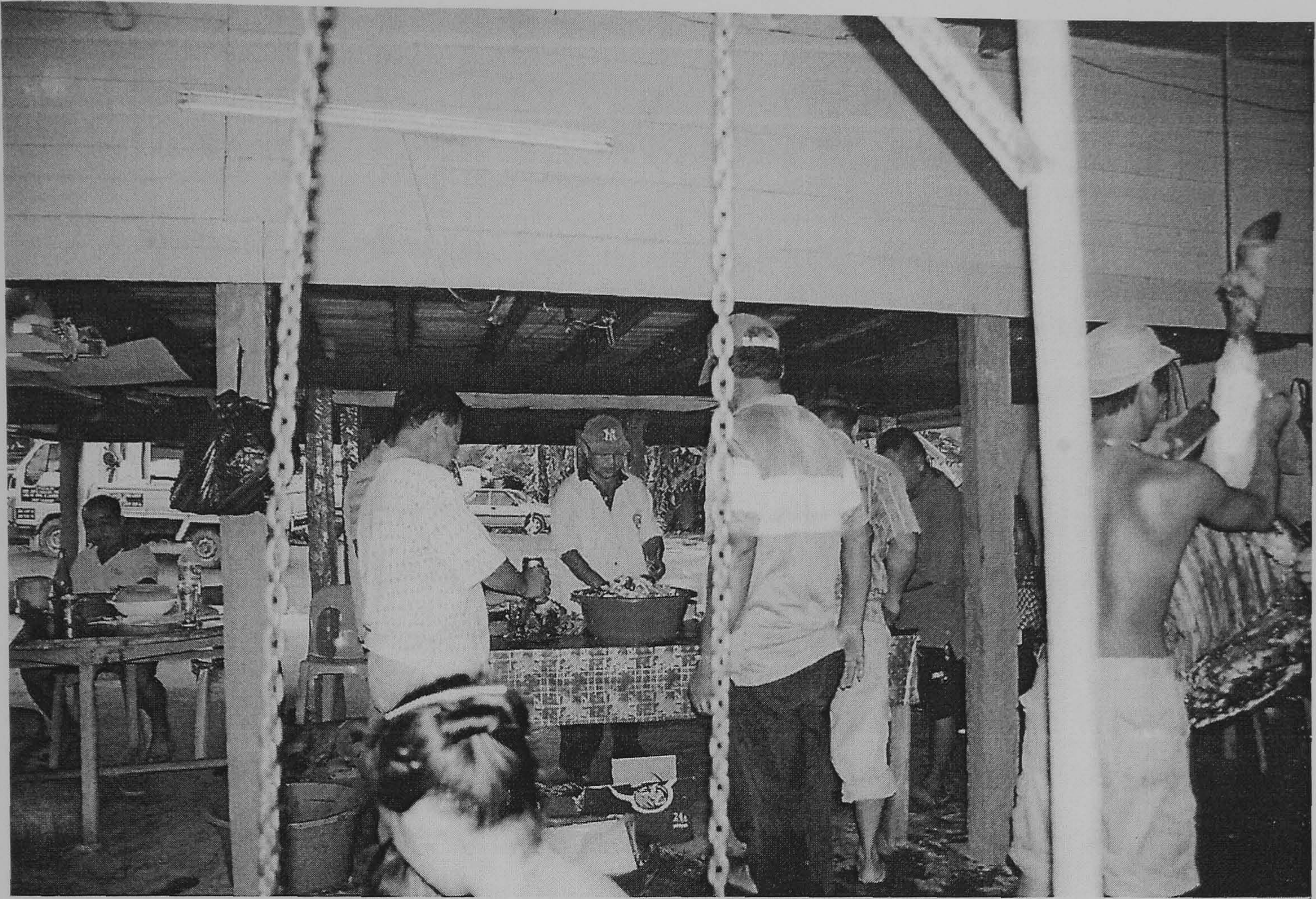


Figure 11 Another stage of the preparations for the *makan sogit*.



Figure 12 Following Kadazan tradition, the possessions of a recently deceased person are burnt by the relatives. The occasion involved a syncretic celebration, mixing Christian prayers recited by the local Christian leader, the village headman, with 'pagan' rituals such as the burning of the clothes and gong playing at a specific moment when the soul of the deceased is believed to be leaving the house.

Shared repertoire

The villagers of Kituau also form a community of practice by sharing a repertoire of 'routines, words, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions' produced or adopted by the community and which have become part of its practice (Wenger, 1998: 83). This repertoire reflects the history of mutual engagement and provides a set of established interpretations, which, however, do not necessarily constrain the generation of new meanings. In the case of the *kampung*, the repertoire involves both cultural traditions inherited by its present members and stories and understandings generated within their mutual engagement. The two, however, should not be seen as completely different, as even traditions dating back to an unidentified past and considered part of an ethnic culture are constantly appropriated and negotiated, and sometimes changed, by individuals through their engagement in practice.

An essential element of the villagers' shared repertoire is the notion of *aramaiti*, a Dusun word (more commonly used than the Penampang variant *alamaiti*), deriving from the Austronesian root *ramai* ('many'), and which might be translated as something like 'being many together', describing a joyful meeting of people. The term expresses both a Kadazan notion of commensality, connected with traditional values of equality and hospitality, and the pleasure deriving from it, and the actual social gatherings in which it is practised. The social gatherings referred to by the term *aramaiti* often involve the consumption of alcohol, a practice so common in Kadazan gatherings that the term is commonly used by all Sabahans to mean something like a drinking session or feast.

A part of the shared repertoire of the *kampung* community of practice consists of a shared taste and understanding of the different value and prestige of different practices and products involved in *aramaiti*. On ordinary occasions, these evaluations are mostly limited to the alcoholic beverages being consumed, which are placed on a scale that goes from the least prestigious home-made traditional drinks, *talak*²⁶ and *lihing*²⁷, to beer, to the most prestigious and expensive whisky and cognac. The evaluation of festive events, on the other hand, takes place at different levels: the

²⁶ A Kadazan rice liqueur traditionally distilled by all families and still made at home by some women

²⁷ A traditional drink made of fermented rice

quantity and type of drinks and food offered, the place at which the celebration is held, the presence of a band playing live music or of a competent speaker, and the type of decorations used. The inclusion of imported elements offers many more possibilities for the display of extravagant, expensive or grand features which, however, while bearing witness to the 'modernity' and 'cosmopolitanism' of the host, are not necessarily perceived by guests as being of a higher quality. Nevertheless, some imported practices have already become established as local traditions, as is the case with the serving, along with some Kadazan delicacies such as *hinava*²⁸, of food cooked in Chinese style. This mix of local and imported practices and elements also distinguishes the Kadazan of the Penampang plains from other Dusunic peoples of the interior, where, as I could observe on one occasion in which I attended a wedding, feasts tend to be more simple and traditional. This comparison between Penampang is also expressed by the Kadazan themselves, who consider their celebrations as being more 'modern', while a person from the interior confirmed this view telling me that their celebrations are more traditional, while the people of Penampang are very 'sophisticated', to the point that at times they can become 'arrogant'. While the association of a different value and prestige to different products and practices according to widely shared 'taste' can be considered as an incipient form of 'distinction' (Bourdieu, 1984), the prestige deriving from the offering of highly evaluated products and practices by a host is only limited to the event, and does not build into a higher status or associate with a class. For the Kadazan, as for the Muria Gonds, a tribal society of India described by Gell, 'social feasting and drinking is not undertaken in a competitive spirit, in order to demonstrate superiority along the lines of Melanesian ceremonial exchange, but is intended to demonstrate commitment to the village and to [ethnic] values' (1986: 119). This fact can be attributed to the enduring of the Kadazan egalitarian ethos as well as to the fact that, with a few notable exceptions, there are no important class differences between the residents of Kituau.

²⁸ A Kadazan dish made of pieces of raw fish marinated in lemon and characterised by the sour taste of the seeds of *bambangan*, a local fruit similar to mango



Figure 13 A wedding held in the KDCA Hall. Note the Western-style dresses worn by the bride and groom and the special seats arranged for important guests to the left of the married couple.

Boundary

Another essential characteristic of communities of practice is that, differently from communities generated through imagination or alignment, they are bounded. The fact that they are bounded, however, does not mean they can be considered in isolation, but, on the contrary, they can be understood only in relation to other communities formed by other practices (Wenger, 1998: 103).

Despite the fact that the boundaries of the community of practice I am considering are not clearly marked, its members seem to have no doubts about who belongs and who does not. The most striking aspect of the definition of boundaries is constituted by the exclusion of the immigrant population residing within the geographic space of the village. These immigrants - either Bugis from Sulawesi, mostly working as rubber tappers, or *Timur*, coming from various islands in South-east Indonesia, mostly renting and cultivating vegetable gardens or working as housemaids - number, according to unofficial sources, about 200 people, only a handful of whom possess regular permits. While they work for Kadazan landlords, the contact with these immigrants is kept to the minimum necessary, and they are rarely invited to the

houses or celebrations of Kadazan villagers. This exclusion was epitomised by Jaunis who, when I asked him if any of them spoke Kadazan, told me: ‘of course not, we Kadazan would never want to teach them our language’.

The consideration of the boundaries of the communities involves an understanding of the space within which it is situated. Its inhabitants associate the village with leisure, relaxation, shorts and sarongs, in opposition to the space of the city, characterised by work, big buildings, air-conditioning and formal wear. The two environments are differentiated also in terms of leisure: while in the village free time is spent in socialising with fellow members of the community, free time in the city means ‘entertainment’, comprising of practices relatively alien to most adult villagers such as going to the cinema or shopping, as well as ‘less respectable’ activities such as going to the karaoke bar. The village space is also a familiar space, which, as defined by Edensor, ‘forms an unquestioned backdrop to daily tasks, pleasure and routine movement’, constituting ‘an habitat organised to enable continuity and stability, and which is recreated by [...] regular existential practices’(2002: 54). Space, he argues, is understood and experienced not only cognitively, but also through sensual, practical and unreflexive knowledge. Edensor uses the notion of taskscape, ‘space to which inhabitants have an everyday practical orientation’, not determining actions, but allowing a certain range of them and limiting others. Edensor, however, argues for expanding the notion of taskscape, which he considers to be useful to allow an appreciation of the ‘unreflexive constitution of spatial belonging’ (2002: 57), with the consideration of ways of inhabiting space that are not connected with specific tasks, such as relaxing, resting and dwelling in the world.

An important intersection point is constituted by the only village shop, a *kedai runcit* (‘grocery shop’, a sort of village corner shop), which offers the opportunity to consume beer and home-made *talak* on a few tables placed in the compound or to watch television, play snooker or cards at the premises. The shop, called Usang from the name of its owner, an enterprising Sino-Kadazan, is the only public space – apart from those with special functions such as the school or church – available in the village. It is a male domain, as women and children generally stay only for the short time necessary to buy some provisions. The shop is also the normal meeting point for a group of men drinking together there almost every day after work, but other groups of men, including that of my main informants, also often go there. Usang is also the main place where the residents meet the immigrants, mostly the Bugis living in the

huts around the village, who often spend their free time in the shop. The interaction, mostly consisting in short discussions or playing cards or snooker together, offers some boundary-crossing while at the same time reinforcing the boundary, as it is rather different from that between the members of the community, and it is limited to a 'neutral', non-domestic space.

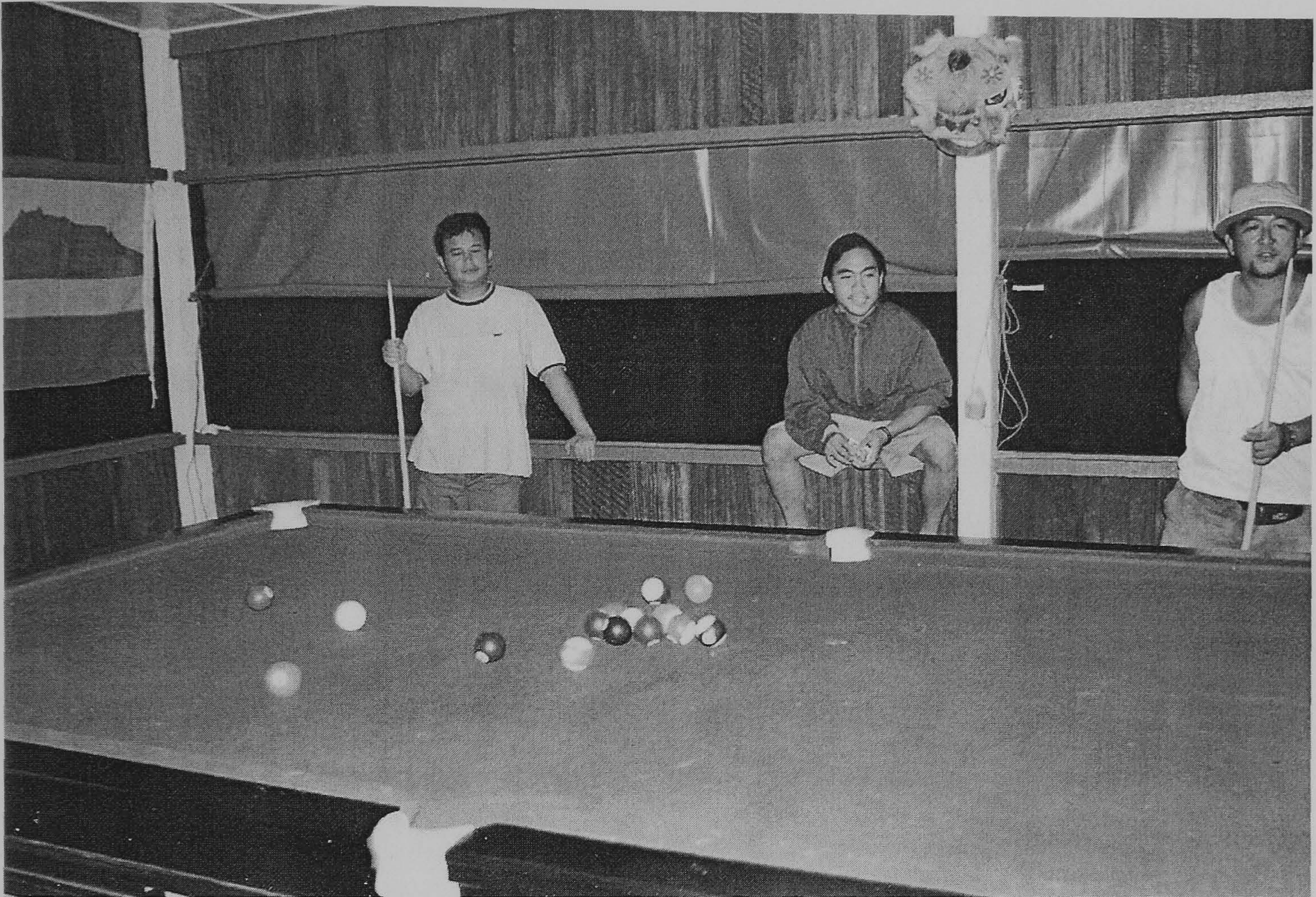


Figure 14 People playing pool at Usang's shop. Note the Chinese dragon mask hanging on the wall, showing the mixing of Kadazan and Chinese cultural elements common among the large sino-Kadazan population of Penampang. Also, on the left, is Sabah's flag.

Alcohol consumption, morality and boundaries

Douglas (1987: 12) argued that alcohol consumption plays an essential role in marking the boundaries of personal and group identities and considered it a practice of inclusion and exclusion. Along the same line, Wilson thinks that alcohol consumption should be understood as 'a historical and contemporary process of identity formation, maintenance, reproduction and transformation' (2005: 12).

Alcohol consumption is an almost ubiquitous element of Kitauu residents' leisure practices, with various alcoholic beverages being drunk during the meeting of groups of friends, being offered to those visiting one's house, at the end of prayer sessions and of *gotong-royong* as well as, usually in large quantities, during the celebrations

for life-cycle events. The belonging to the *kampung* is very much centred around forms of sociality that include alcohol consumption as a shared defining practice, embodying in the sharing of a drink that of a whole way of life, and making drinks ‘a medium for constructing the actual world’ (Douglas, 1987: 9). Drinking together and participating to the expenses for buying alcohol or in the preparation of beverages is an essential aspect of showing commitment to the village and its values.

At a broader level, the production and drinking of alcohol have always constituted an aspect of the identity of the Dusunic peoples, confirming the significance of drinking and eating practices in defining the uniqueness of regional and ethnic character, and the associated identities, remarked upon for places as far from each other as Yucatan (Ayora-Diaz and Vargas-Cetina, 2005) and the Basque Country (Kasmir, 2005). The Dusunic peoples are characterised by their penchant for drinking alcoholic beverages, the unique drinks they produce and drinking practices such as the habit to always accompany alcohol with eating *pusas*, certain types of food. Some drinking practices also have a regional character, such as the selling and buying of beer according to the *sepuluh-tiga* (M. ‘ten-three’) principle, consisting of three cans of beer, a ‘set’, being sold for 10 ringgits, a very low price made possible by the wide availability in Sabah of beer smuggled from the nearby duty-free island of Labuan.

Alcohol consumption also has traditionally represented an essential element of distinction between them and the Muslim/Malay population. This form of distinction is even more relevant at present, as the Kadazan live in a Muslim-majority country in which by law it is an offence for Muslim citizens, but not for non-Muslims, to drink alcohol. Alcohol consumption, therefore, can be considered as embodying and materialising the sense of being Kadazan and acting as an identity marker within the Malaysian ethnic systems, a marker that is at the same time proudly upheld and embarrassingly contained in its excesses within the confines of the ethnic group and the village.

This ambiguous position held by alcohol consumption, between the positive value attributed to it within discourses stressing its importance in *aramaiti* and therefore its importance in village and ethnic sociality and identity, and the negative ones that consider it as a form of excess and a social ill, is well captured by a conversation I was involved in during my stay in Kituau:

Jaunis was killing some quiet afternoon time sitting at the round, wooden table in the covered part in front of his house, having a look at the newspaper, smoking cigarettes and chewing *pinang* when he received a visit by Marcellus. The conversation soon was directed to the news reported on the front page of the *Daily*: a woman had been found unconscious near Kobusak, on the main road to Kota Kinabalu, where she had collapsed after drinking a large amount of *talak*, as described by various witnesses. Jaunis commented the fact was again another embarrassing episode for the Kadazan/Dusun people; despite the fact that the ethnic origin of the woman is not reported, Penampang²⁹ always features in the media for stories that have to do with drunkenness and damages deriving from it. Marcellus, who works for the *Daily* and therefore had more precise insider's information, agreed with Jaunis in condemning the episode. Struck by their attitude, I asked them how they could judge the case negatively while, being good drinkers, they could end up in the same situation. They agreed in replying that getting drunk is a behaviour acceptable in the house or in the village or during special occasions, but not like that, in the middle of the road in the city in front of everybody. That would not be decent behaviour.

The comments of Jaunis and Marcellus reflect an attitude towards alcohol that seemed to be shared by the majority of Kitauu residents, approving of its consumption while at the same time criticising its excesses. This stance is part of a general morality, which extends to other fields such as working ethic, which could be considered as part of the Kadazan's ideolect, which Postill (2006) defines as a local variant of a dominant ideology propagated by the state. The elements concurring in the Kadazan ideolect are, together with the state ideology, their traditional culture and ethos, but also the Catholic modernist ideology deeply embedded in the modern Kadazan culture created since the 1950s. State ideology and Catholic modernism, however, share some common elements, one of which is the idea of moderation and working hard, seen as ways for the individual to reach success, but also as duties to the nation and to God. This perspective also shows how attitudes towards drinking alcohol should be placed within more general conceptions and organisation of time, and in particular in the division between working time and leisure time characterising modern societies. Alcohol, as argued by Gusfield (1963, cited in Douglas, 1987) stands, in America as among the Kadazan, in opposition to coffee as a marker of

²⁹ Penampang, despite being a multi-ethnic district, is widely identified with its non-Muslim and primarily Kadazan majority

shifting from worktime to 'playtime', the occasion on which it is considered appropriate to consume it.

The moral stance deriving from this idelect is evident in the disapproval and ridicule expressed towards those who 'go beyond the limit' and drink instead of going to work or spend the majority of their salary on alcohol. This attitude is exemplified by the ridiculing of two famous village characters, who spend hours and hours at any time of the day drinking at Usang: their stories show how, being 'defeated by the drinks', as one of the villagers put it, they lost or risk losing their job, have problems with their family and their health. One of them, in particular, after being the first to get a diploma in the village, used to be an important civil servant with good prospects, but lost his job because he preferred to drink with friends rather than go to work.

Alcohol consumption is also an object of contention between the modernist, and primarily urban, elite, who are ashamed of the habit of consuming great amounts of alcohol of many Kadazan and of the fame of drunkards they have traditionally attracted, and the, mostly rural, masses, who do not see any reason to be ashamed of their habit and in some, more or less explicit, way consider drinking to be an essential part of their tradition and culture.

The issue of alcohol consumption is not limited to local discourses, but it can be fully understood only within the wider arena of public morality and reputation at the national and state level. The consideration of the national and state arena is implicit also in the local arena, as evidenced by the conversation between Jaunis and Marcellus. While they implicitly accepted a discourse common around Sabah that identifies alcohol consumption as a defining characteristic of the Kadazan, they are on, the one hand, proud of this characteristic constituting an identifying character as well as an expression of commensality and hospitality and, on the other, very concerned about the way in which the reputation of their ethnic group might be spoilt by excessive alcohol consumption or other acts that are considered shameful. This attitude can be understood through the notion of 'cultural intimacy' developed by Herzfeld, a notion that refers to 'the aspects of cultural identity that are considered a source of external embarrassment, but that nevertheless provide the insiders with the assurance of their common sociality' (1996:3). The effects of this situation are the efforts to provide a positive and idealised representation of the group that hides the negative elements, which are nevertheless forming part of the collective identity. This effort at managing self-representation of a group takes the form, among the Kadazan

as among many other groups all over the world, of 'washing one's dirty linen at home', attempting to present a public image of people who follow the ideal behaviour while accepting deviations from such principles as long as they are not exposed outside of the group. As demonstrated by the conversation I have analysed, the public arena within which ethnic groups (*bangsa*) compete for status and prestige and to defend their public image is national and, even more sub-national, and is an arena that is actively created through the media.

These considerations have shown that, while a community of practice is formed through the mutual engagement of its members, it cannot be considered in isolation from other communities of practice and from the larger context in which it is located. Moreover, practices cannot be considered in isolation from the discourses through which they are attributed meaning, which can be produced by the members of communities of practices themselves but also, more often, by powerful institutions such as the state. The next section investigates this relationship by looking at the discourses informing the understanding of the practices I have described so far, and the way in which they contribute to connect them explicitly with forms of collective identification.

Discourses about the *kampung*

Thompson (2002) argues that the *kampung* is the subject of a Malaysia-wide hegemonic discourse, which appears ubiquitously in urban-dominated media, primarily the national curriculum and school textbooks, but also television, newspapers and popular music (2002: 54, n. 3). Within this discourse, according to him, 'kampung embodies ideas about modernity, tradition, class, ethnicity, morality, belonging and anomie' (2002: 54). The discourse circulated by the media presents the *kampung* as 'the residue of an unchanged past, where residents "still" (*masih*) engage in *gotong-royong* mutual self-help activities', people are placed outside of consumer economy and infrastructures are still lacking (Thompson, 2002: 57). Applying Raymond Williams' notion of 'structure of feeling', 'a particular quality of social experience and relationship, historically distinct from other particular qualities' (1973: 131, cited in Thompson, 2002: 54) Thompson argues that the *kampung* has an essential position in a 'structure of feeling' contrasting rural and urban Malaysia.

Similarly to what Thompson argued for the Malays, the ethnic group most closely identified with the *kampung* and rurality in the national discourse, the Kadazan are not just passive recipients of these discourses, but they ‘weave those ideas and images into their own lives, desires, and interpretations of subjective experience’ (2002: 54). In the case of the Kadazan, however, this is appropriated and used as the foundation of the local discourse I have called kampungism. This discourse maintains some of those Thompson called ‘hegemonic associations’, such as that between the *kampung* and security and public surveillance of each other’s actions, and distinctions, such as the rural-urban one, of the national, official one. Another essential association at the basis of both the national and the local discourse is the association between *kampung* and ethnicity (Thompson, 2002), which in this case considers the village as the domain of the Kadazan rather than that of the Malays. As argued by Thompson (2002: 68), the ‘spatial’ and ‘ethnic’ discourses reinforce each other, as, paraphrasing what he said about the Malays, what makes the Kadazan Kadazan is their residence in the *kampung*, which gets its character by being Kadazan.

The kampungist discourse circulating among the inhabitants of Kituau appropriates the main associations and distinctions of the national one in order to give meaning to the practices that I have previously described. It stresses the primacy of the *kampung* as the locus of real belonging and of authentic social ties and contrasts the togetherness of the villagers with the individualism of city dwellers. This ruralist, conservative discourse denies the suburban state of the village and its interconnectedness with the state capital and the wider Malaysian system. In the realm of economics, the kampungist ideology tends to conceal the fact that the resources necessary for the social practices that materialise the *kampung* derive from the urban environment. The *kampung* practices are also controlled by the urban economy in the fact that they take place in the residual time, leisure time, free from working commitments, taking place within a strict temporary regime regulating life through the use of clock and calendar time (see Postill, 2006).

However, while the Kadazan derive their livelihood from participating in urban cash economy, either in the form of salaried labour or of self-employment or in the receiving of a pension, their expenditure is mostly limited to basic items such as food, clothing and household items and bills and petrol, and leaves a great amount of economic resources to be spent in village sociality, especially for sponsoring feasts. Again, the Kadazan are similar to the Muria Gonds in the fact that for them

'production adheres to the premises of one kind of economy, whereas consumption [in many cases] continues to be based on the premise of a quite different economy' (Gell, 1986: 110).

Following the hegemonic association between *kampung* and ethnicity, the inhabitants of Kituau identify Kadazan-ness with *kampung* way of life. This identification was at the very basis of the elaboration of the modern Kadazan identity, since, as I have described in chapter 3, the cultural elements through which it was formed were collected in rural areas by the intelligentsia and subsequently spread in their re-elaborated way to the villagers, who were the target of their diffusion. The proponents of this modern culture always emphasised its rural origin as a source of authenticity and continuity with the past. This stress on the village also presents an actual continuity with Kadazan tradition due to the fact that, as I have described in chapter 2, the *kampung* was the most basic level of ascription for the Dusunic peoples as well as the main political and jural unit (Harrison, 1974). The inhabitants of Kituau consider their village to be a 'Kadazan village' a conception based on the fact that almost all its residents, and the totality of those forming the community of practice I have considered so far, are Kadazan and that the village is situated in the predominantly Kadazan area of Penampang. This equation of the *kampung* with Kadazan-ness, however involves the exclusion of its foreign inhabitants. In this sense, the kampungist ideology, by equating Kadazan-ness with *kampung* life, regulated by *adat* and by the principles of equality and cooperation, appropriates the structure of feeling revolving around the *kampung* declaring it as belonging to Kadazan-ness, and the practices in which it appears and out of which it emerges as being in continuity with Kadazan traditions and values.

Another essential aspect of Kadazan-ness, as perceived by the people of Kituau, is its link with Christianity, which, as I have shown in chapter 3, has been established since the elaboration of the modern Kadazan culture. Christianity has come to constitute an essential rallying point in difficult times as well as an essential form of distinction between the Kadazan and the Muslim Sabahans and, even more, the Peninsula Malays. Again, the equation between the village and the Christian community involves some ideological work leading to the forgetting of some intra-village differences, namely the presence of three families of Muslim villagers. The status of these villagers is highly ambiguous as their religion in some way, according to the hegemonic Malaysian discourse on ethnicity, gives them the possibility to be

identified and identify themselves as Malay, therefore partially denying their Kadazan ethnic origin. Fellow villagers respond to their ambiguous status either by considering them as non-members of the *kampung*, or by allowing them membership by forgetting their religion or providing *ad hoc* justifications for their status, such as that they had to convert under certain pressures, as for obtaining a job or a scholarship or a promotion, but that ‘deep inside’, ‘in reality’ they still are Kadazan. This treatment of fellow-villagers can, on the one hand, be attributed to an attempt to construct the village as homogeneous, therefore allowing for its identification with Kadazan-ness, and, on the other, to the attempt to solve the ambiguities inherent in the Malaysian discourse of ethnicity in relation to indigenous peoples of Borneo.

The kampung and modernity

The issue of modernity is central to the relationship between the national discourse and kampungism, which reflects the ambiguity present in the relationship between the Kadazan and the Malaysian state. While, on the one hand, the state rhetoric presents its rural population as the repository of traditional values and lifestyle, on the other, and this is particularly the case with indigenous peoples of Borneo such as the Kadazan, it presents them as needing to modernise and to change their ‘mindset’. This ambivalent position towards the rural population is expressed in discourses of nostalgia on the one hand and development on the other. The Kadazan, on their part, aspire to the development and well-being promised by the state, allowing them to ‘walk abreast ‘along the path to prosperity’’ (Postill, 2006: 109), while they wish to be able to keep their culture and way of life. Realising that, as argued by Rosaldo (2003), in order to become developed, the state asks them to stop being what they are, they react, on the one hand, by emphasising their sense of belonging to the *kampung* and, on the other, by proposing an alternative narrative of modernity to the one brought forward by the Malaysian government.

Similarly to Malay villagers (see Thompson, 2002: 57), the residents of Kituau consider modernisation mostly in terms of infrastructure, economic development and change in lifestyle as well as having an international position as a country. As told to me by various villagers whom I asked about their life history, those belonging to the senior generation have seen the majority of these changes taking place and have

experienced them as changing their way of life, in terms of providing them, in most cases with some level of formal education, enabling them to carry out manual or clerical salaried jobs, progressively replacing rice farming as a source of subsistence. They have witnessed the building of the first sealed roads in the rural areas and the development of a modern hospital and other infrastructures, as well as the reshaping of the rural and urban areas. Their life has been made easier by the diffusion and availability of electricity, piped water, telephones, cars, air-conditioning and many other technologies. Those who have experienced these changes mostly told me they considered them as positive, making life easier and more comfortable. They identified most of these changes as having taken place in the post-colonial period, and therefore attributed these developments to Malaysia, which they consider the most powerful source of modernisation in the recent past and in the present.

At the same time, however, more than one villager implicitly attributed modernity to the influence of *orang putih*, who initiated all these changes by bringing their superior technology and political organisation during the colonial era, and who were the first to establish education, infrastructures and Christianity. On the basis of this account of modernity alternative to the one promoted by the nation-building propaganda, many villages implicitly advocated the possibility of a different form of modernity from that promoted by Malaysia, involving development in infrastructure and material conditions of life but without the cultural homogenisation and surrender of their cultural uniqueness that they see as inherent to the official one.

Conclusion

The inhabitants of Kituau invest most of their time, and the money and resources they obtain from their work, which mainly takes place in towns, in various forms of village sociality. The practices constituting this sociality, by involving a ‘mutual engagement’, a ‘joint enterprise’ and a ‘shared repertoire’, make those taking part in them a ‘community of practice’. This community of practice, which is sustained through the constant investment of resources and time, provides various forms of fulfilment to its members as well as the basis for obtaining help from each other. This community of practice is also a source of identity for its members, who often identify themselves and their practices as belonging to the *kampung*. This sense of belonging

is expressed in an idiom of authenticity and difference from the city that derives from a widespread dominant national discourse, but which is appropriated to stress the alleged independence of the *kampung* from the outside world, and especially from the very source of the discourse, the state. Through the 'kampungist' discourse and the investment in the local sphere, therefore, Kadazan villagers generate and sustain a sense of belonging based on participation and that allows them a higher degree of ownership of the meaning of their experiences. Mostly unable to participate and make their voice heard in the national and international arena, the Kadazan concentrate many of their resources and their search for belonging to a level, the local, over which they feel they can exert a certain degree of control.

Chapter 6

A Tale of Two Celebrations: the *Pesta Kaamatan* as a site of struggle between the Kadazan and the state

It was the 31st of May. We were covering the few kilometres' distance between the *kampung* and the big KDCA headquarters on the road to the city, riding the old Toyota with the windows open, feeling the excitement that grew all around us, for that was the great day, the climax of the whole month, possibly of my whole period of fieldwork. My host and guide, Jaunis, was keen to show me the great display of the Kadazan culture, its dressing itself for the special day, its hospitality at its excessive best. I was full of expectations for all that and eager to show a visiting Japanese friend the best of my adoptive culture, the thing I had been preparing myself for during the past few months, whose build-up I had been able to breathe day by day in the village and everywhere else, even in the supermarkets displaying replicas of stalks of padi, baskets filled with agricultural bounties or smiling faces of women in black dresses and wearing conical rattan hats. The street was full of cars heading in the same direction as us, so, after passing Donggonggon, with its *tamu* grounds, its van drivers sitting in small groups and its coffee shops, Jaunis took a turn out of the main road to a secondary one. The street went through the *kampung* of Peter Mojuntin, the hero of the early Kadazan nationalism, the 'golden son of Penampang', tragically killed in the plane crash of 1976, where his family house still stands, then all the way through what used to be a series of Kadazan villages now engulfed by the urban sprawl to reach the last of them, Koidupan, where we parked the car just behind the net which fenced the compound of the KDCA. Once inside, past the big gates, we found ourselves in the middle of a huge crowd of women, men and children, dressed in all colours and fashions, many wearing the black Kadazandusun traditional dress, all walking from one side to another, stopping here and there to be taken in a vortex of music, dancing, eating and drinking. The whole open space within the fences was filled up with stalls selling food and drinks, handicrafts, books or music, stands set up by the sponsor, Nestlé, to promote its products, and various stages where different groups performed ethnic dances or music. The most animated area was towards the front, where members of each Kadazandusun group gathered in the replica of their traditional

house and there danced, played music drank, chatted and entertained long-time friends as well as occasional visitors.

Meanwhile, in the main hall, the highlight of the celebration, organised, as every year, by KDCA, had just started. After shortly browsing around the stalls and the traditional houses of the different Kadazandusun *suku*³⁰ for a while, we entered the hall, filled to its maximum capacity, where people were gathered to follow a neatly organised and timed show, consisting of music, dance, and entertainment and attended by the major authorities of Sabah, and conducted by well-rehearsed presenters.

After following the highlight of the event, the ritual cutting of padi stalks, followed by gong beating, officiated by Sabah's Governor, as well as the finals of the Unduk Ngadau beauty contest, we quickly moved out of the hall to reach, after another short browse around the stalls, the campus of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), at the other side of the city, where a second celebration, organised by the federal authorities, was starting at seven.



Figure 15 The side of KDCA main hall, built in a style re-elaborating traditional architectural designs; note the replicas of gongs, one of the symbols of Kadazan-ness, on the walls.

³⁰ The term used to refer to sub-groups of the Dusunic peoples, identified by the area they inhabit as well as cultural traits such as dialect, traditional costume, or different *adat*

Introduction

The annual Harvest Festival celebrations, known as *Pesta Kaamatan* or simply *Kaamatan*, can be considered as the most important ‘celebration and assertion of Kadazan-ness’ (Loh, 1992: 243), of which it has emerged as ‘the most important symbol’ (Loh, 1992: 247-48). It can also be considered as the most important public form of reification of Kadazan identification and, as such, as a significant site of struggle between the Kadazan and the state over the definition of the role that Kadazan culture and identity can have within Malaysia. This significance is made evident by the analysis of past *Kaamatan* celebrations, which have constituted an essential assertion of Kadazan resistance to the assimilationist direction taken by Malaysian nation-building. The importance of these past events is evidenced by their permanence in the individual and collective memory of the Dusunic peoples.

In this chapter, I analyse two *Kaamatan* celebrations that took place almost simultaneously on the 31st of May 2006, one organised by the Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA) and the other by the Malaysian federal Government. My argument is that the two events corresponded to two different positions in regards to the definition of Kadazan culture and the role it should play within multi-ethnic Malaysia. According to the government projects, the culture of the various ethnic groups should enrich the national culture within the limits of ‘tolerable difference’ (Rival, 1997: 138), which means without challenging the nation-building agenda and Malay supremacy. The KD leaders, on the other hand, use culture as a rallying point for uniting the KD in order to obtain certain political goals. The analysis of the events shows how the Kadazan identity making, similarly to the organisation of the public events in which it is represented, is deeply embedded in the Malaysian system of constitution of ethnic difference and in the political context that makes them significant.

Modern *Kaamatan* does not only contribute to the constitution of Kadazan individuals as Kadazan and as Malaysian citizens, but also as consumers, as evidenced by the effort to entice them as a specific class of consumers within advertisements elaborated specifically for the period.

Finally, I will show how Kadazan villagers show a partial rejection of the discourses and strategies constituting them as Kadazan, Malaysian citizens and

consumers and by opposing a notion of lived culture, constituted by tactics (De Certau, 1984), to that of an objectified culture.

The significance of *Kaamatan*: symbolic, political, historical

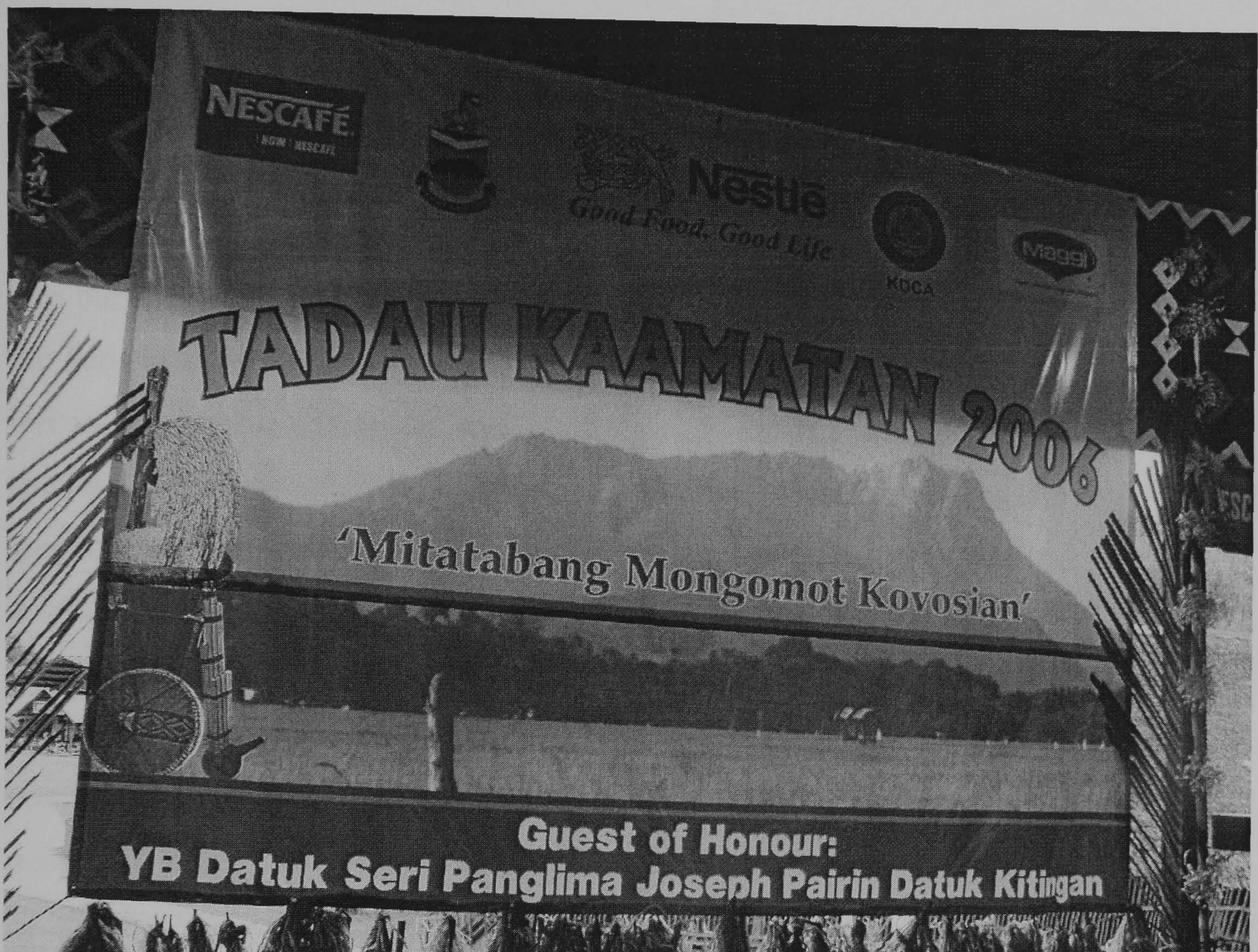


Figure 16 The banner for a Kaamatan sponsorship party organised in April for the representatives of Nestle Malaysia, the sponsors of the event. The banner shows some of the prominent symbols associated with the event: on the background of a just harvested field, a stalk of padi, a traditional basket and conical hat and the most famous KD musical instrument, the sompoton. The banner also reports the motto of the Kaamatan 2006, 'Mitatabang Mongomot Kovosian', 'Together Towards a Good Harvest'.

According to a myth shared, with some variations, among all Dusunic peoples, at the beginning of times the human race, created by Supreme Being Kinoingan, experienced a great famine. Kinoingan's maiden daughter, Huminodun³¹, immolated herself to provide human beings with food, producing the main staple, rice, together with other essential crops such as coconut, tapioca, ginger, maize and yams, through different parts of her body. Subsequently, the myth goes, when the human beings

³¹ According to Regis and John Baptist (1996), this version of the myth derives from the misunderstanding of the figure of Huminodun, who would be another name of Suminundu, Kinoingan's wife, and not of their daughter

harvested the first crop, she was transformed into Unduk Ngadau, a spirit coming out of a big jar in which the rice harvested on the first day was placed. Another essential element of the myth is the direction given by Huminodun that, before starting the harvest, the father should take seven stalks of padi (called *toguruon*) and tie them to one end of a spliced bamboo stick and plant them at the centre of the field, and then take them home in the rice storage container after the harvest was completed. The seven stalks of padi would represent the spirit of rice, *Bambaazon* (*Bambarayon* in interior dialects), responsible for bountiful harvests (Gobile, 2006: 105-106).

This myth had a central role in the traditional belief system of the Dusunic peoples, and it was at the basis of a whole set of rituals carried out every year at the time of the rice harvest. The most important of these was the *magavau* ceremony, officiated by the *bobohizan* to recover grains of rice that might have been lost during the harvest or left in the field for some reason, carrying the *Bambaazon* with them and therefore causing a scarcity of future crops, (Gobile, 2006: 104). The rituals connected with harvest were the most important of the year, and they entailed a good deal of celebration and feasting within villages.

As I have described in chapter 3, the members of the Society of Kadazan decided, as part of the creation of a modern Kadazan culture carried out by the Kadazan intelligentsia in the 1950s, to hold a unified Harvest Festival for all the Dusunic people on the same day, and aimed at obtaining its recognition as an official holiday by the British authorities. In 1960, thanks to the efforts of Donald Stephens, they obtained the official recognition and organised the first celebration at the level of the whole colony.

The first celebration, which was designed expanding on the model established during other native festivities during the 1950s (Hiroyuki, 2002), already included the features that have characterised *Kaamatan* throughout its history: some ritual acts connected with rice harvest, such as the cutting of seven padi stalks and the *magavau* ceremony, and the Unduk Ngadau beauty contest. While these elements are presented by the KDCA to bear strong continuity with the traditional celebrations held in villages before 1960, Hiroyuki considers them to be mostly a modern invention. He describes the Unduk Ngadau as deriving from an interest in beauty pageants developed in the mid-1950s, mostly provoked by the visit of a famous Indonesian actress and beauty queen (2002: 9-10). The banqueting and merry-making associated with modern *Kaamatan*, on the other hand, would derive from another traditional

ritual, the *moginakan*, which involved great expense and was held on the occasion of particularly good harvests, but also for the reconstruction of a house, delivery of a baby or recovery from illness (Hiroyuki, 2002: 3). In a similar vein, Regis and John Baptist (1996), on the basis of their analysis of the *rinait*, the sacred verses traditionally used by ritual specialists of various Dusunic groups, argue that the myth has been romantically developed over the years in order to validate and confer moral and symbolic value to the holding of the annual beauty contest for the selection of the Unduk Ngadau.



Figure 17 The winner of the 2005 Unduk Ngadau beauty pageant, from Penampang.

In its present form, the Harvest Festival consists of a month-long celebration, starting at the beginning of May with an official opening, which takes place every year in a different district, and of a dense calendar of village and district-level events organised throughout the month, culminating on the 30th and 31st, the *Tadau Tagazo Kaamatan* (literally ‘great day’) at KDCA’s headquarters. During these days, the *Hongkod Koisaan*, KDCA’s cultural centre in Penampang, comes to constitute the symbolic centre of the celebrations taking place at different times and places during the month, where the events taking place on a smaller scale are replicated and

magnified. The symbolic and ritual centrality of the event inevitably gives it a great resonance and symbolic significance, making it the site in which the KDs are represented to themselves and to the others. The Festival constitutes an essential display of symbolic markers, such as the black-and-gold costume, *sumazau* dancing, gong playing and rice symbolism, that have established themselves within the last fifty years (see chapter 3) as essential reifications of people's sense of being Kadazan.

Considering the fact that the vast majority of KD are at present Christian or Muslim, the ritual should be considered as an act with powerful symbolic value rather than a religious re-enactment of the myth. The connection with the rice cycle, moreover, has a merely symbolic value for the urban elites organising the event as well as for those, like the inhabitants of Kituau, who do not depend any more on farming for their livelihood.

Kaamatan between political significance and collective memory

In his consideration of the significance of *Kaamatan*, Loh (1992) analysed three specific Festivals - the ones of 1960, 1976 and 1982 - arguing that they marked 'important turning points in the historical memory of the Kadazans'. He saw the importance of the first Harvest Festival in the fact that it provided the Kadazan with a sense of being 'in control of Sabah and of their own destiny', as well as being the first time in which the harvest was being celebrated together in the same place and time rather than taking place in each locality after each single harvesting (1992: 247). An essential element of the first Harvest Festival was its connection with the Catholic Church: the celebration was held in the grounds of St. Michael, Penampang, a mission primary school, and the first act of the event was a sung mass followed by a procession of the Holy Eucharist, which had been postponed from Corpus Christi to coincide with the occasion. The main organisers were Donald Stephens and Fred Sinidol, director of Radio Sabah's Dusun Section, who took charge of the musical programme, inviting gong players and singers usually performing for the radio. The party consisted of playing music, dancing *sumazau*, much eating and *tapai* drinking, a beauty contest to elect Miss Penampang, a Native Costume Competition for men, a football match and a free cinema show. The programme also included speeches by Stephens as well as the British Chief Secretary and Father Antonissen, the author of

the Kadazan-English Dictionary we already encountered in the third chapter (*Kaamatan* Kg. Ramaya 2003 Souvenir Booklet: 28-33).

Similarly, the 1976 Festival, held after the electoral defeat of Mustapha (see chapter 3), was experienced as a symbol of Kadazan political victory and as the occasion in which the importance of the event in Sabah's calendar was re-instated (Loh, 1992: 247). The 1982 *Kaamatan* took place at an even more important turning point, determined by the opposition between the KD and the government. In 1981, the State government had declared the Harvest Festival a *Pesta Rakyat* ('People's Festival'), transforming it into a celebration for all Sabahans, and taking over the sponsorship and organisation of the event. Moreover, the 1982 *Pesta* coincided with the official visit of Malaysia's Head of State, the *Yang Di-Pertuan Agong* ('King'), whose participation in the event determined a shortening of the celebration from two to one day, resulting in the elimination of certain rituals carried out by the *bobohizan*, and the enforcement of tight security measures, which prevented participation by many ordinary Kadazan from various parts of Sabah. A ceremony of conversion of some Kadazan to Islam was also included in the King's programme. To allow for the participation of people from all around Sabah and because the usual harvest rituals for the year had not been carried out, and interpreting the take over by the state as a denial of their identity, the Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA) and the United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA) joined forces to organise an alternative Harvest Festival. The government strongly opposed the project, refusing to provide any funding or to allow the use of government facilities, and ordering party and government members to boycott the event, which was also ignored by the media. Despite the absence of government officials, apart from Joseph Pairin Kitingan (KCA leader) and Mark Koding (USDA leader), and the government opposition, the celebration, held on the 26th and 27th of June in an open field on the river near Tambunan, Kitingan's hometown, was a great success, attracting KD and Murut from all over Sabah in a powerful show of disaffection with the government (Loh, 1992: 245-46).

As argued by Loh (1992), the event still holds an important place in the individual and collective memory of the Kadazan, as exemplified by the story told me by Augusta, who was in her late teens at the time, who described how people of Penampang attended the celebration in great numbers, covering the 60 kilometres separating them from Tambunan in public transport buses that had suspended the

regular service for the occasion and been used to carry the party. She remembered arguing with her parents who were worried about letting her go, and then getting the permission thanks to the intervention of older villagers who promised to look after her, she remembered the sense of excitement and of doing something necessary and important, the sense of togetherness and of cooperation among all those who participated, the sense of security and joy deriving from doing what they thought was right and necessary. She told me of a 'perfect organisation' deriving from the contribution of everybody, of the generosity of the hosts, of the fond memory of being part of such an event. These examples show the extent to which *Kaamatan* is an essential node in the relationship between the Kadazan and the state, as it constitutes an essential site of struggle between the two.

The celebration at KDCA headquarters

The celebration I attended at KDCA started at 8.45 in the morning with the arrival of the most prominent KD politician, Datuk Joseph Pairin Kitingan, the Chairman of the State Level *Kaamatan* as well as the Deputy Chief Minister, followed by State and Federal MPs as well as other local authorities at 9.00, then the Chief Minister of Sabah at 9.15, and finally the Governor of Sabah, whose arrival was greeted by the national and Sabah anthems. Following the anthems, the event followed with the performance of the *magavau* ritual by KD priestesses from Kota Marudu, the district that acted as host for the launching of the month-long celebrations in 2006. The Governor then proceeded to close the Festival Month by performing the main ritual, involving cutting seven padi stalks, putting them in the *tangkob*, the traditional rice container, and then beating a special gong seven times. This ritual unique to *Kaamatan* was followed by the presentation of a memento to the highest authority, the Governor, from the Chairman Kitingan, the singing of *Kaamatan* songs by a choir, then a welcoming address by the host, followed by a speech by the Chief Minister. After watching a 'dance drama' performed by members of local cultural associations, representing the myth of Huminodun, the authorities were taken on a tour of the exhibitions and replicas of traditional houses outside the hall, offered lunch, after which they left. The event continued with the performance by various singers and ensembles of musicians, including the performance by Atama, a young Kadazan artist

blending hip-hop with traditional tunes, whose lyrics mix English with Kadazan and express the pride of his ethnic origin while at the same time demonstrating his involvement in a cosmopolitan global culture. Finally, the show ended with another highlight, possibly the most popular among the public, the finals of the beauty pageant, culminating in the nomination of the Unduk Ngadau 2006 among the representatives of each district.

While the highlight of the celebrations went on in the main hall, a series of other events took place at different sites within the KDCA compound. Among many stands promoting commercial products or local singers, notable was the one organised by CASH, a local consumer's association, collecting signatures for a petition to establish a Commission of Enquiry into the problem of illegal immigrants in Sabah, which at present is one of the issues most strongly felt by the KDs (cf. chapter 7). Nearby a group of *bobohizan* were showing a video, filmed by the Sabah Museum crew, of a traditional religious ritual, trying to raise awareness of Kadazan cultural traditions. There was also an outdoor stage on which various bands played traditional tunes, including '*Kaamatan* anthems' written by famous 'golden age' KD singers and radio celebrities such as Claudius Sundang Alex, or a past politician such as James Ongkili. A band also played another 'unofficial anthem' calling people to take part in *aramaiti*. Much partying also went on in the traditional houses of the different KD sub-groups reconstructed in the KDCA headquarters, run by members of the sub-group themselves and showing their costumes, dancing and music, all accompanied by much eating and drinking of native drinks such as *tapai* or *talak*. As different events were taking place at the same time at different sites, each participant could select the ones he/she was most interested in and, as a result, have a partially unique experience of the day. While the main show taking place in the hall, and especially the Unduk Ngadau final, seemed, judging from the number of people gathered inside, the most popular, some people chose to spend most of the day together with their village friends at the house of their sub-group or just drinking and eating at one of the stalls.



Figure 18 The celebrations at the House of the Dusun Tindal at the KDCA compound.



Figure 19 A band playing on one of the stages outside of the main hall; special seats are placed in the front for guests of honour.

The celebration at UMS

The campus of Universiti Malaysia Sabah (UMS), consisting of various faculty buildings spread over many hectares of land covered with luxuriant, well tended vegetation, presented all the signs of a major stately event taking place: army personnel in high uniform, Malaysian flags, many forms of decoration, major media presence and a tight security, all gathered around the Chancellor's Hall, the vast domed building at the centre of the campus in which the event would take place. A great crowd had gathered at the venue, probably attracted by the *panem et circenses* given by the performance of some of Malaysia's most popular singers, as well as the spectacle associated with the presence of the country's highest political authorities and the food offered.

For those who were able to secure a seat within the hall, the show started with the entertainment offered by a popular KD comedian, Abu Bakarela, who left the scene at the arrival of the important guests: Pairin Kitingan, Sabah's Chief Minister, the Federal Minister of Culture, the Prime Minister and the Head of state (*Agong*). At the arrival of the latter, all those present stood up, singing Malaysia's national anthem, followed by that of Sabah and by the exclamation 'Malaysia boleh' ('Malaysia can'), followed by 'Sabah boleh', both repeated three times and accompanied by the raising of the right hand. After everybody returned to their seats, it was the turn for the speeches, delivered in Malay, by the Minister of Culture, the Prime Minister and the Chief Minister of Sabah, followed by the great opening officiated by the *Agong*, consisting in the ritual cutting of the padi stalks and beating of the gong. The event then followed with the show, in which local dancers interpreted Huminodun's legend, accompanied by the famous singers performing various songs. Then it was the moment of the offering of mementoes to the invited guests, who then proceeded to leave the venue, while the show went on for more than an hour.

The event was highly mediatised, both in terms of media, such as audio and lighting systems, used as part of the show and in terms of those used to relay it to a wider public not physically present. The latter included reports in the press by journalists attending the event, as well as a live television broadcast on the public channel TV1, and broadcast of highlights by the commercial channel TV3. The two forms of mediation overlapped in the presence of screens distributed around the hall

that showed the TV broadcast to the present as it was filmed, in a sort of show of hyper-reality.



Figure 20 A moment in the theatrical rendition of Huminodun's legend interpreted by a local cultural group; the famous Malay singer Siti Nurhaliza can be seen at centre stage wearing the traditional Kadazan dress.



Figure 21 The *Agong* appears on one of the screens located in the hall while ceremonially cutting the seven stalks of padi in a field reconstructed indoors, wearing the *sigah*, the traditional Kadazan headgear and the common Malay dress for formal occasions, a *batik* shirt.

Similarity between the two events: the programme as a modular social script

The Highlight of the KDCA celebration and that held at UMS were similar in following a standard protocol for public events well established all over Malaysia, taking place according to a strict timetable, featuring competent presenters and political authorities, who arrived at the venue in reverse order of importance and were welcomed as prescribed by precise protocols, including the singing of the national and state anthems, the giving of mementoes and the delivery of speeches. Analysing a very similar type of event in the case of a celebration for *Gawai Dayak*, the Sarawakian equivalent to *Kaamatan*, held at a hotel in Kuching in 2001, Postill (2006: 173-79) describes the programme, including the arrival and departure of guests, a beauty pageant and a midnight count-up to the official start of the Gawai, followed by handshakes, as a uniquely Malaysian 'sequence of modular, mostly imported, social scripts', which he defines as 'a culturally shared mental schema for performing actions in a structured manner' (2006: 177). Connecting this modularity of public events to that of the nation, remarked upon by Anderson (1991), Postill argues the former to be an expression of the latter within seemingly banal practices. Central is, according to him, the role of clock-and-calendar time (CCT), the basic form of modularity, imported by the West but mediated by the intervention of the Malaysian state, on which the programme of public event rests. CCT, according to him, regulates not only the programme of public events, but also their position in the annual calendar, punctuated by the main holidays, corresponding to national celebrations such as Independence Day or the religious holidays of the main ethnic groups. As the celebration of *Gawai Dayak* signifies the status of the Dayak as one of the ethnic groups of Malaysia, putting them at symbolic parity with the Malays, Chinese and Indians (Postill, 2006: 178), so is arguably for the KD and *Kaamatan*. While the organisers of both the KDCA and UMS celebration stress this symbolic parity, however, what this parity entails seems to be at the heart of the struggle between the Kadazan and the state.

Differences between the two events: struggle over the political significance

The event at UMS, differently from that held at KDCA, belonged to a category of Malaysian public events taking place in correspondence with the main annual celebrations belonging to the main ethnic groups of the country such as *Hari Raya Aidilfitri*, the Muslim end of Ramadan, for the Malays, Chinese New Year and *Deepavali* for the Hindu Indians, the *rumah terbuka*, 'open house'. According to this Malaysian institution, supported by the Ministry of National Unity, prominent members of the ethnic and religious group that is celebrating a holiday, among which is included the Prime Minister during *Hari Raya*, open their house to those who wish to participate, offering them food and hospitality. The members of indigenous groups of Sabah and Sarawak have started holding 'open houses' only in the last years, and in Sabah the *rumah terbuka* for *Kaamatan* was organised for the second time by the federal government in 2006. In the tradition of the open house, food was offered to the participants, and members of all ethnic groups were encouraged to attend. Differently from the traditional 'open house', however, the event consisted mostly in a show held for the highest federal and state authorities, for the national media and for the general public.

The spirit of the 'open house', a modern institution elaborated by Malaysia's political elites, is an expression of one of the principles underlying the central government's nation building agenda, based on the idea of a country characterised by a 'unity in diversity', within which all the diverse ethnic and religious cultures contribute some elements to the overall Malaysian culture. This ideology can be compared with the four possible strategies that the government could use to create a sense of nationhood described by Nagata (1979), and it could be argued that it comes closer to that constituted by a pluralistic arrangement in which the main communities retain their cultural distinctiveness, as it emphasises the uniqueness of the single ethnic and religious cultures, in this case that of the KDs, while fostering understanding and appreciation among members of other communities. While this principle is undoubtedly at the basis of the institution of the *rumah terbuka*, another principle can be found alongside it, one that was particularly prominent in the *Kaamatan* celebration which took place at UMS, that of the creation of a hybrid Malaysian culture comprising elements deriving from different ethnic groups. This

concept of nation building, expressed by the recent idea of a *bangsa Malaysia* promoted by the government since the 1990s, is particularly evident in the stress put within the event on the blending of various ethnic cultures. The project was expressed by the fact that a prominent Malay artist, Siti Nurhaliza, in some way symbolising the new, urban Malayness, sang a KD *Kaamatan* song while wearing the traditional black-and-gold KD costume; on the other hand, young KD singers appreciated all over Sabah, sang a Malay song characterised by Arabic-inspired tunes and an Indian one, and a famous Chinese mouth organ player played his instrument wearing the KD costume.

The climax of the event, taking place before the authorities left the venue, however, consisted of *joget*, a popular Malay rhythm, which was sung by all the artists, a fact that immediately recalls another possible nation building strategy described by Nagata (1979), that of assimilation to Malayness. However, I would rather read the climax as a sign of the primacy of the Malays within an ambiguous nation-building agenda that privileges in certain instances the creation of a hybrid Malaysian culture and in others a pluralistic arrangement in which each community retains its uniqueness. The message sent by the UMS event to the nation, and primarily to the KDs, seems to be that cultural, and even religious, distinctive uniqueness is acceptable within Malaysia as long as it remains within the cultural sphere and it does not challenge the political and cultural domination of the Malays, and therefore does not interfere with the nation-building agenda set by the elites in power. The organisation of the *rumah terbuka* on the same day as the event taking place at the KDCA headquarters, moreover with the two events almost temporally overlapping and being located at the opposite ends of Kota Kinabalu, seems to be a clear sign of the will of the government to take the control symbolically of the *Kaamatan* holiday, and to break the monopoly of the Association over the organisation of the event.

Participation in the events

While the vast majority of the Kadazan I knew attended the KDCA celebration, only five of them also went to UMS, taking part, as I did, to both events. In the following days, back at the village, I asked many of the residents whether they had attended either of the two (or both) events and what was the reason for their choice. The answers I received consistently conveyed the idea that the event held at UMS had nothing to do with *Kaamatan* and its spirit, and many identified it as an attempt by the Federal Government to exert control on the *Kaamatan*. The pattern of participation to the two events seemed to prove the general agreement over these opinions: from what I could ascertain, the event at UMS was mostly attended by Muslim natives and ethnic Indians and Chinese, who probably did not identify *Kaamatan* as belonging to their tradition, but were more interested in the show. The only positive comment about the UMS event was given to me by a woman working in a local cultural association and involved in the organisation of the events at both KDCA and UMS. She saw the event as a good opportunity for the KDs to express their culture in novel and creative ways and to be showcased and appreciated on a national level. She particularly appreciated the mix of ethnic cultures exemplified by the fact that a Malay, Siti Nurhaliza, wore a Kadazan dress and sang Kadazan songs, a homage to her culture that was a source of great pride for her. On the other hand, she criticised KDCA for not looking for any innovation and being content with the Unduk Ngadau competition and the general merrymaking ending in the usual generalised drunkenness.

The dismissal of the event held at UMS was based on a political reading of its organisation, implicitly acknowledging it as an attempt by the Federal Government to appropriate the *Kaamatan* and to control its meaning. The general sense of disillusionment towards politics informing this reading and the choice not to participate, however, is not limited to the political elites ruling the country, but also to the institutions representing the KDs. While politicians are generally perceived as being primarily animated by self-interest, cultural institutions such as KDCA are also perceived as being used by KD leaders as platforms for obtaining support or to further their agendas. As a result, ordinary Kadazan oppose the monopoly over the definition of their identity held by cultural associations such as KDCA and the cultural and political elites at their top.

One of the forms taken by this opposition is that of a discourse of authenticity: while many Kadazan rejected the federal-organised celebration as being inauthentic, the celebrations organised by KDCA were also criticised as not being fully authentic and tainted by political and commercial interests alien to the original spirit. This view was explicitly expressed by a veteran member of the Kadazan intelligentsia, Herman Luping, who, in an article in the *Borneo Post* (4/6/2006), criticised today's *Kaamatan* as a 'huge commercial venture', arguing that 'we seem to have lost sight of what "Tadau Kaamatan" is all about – especially the religious connotation and implication'. While he praised the attempt to use the event to create unity among Malaysians, he seemed worried about the inclusion of foreign elements, such as some 'western dancing' taking place at the *Hongkod Koisaan* on the 31st of May, and the loss of the 'indigenous entity' of the celebration, which he attributes to the fact that *Kaamatan* has now become 'a national event', which exposes it to the risk of becoming 'Malaysianised'. He contrasted the present condition with that of the past, in which the celebration was 'simple and yet full of meaning', expressing a discourse of loss of authenticity that is widely shared among ordinary Kadazan.

***Kaamatan* as a commercial event**

As with all major holidays of Malaysia, such as *Hari Raya*, Chinese New Year and Independence Day, *Kaamatan* does not only have an ethnic, religious and political valence, but also a commercial one. The fact is evident from the great number of advertisements and commercial initiatives associated with the holiday, which can be found in newspapers, on billboards, in supermarket lanes and at the venues of *Kaamatan* celebrations. The most conspicuous example is constituted by Nestle and its subsidiary Maggi, the most common household brand of instant food, especially popular with its instant noodles. These companies acted as official sponsors of all events organised by KDCA, including both those at district level and the final celebration at the *Hongkod Koisaan*. As a result, the headquarters of the Association were covered with posters showing cups of instant coffee alongside traditional KD decorative patterns or the Nescafe logo next to the image of a field full of ripe padi and of a group of people in traditional dress or a young smiling woman wearing the Kadazan costume next to Maggi's logo. The brands were also present at the venue

with stands offering free instant coffee or soup or offering people participation in a draw to win a four-wheel-drive Isuzu. Despite Nestle and Maggi having the privileged places thanks to their sponsorships, other brands were also much present during the period through posters found on the streets and in restaurants and pubs, especially those producing beer of which the KD are the main consumers in Sabah. Smaller companies, such as local supermarket chains and even family-run shops or service providers also participated by offering special promotions, organising special displays at their premises, or advertising their business in the newspapers while wishing a happy *Kaamatan*. All of these advertisements display some of the main KD ethnic markers: people in traditional dress, traditional decorative patterns, ripe fields awaiting harvest, stalks of padi, gongs, *sompoton*, conical hats, traditional baskets.

Considering Foster's (2002) argument that national communities are also constituted as communities of consumers and that advertisements play an essential role in the process in Papua New Guinea, it could be asked whether it applies to the advertisement and the consuming practices connected with *Kaamatan*. First of all, it must be considered that the Festival does not have national importance, but only a state-wide one, as it does not constitute a holiday outside Sabah, where it is not well known and is only celebrated by limited communities of KD who migrated from their homeland, primarily to Kuala Lumpur. Secondly, even within Sabah, the interest in the event, and in all consuming practices connected with it, is mostly limited to the KDs, and, in particular, many Muslim people are naturally not attracted by its staples of alcohol and pork consumption, as well as by some of its pagan undertones. Despite being celebrated primarily by KDs, *Kaamatan* is, however at least acknowledged by all Sabahans and constitutes a relevant point in all Sabahans' calendar. Advertisement, while displaying much of KD's ethnic markers, moreover, is usually made in a way that allows it to speak to all Sabahans, and arguably consumption practices, be they taking advantage of special offers or spending the two days off work in some leisure activity, are the ones in which, more than any other, *Kaamatan* unites Sabahans. Nevertheless, I would not conclude that consumption practices connected with the festivity constitute the KD as a community of consumers distinguished and opposed to the nation, as the aspects that mostly constitute a sense of community are symbolic and cultural rather than linked to consumerism.

Lived culture vs. objectified culture

Many of the people I talked with, in criticising the ‘commercialised’ celebration held at KDCA’s main hall contrasted them not only with those of the past, but also with those taking place in the houses of the sub-groups in the KDCA compound and in the villages. The latter, organised by committees formed by a handful of inhabitants of one or more *kampung*, often including the headman and the JKK chairman, usually take place throughout the whole month of May, constituting an alternative festive calendar published in the Kadazan section of the local newspapers. The village celebrations, moreover, constitute an essential collective memory of the *kampung*, enriched, as is the case with other forms of *kampung* sociality I have described in chapter 5, by the sense of sharing with people closely connected by kinship and neighbourhood, but also by common concerns and interests, as well as by the unique character of the individual participants. The authentic spirit of *Kaamatan* and of Kadazan culture is therefore located within events that are informally organised by the participants themselves.

This position, opposing an ideal ‘lived culture’, constituted by the ‘real’ practices of ‘real’ people in ‘real’ locations, to a display of symbols that have lost their initial meaning and acquired political and economic importance, seems to be a radical critique not only to the use made of symbols and traditions, but to the whole connection between identity and objectified culture. Finding themselves in a situation in which they feel they have lost control over their objectified culture, which they have learnt over the years to understand as identifying them as who they are, ordinary Kadazan seem to have responded by rejecting its primary role in the definition of their identity, resorting to a folk notion of ‘lived culture’. This position is radically different from that of those using culture within a nation building agenda (the state), as a rallying point to obtain political goals for their group or for themselves (the KD political leaders), or even celebrating it for its own value, as a sort of artefact (intellectuals such as the woman working in the Sabah Museum).

This position could be interpreted as a form of what De Certeau (1984) calls tactics, a set of popular practices opposed to strategy, distinguished by not having a place of their own, but rather by applying contingent and one-off tricks to obtain their results by transforming events into ‘occasions’.



Figure 22 Children dancing for a dancing competition during the district-level Kaamatan celebrations taking place at the Dewan Tun Fuad Stephens in Penampang.

Conclusion

The *Kaamatan* has acquired different significance under different historical circumstances, acting as a symbol of ethnic self-consciousness and desire of recognition in the 1960s, a rallying point for fighting religious and political oppression in the 1970s and early 1980s, a catalyst for a renewed self-consciousness and cultural and political revival in the 1980s, a ritual of identity in the 1990s.

No matter what significance was conferred upon it, the event always acquired and realised it through the display of the most powerful Kadazan cultural symbols, coming to embody over the years the foremost 'celebration and assertion of Kadazan-ness' (Loh, 1992: 247-48). As such, it has become at present an essential locus of struggle for the definition of Kadazan-ness and of its role, primarily, as exemplified by the events I have considered, between the nation building agenda of the state and a more important and autonomous role implicitly desired by the Kadazan and their leaders. The results of this struggle are highly ambiguous as, while there is strong evidence to the rejection by the Kadazan of the model of nation brought forward by

the central government and of the enduring use of *Kaamatan* as a means to express this resistance, the Kadazan have indeed become part of the nation by becoming involved in phenomena such as, among others, the spread of CCT and of consumerism which, despite being of foreign origin, assume a uniquely Malaysian form controlled by the national elites located at the national centres. The language itself in which Kadazan are able to express their resistance is a national one materialised by the nation building process.

Possibly because of the present situation, characterised by the retreat of ordinary Kadazan from the realm of politics, or possibly despite it, *Kaamatan* has also gained, or re-gained, a value as symbol of what people feel they really are, detached from an objectified culture that can be controlled by the elites and experienced as 'lived culture', constituted by the practices and strategies adopted by people in their everyday life, using a label to define something that goes beyond labels.

Chapter 7

The threatening Other: citizenship rights and anti-state nationalism as reactions to illegal immigration



18/3/2006. A demonstration had been organised at Kampung Maang against the government's plan, transpired through trustworthy rumours, to relocate there about 2,000 squatters (most of whom were allegedly illegal immigrants) from Sri Tanjung, an area that needed to be cleared to leave space for the expansion of Kota Kinabalu airport. Judeth, the friend who had helped me to find a house in which to reside, where I had moved on that same day, had dissuaded me from going to the demonstration site, being afraid that my presence might have been noticed by the police or some 'special branches' and that the fact could have jeopardised my

research, convincing the government that I was involved in political activities or even that I wanted to be a new Bruno Manser³², a point about which various authorities had already shown some concern. Finally I persuaded her to take me there to have a look in the late afternoon, after the end of the demonstration, with the promise that I would get off the car only for a minute, just to take some pictures, and that I would try to be as discreet as possible.

The site of the demonstration lies along the main road from Penampang to Papar, just about 4 kilometres from Kituau, on the opposite side from the village of Maang. Cars were parked on both sides of the road for more than one kilometre, as well as in open areas on the roadside and in the compounds of many houses. From the number of cars and people standing by the roadside, it was immediately obvious that the demonstration had attracted a great number of participants, as probably many had already left. As I got out of the car and leant on the demonstration site at the foot of a hill, separated by the road from a broad drain crossed by a small bridge, I could see people moving around, and notably quite a few veiled women among them, gathering in small groups, talking, standing by banners fixed to the ground and displaying protest messages in Malay, policemen making sure that everything went according to plans and journalists filming the scene.

The main aim of the demonstration, organised by the Kampung Maang Action Committee, was to appeal to the State Government to choose a different site for relocating the squatters, as well as to collect signatures for a petition to be submitted to the Prime Minister in case the State Government refused to reconsider the plan.

As I learned from the newspaper the next day, the demonstration was attended by around 5,000 people coming not only from Penampang but from all districts of Sabah, as well as the State Assemblyman and Federal MP for the local constituency, the leaders of two KD-majority parties members of the ruling coalition and Sabah's deputy chief and chief of two opposition parties. Among the participants was also Atama, a Kadazan rapper famous for his supporting of the cause of KDs, who played, together with some youths from Maang, at the end of the demonstration. A journalist remarked that the demonstration had been 'probably the first' time in Sabah's history a Chief Minister 'face[d] public protest over [...] an "unpopular" government decision' (*Daily Express*, 19/3/2006).

³² Bruno Manser was a Swiss shepherd who organised groups of nomadic Penan of Sarawak into protesting against logging into their territory.



Figure 23 One of the demonstration banners, saying (in Malay): 'an invitation to fight together to demand the rights of the 'original people''.



Figure 24 People at the site after the end of the demonstration.

Introduction

The demonstration which I described at the start of the chapter was significant in representing the most dramatic expression of the fears of the Kadazan living in Penampang about the manifestation at their very doorstep of one of the most serious problems affecting Sabah, illegal immigration. Immigration is a phenomenon that has reached great proportions, to the point that almost one third of the population of Sabah is considered to be of foreign origin (Sadiq, 2005), and it is widely connected, and almost equated, with criminality in the press and in public opinion.

Following Hall *et al.* (1978), this chapter is considering crime as an idea of the reverse of a normal 'way of life', the analysis of which can facilitate the understanding of what it is perceived to subvert the normal order of society and the 'images of society' at the basis of widely shared and mostly unquestioned ideas of what the defining features of a society are. The immigrants are perceived primarily as a threat to values corresponding to 'images of society' such as that of work, respectability and the family, and the reaction involves the summoning of law, which becomes the only institutional and powerful force which can maintain the conditions of a certain 'way of life', becoming a powerful mobiliser against crime, the 'evil' which is the reverse of the 'normality' (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 148).

This perspective brings the issue of immigration within a conception of the state based on the principles of popular sovereignty, in which citizens are defined as right-bearing individuals and contrasted with non-citizens and based on presupposing the identity of the people with the nation and of the nation with the state (Chatterjee, 2004). Within this perspective, however, the definition of the nation remains at a legalistic level, and belonging to the nation is limited to identifying oneself with a group of individuals with certain rights and certain duties. This is the way in which many Kadazan seem to conceive their being Malaysian.

In Malaysia, however, as in most post-colonial states of Africa and Asia (Chatterjee, 2004), individuals are not simply and not primarily considered as citizens equal in all rights, but rather as members of groups with unique characteristics and often a unique identity that need to be governed through adequate techniques of governmentality. This principle situates the Kadazan within two categories, that of *bumiputera*, comprising all indigenous peoples of Malaysia, and that of Kadazandusun. Despite the promise of special rights granted by their *bumiputera*

status, the Kadazan see themselves being defined as a marginal group by the forms of governmentality practised within the Malaysian multi-ethnic system. They react by identifying Malaysia and Malaysian-ness with the government on the one hand and with the Malays on the other, and reject both by stressing their cultural and religious elements of distinction.

The Kadazan, therefore, while internalising the definition of citizenship underlying the modern state, reject their marginality by opposing at the same time the 'external Other', the immigrant, and the 'internal Other', the forces determining their very marginal status, identified with the government and the Malays. This struggle takes the form of a defence of what both forms of the Other seem to threaten, the *kampung* as a physical and ideological expression of Kadazan-ness and of its values and 'ideas of society', such as respectability, work, cooperation, solidarity, the family. The feared results of the presence of the immigrants and the actions of the government are ultimately the alteration of the local ethnic and religious balance and, with it, the demise of Kadazan identity and way of life. Finally, the presence of immigrants is one of the most significant elements influencing the material conditions of life in Sabah, and determining its status of borderland. The experience of these conditions of life, which are unique to Sabah, and the consciousness that they are shared throughout the State, has determined the development of a Sabahan identity, which has all the characteristics of what Kaplan (1999) calls a 'borderland identity', strongly felt among individuals belonging to different ethnic and religious groups. This identity is upheld through an emphasis on a racial harmony and ability to interact positively that is felt to be uniquely Sabahan and contrasted with the racial divisions of the Peninsula. This Sabahan identity, while strongly felt on certain occasions, however, becomes secondary when more powerful forms of identity, such as the ethnic or religious one, come to the fore.

The expression of different positions on the relocation in the media

The three protagonists taking part in the events were the people of Maang and the surrounding area, the State authorities and KD political leaders. The local people identified the Sri Tanjung squatters with illegal immigrants, and therefore considered the resettlement as a plan to be fought not only because of its possible direct results, but also as a step in the struggle to find a solution to the general problem of illegal immigration, of which the Maang issue was perceived as just one manifestation. This was the general perception among the people of Maang and of surrounding villages, but also, arguably, of the many Sabahans, including KD political leaders, who participated in the demonstration or supported the struggle of the people of Maang. The political authorities of the State, on the other hand, tried to deny this relationship and to minimise the significance of the Maang issue through their statements published in the press. The leaders of the KD-majority political parties, finally, while not directly opposing or criticising the government, put the emphasis on the relationship between the issue and the problem of illegal immigration.

The position of the local people

The news about the possible relocation plan was spread from those who first came to know about it to their networks of neighbours and friends through word-of-mouth and mobile phone text messages, making the issue rapidly known to the whole Penampang. The people of Maang and surrounding villages reacted through the Kampung Maang Action Committee, who raised awareness about the issue, organised the demonstration and expressed their position through public statements.

Small media such as mobile phones and printed leaflets were essential in mobilising people for the demonstration, providing the easiest way to circulate information rapidly. Mobile phones provided the fastest and simplest way of obtaining participation through text messages, which can easily be forwarded and create a chain reaching many hundreds of people, carrying contents as simple as the one I received from a local friend, just saying, using English and standard SMS

abbreviations, 'Let's join together 2 stop the immigrants resettlement in Kg. Maang. Come to Maang on 18-03 @ 2 pm. Pass this sms 2 all ur friends. Tq'.

The leaflet prepared to encourage participation to the demonstration, on the other hand, while requiring more effort to be printed and circulated, offered the opportunity of giving more in-depth information about the issue, supporting the rejection of the squatters' relocation by qualifying the area as *adat* land by virtue of being inhabited by the ancestors of the present inhabitants for at least ten generations. Moreover, the leaflet identified some serious problems that could have derived from the seizing of the land by the government, including the risk of pollution and the disturbance of the local ecosystem, including water and the forest, which could result in natural disasters, as well as the violation of a sacred Christian site, used for Good Friday's Station of the Cross procession (see below).

The press: outlet for the authorities

The issue loomed large in the newspapers, the main media dealing regularly with sub-national news, with frequent reports, almost daily in April, as exemplified by the *Daily Express* (21/3/06, 25/3/06, 4/4/06, 6/4/06, 7/4/06, 8/4/06, 19/4/06, 11/5/06, 29/6/06, 5/7/06, 6/7/06, 2/8/06, 4/8/06, 8/8/06, 13/8/06, 3/9/06, 11/10/06, 24/11/06, 16/12/06, 10/1/07). The Sabahan press dealt with the issue mostly by publishing official statements by public authorities or by a few recognised organisations, while statements by the Kampung Maang Action Committee were published only once (*Daily Express*, 16/3/2006). Among the examples of official statements by authorities were those by unspecified 'highly placed sources', guaranteeing that the project was meant to accommodate only squatters with citizenship status, and that there was no reason for the people of Maang to fear the resettlement (*Daily Express*, 21/3/06), and of the former Berjaya-era Chief Minister Salleh Tun Said, who encouraged the KD leaders within the ruling coalition to explain the rationale behind the relocation to Maang to the people, rather than 'turning it into a racial issue in the media', and stated that "This is not a racial issue or Penampang but only involves Kampung Maang" (*Daily Express*, 25/3/06). Similarly, the Deputy Chief Minister Chong Kah Kiat guaranteed that the Home Ministry would ascertain the authenticity of the Sri Tanjung's squatters identity cards as well as their real identities, and said the

perception had been very strong, 'as if Kampung Maang was invaded, shifting from initial fear of the illegal immigrants in the Sri Tanjung squatter colony'. He also underlined that the reason for the relocation, the expansion of Kota Kinabalu airport, would bring benefits, in terms of economic spin-offs, to everybody in Sabah (*Daily Express*, 6/4/06). The authorities, while denying the connection between the relocation of the squatters and the problem of illegal immigration, indirectly reinforced people's belief in it through their very emphasis in the denial.

The middle-ground position taken by leaders of KD parties was exemplified by the position of UPKO, taking the occasion to demand on the Federal Government to set up a Royal Commission of Enquiry to verify the authenticity of citizenship documents awarded to foreigners (*Daily Express*, 4/4/06). Penampang MP Donald Mojuntin, one of the most vocal of KD political leaders, commented on the appointment of Joseph Pairin Kitingan - the leader of PBS, KDCA president and Deputy Chief Minister - as chairman for the Selection Committee, saying that Maang residents were placing high hopes on him, as he had been always expressed a strong concern with the issue of illegal immigrants. Mojuntin also clarified that the objections of the people had nothing to do with race (*Daily Express*, 6/7/06). Finally, replying to the State Secretary's declaration that the Sri Tanjung squatters would be relocated in Kinarut, but that the site at Maang would be used for housing other squatters from surrounding areas, Dompok said that 'he hoped the State Government will really mean it this time when it said it will rid Pulau Gaya³³ of illegal immigrants and demolish their squatter homes once and for all. He also said that "Illegal immigrants have no place in this country" (*Daily Express*, 13/8/06).

³³ An island just off Kota Kinabalu which is famous all over Sabah for its squatter settlements, mostly inhabited by illegal immigrants, and for the high concentration of crime and drug dealing

Public opinion and ideology

The association between the immigrants, especially the illegal ones, and crime is constant in Sabah's press³⁴, to the point that, as remarked by Sadiq (2005: 115, note 40), 'local newspapers carry news about illegal immigrants every day. Much of the local news reporting is devoted to crimes committed by illegal immigrants'.

This section analyses the reaction to the issue of illegal immigrants by the Kadazan people by applying Hall *et al.*'s (1978) discussion about 'clusters' of recurrent themes and images within public reactions to crime in England. As described by Hall *et al.* (1978: 135), the media reports are preceded by a primary level of opinion formation, constituted by the circulation of information, opinions and rumours, 'framed by interpretation, shaped by common-sense views and received wisdom', only a small portion of which generally find their way into the local press. These local communication channels are, however, soon integrated, in a highly selective way, into a more public and formal level by the network of the 'mass media', which crystallise 'public opinion'. Communication and communication networks, then, bring into relationship with one another 'the relatively 'separate worlds' of professional and lay opinion, of controller and controlled, making events and issues public in the full sense and creating public opinion (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 135-136). Moreover, they argue, the more an issue becomes public, the more it is possible to find 'a highly structured, though by no means complete, or coherent, or internally consistent, set of ideologies about crime' (1978: 136). While it is beyond the scope of this chapter to analyse in detail the media coverage of immigration and crime, I will limit the discussion to a few cases, with the aim of clarifying the themes underlying the reports, without the pretension of providing a representative sample. Similarly to what was done by Hall *et al.*, I will concentrate on letters to newspapers rather than on reports by journalists. Hall *et al.* (1978: 137) consider letters to the editor as a primary example of public opinion coming back the opposite way from its normal flow, from the domain of the private and the local into that of public opinion. According to Hall *et al.*, the status of

³⁴Just as an example consider the news reported by the Daily Express on a random day (19/8/2006). At the centre of page 4 there is an article titled 'Cheating and having a fake IC: Man jailed', reporting about a man, whose country of origin is not specified, sentenced to 15 months' jail for the two crimes, and ending by reporting, after the common formula 'in another case', that two Filipinos were jailed after testing positive for Syabu, a locally used type of amphetamine. Below is another article titled 'Immigration offences: 21 jailed', reporting that the foreigners, Indonesians and Filipinos, had received a three months' jail sentence.

crime is central as it ‘both touches the material conditions in which life is lived, and is appropriated in the ideological representations of that life’(1978: 150), the latter involving core ‘images of society’ - such as those of respectability, work, discipline, hierarchy and authority - which constitute the ‘unquestioned substratum of truth’ and the ‘source of [...] collective emotional force and appeal’ of a specific view of society (1978: 140). As a consequence

This ‘complex centrality of crime gives ‘crime as a public issue’ a powerful mobilising force – support can be rallied to a campaign against it, not by presenting it as an abstract issue, but as a tangible force which threatens the complexly balanced stabilities which represent the ‘English way of life’. Crime is summoned – through this ideology – as the ‘evil’ which is the reverse of the ‘normality’ of ‘Englishness’, and an evil which if left unchecked can rot away the stable order of normality’ (Hall *et al.*,1978: 150)

Many aspects of the discussion of Hall *et al.* (1978), which deals specifically with the English situation (see below), seem directly applicable to the case I am considering. Similarly to what was argued by them, the issue of crime, and in particular in its association with immigration, seems to be perceived as a threat to a whole way of life and to be the opposite of normality, threatening to subvert its order. This view is implicit, for example, in a letter sent by a reader, signing as Anti-Crime, to the *Daily Express* Forum ‘What The People Say’ (10/9/2006), who lamented the crimes committed by the illegal immigrants in his area over 12 years, which included ‘breaking into people’s houses, stealing, robbing, vandalism, bullying, killing pets and other animals, threatening, beating up the residents, stealing their letters by smashing open their mail-boxes, disturbing public peace’, which had caused the ‘near-destruction of the residents’ livelihood’. The writer of another letter, Bumiputera Tulin (*Daily Express*, 3/9/2006) similarly accused illegal immigrants of uncivilised acts such as ‘cultural pollution, VCD peddling on the streets, unruly behaviour, pissing and littering in public places’. The acts of these criminals are perceived as the reverse of normality, threatening it by constituting an attack on the essential laws and conventions regulating it. They are a clear threat to respectability, constituted by conformity to established social standards, defining ‘upright, decent conduct’ (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 140), to the public image of work, based on what Hall *et al.* (1978: 141-42) call the ‘calculus of work’, the belief that ‘valued things [...] are a reward for the diligent application to long-term productive goals through work’, entailing a strong

moral condemnation of those getting a livelihood without putting in their efforts or giving their contribution.

The perceived attack made by the immigrants to these principles is stated even more explicitly in another letter, published on the same day (10/9/2006), in which the author accuses the foreigners of easily finding jobs, differently from the locals who are often unemployed, because they can be content with very low salaries, as they are not paying for the facilities they enjoy, which they obtain by theft rather than by paying taxes. Bumiputera Tulin touched on similar points by arguing that illegal immigrants commit theft of electricity and water ‘while locals have to pay bills’ and that ‘locals in the rural areas miss their chances to pursue higher education because many of their places are taken by immigrants’ children’.

Another element considered by Hall *et al.* (1978: 72-73) to be implied in the social understanding of crime, that of ‘an implied ‘rational calculus’ about the relation between violence and the results gained from its use, is evident in the concerns expressed by Anti-Crime, who describes gratuitous acts, such as the stealing of a priceless glass bowl by burglars breaking into his house, the breaking of a glass window by throwing a stone, the killing and torturing of pets, stealing people’s mail or causing problems to the customers of a cybercafé.

All these acts seem to qualify the immigrants, referred to as ‘invaders’, as not only irreconcilable, but as completely contrary, in the perception of the letter’s author as well as of many ordinary Sabahans, to the conventions of the decent and respectable way of life of the local residents, to which they constitute a dangerous threat.

The only possible solution to these troubles seem to be constituted by the law, which according to Hall *et al.*, is summoned in defence of all the other images of society – respectability, work, discipline – ‘in the last instance’, when people seem not able, or willing, to regulate themselves. The law ‘can be used as a mobiliser when it becomes the only institutional and powerful force which can maintain the conditions of [the] ‘way of life’ (1978: 148).

The recourse to the law, which is called upon within all letters, is, however, problematic because of the apparent inability or unwillingness of the authorities to solve the issues of illegal immigration. This ambivalent position towards the enforcement of law is expressed by Anti-Crime, who states that ‘the Government has talked about getting rid of these “invaders” but nothing more than empty promises’, adding that ‘Sabah is definitely turning into an illegal immigrants’ destination’ rather

than, as envisaged by the government and local people, a tourist destination. Similarly, the other letter published on the same day, by Kecewa, was titled, again mocking a tourist promotion slogan, 'Malaysia truly Asia while Sabah is truly Manila, Jakarta', and argued that 'Our Government is cradling other people's babies while its own babies are left to the flies', and that 'until now, the problems not only remain unsolved but compounded. I haven't seen the faintest positive impact of the supposed good measures taken by the Government in all these years'. Bumiputera Tulin defined that of the leaders as *omong kosong* ('empty talk'), and described 'the problems caused by illegals to us now' as 'not very much different from the war problems faced by our ancestors', argued that 'Sabah is being over protective of the immigrants', who would be 'holding even Government jobs', that illegal immigrants in detention centres 'come and go as they wish by escaping'.

Two of the letters, those of Bumiputera Tulin and Kecewa, also directly touch on the issue of the relocation of the Sri Tanjung people, the former remarking that the problem of whether the squatters were truly locals had not yet been addressed by the authorities, and the latter that the opposition by 'our' *rakyat* (M. 'people') and leaders had been successful in stopping the relocation to Maang, while the people of Kinarut, who had supported the Government's decision, had to accept the relocation.

Hall *et al.* considered the social images they described as producing and sustaining 'an uncodified but immensely powerful, conservative *sense of Englishness*, of an English 'way of life', of an 'English' viewpoint which – it also, by its very density of reference, asserts – *everyone* shares to some extent' (1978: 140, emphasis in original). The question that we should ask now is: what sense of belonging do similar images produce and sustain in the case we are considering?

The rest of the chapter will attempt to answer this question for what concerns the Kadazan living in Penampang. Before starting to address this question, however, a more general consideration about the size and consequences of the presence of immigrants in Sabah, as well as of the agendas connected to it, is required.

Immigration in Sabah

According to the general perception shared by most Sabahans I spoke to³⁵, the immigrant population has, over the years since the 1970s, come to constitute a significant proportion of the State's population. Supporting this perception, an international academic, Kamal Sadiq, argues (2005: 108) that 'almost one in every three residents of Sabah may be a foreigner', including both illegal immigrants and legal workers, questioning the data presented in the 1991 census, which, according to him, seriously underestimated the number of foreigners, especially Filipinos. More recent official statistics (Malaysia Department of Statistics, 2005, cited in Leete, 2007), on the other hand, give the proportion of non-citizens as 24.8 percent of Sabah's population.

Azizah Kassim (1998, cited in Sadiq, 2005: 107) reports that a former Chief Minister estimated the number of foreigners to be between 400,000 and 500,000, while the leaders of PBS estimate a figure of one million foreigners out of a population of 2.8 million on the basis of the unpublished *Transient Population Study* they carried out in 1988, during the period the party was in power; similar estimates are given by Filipino sources (Sadiq, 2005: 108).

These accounts are notably consistent with the dramatic population growth experienced by Sabah since the 1980s, with an annual 5.5 percent against a Malaysian average of 2.6 between 1981 and 1991, and of 6.2 compared with the Malaysian 2.7 between 1991 and 1995, with a growth rate of almost three times that of other States. Comparing Sabah with neighbouring Sarawak, which has similar fertility and death rates, it is possible to see that, while the latter had a larger population in 1980, the estimated population of the two states according to the Seventh Malaysia Plan (1995-2000) are of 2.06 million for Sarawak and 3.3 million for Sabah, with about 1.3 million more people (Kadiq, 2005: 109).

If these figures are contrasted with the unpublished data from the state immigration reported by Azizah Kassim (1998, cited in Sadiq, 2005: 107) of only 120,719 alien workers registered in Sabah in 1997, it is easy to infer that a great proportion of the immigrants are illegal. Estimating the number of immigrants, and in particular of

³⁵ See also, for example, the already mentioned letter by Kecewa, (*Daily Express*, 10/9/2006), who states that 'Statistics show that 24.82 per cent of Sabah's population comprises Filipinos and Indonesians. This amounts to 727,647 persons, which is a lot'

illegals, is further complicated by the fact that many of them become regularised through various procedures. These are either legal, such as government programmes, marriages with local people, or the granting of refugee status, or illegal, such as the use of fake documents. As is common knowledge around Sabah, it is quite easy to obtain a fake identity card: while Sadiq (2005: 115) argues they can be obtained for as little as 10 ringgits, my local friends told me they knew the price depended on the immigrant's origin, but generally could be around 100, and they even jokingly encouraged me to get one.

The ease with which an IC can be obtained partly depends on the fact that the use of legal documents is rare or absent among the natives in rural areas, as people do not normally need them and might need to travel long distance or go through much hassle in order to get them. A good example of the situation is given by the fact, reported by the national newspaper *The Sun* (1999, cited in Sadiq, 2005: 114), that the National Registration Department complained that in Sabah over two million people did not possess a birth certificate. The result is what Sadiq defines as a 'weakly institutionalised citizenship' in Malaysia, and in particular in Sabah, where, because of the particular circumstances, 'the state does not insist on the possession of a standard document for the exercise of an individual's civil, political, economic, or social rights' (2005: 114). While since 1987 a birth certificate is required to obtain a Malaysian IC, the Registration Department often needs to acquire information about the identity of people from village headmen or other community leaders as the only means to provide individuals from remote areas with identity cards, and these individuals have sometimes been bribed or misled into helping non-citizens to obtain documents. At times illegal immigrants have also obtained Malaysian ICs by presenting genuine birth certificates belonging to natives. As reported by the *Borneo Post* (1999, cited in Sadiq, 2005: 116), a former detainee who held a leading role in an operation to provide ICs to illegal foreigners, confessed that a total of 130,000 documents were provided in 1985 alone.

The fact that the majority of the immigrants are Muslim, and mostly belonging to ethnic groups with cultural and physical features that make it easy for them to be assimilated within the Malays, and that by obtaining ICs they directly get the right to vote, provides evidence to the fact that they are given citizenship rights by various means not simply for the economic advantage of those involved, but also for a political agenda. The fact was demonstrated within court cases in which the

involvement of senior UMNO members in the falsification of ICs transpired in the hearings (Sadiq, 2005: 116).

As remarked by Sadiq:

Legalizing illegal immigrants becomes the preferred strategy of the dominant Malay parties when overt Malayization does not proceed quickly enough. The goal of the Malays, who dominate the federal government, is to change the demographic and political character of Sabah so that it becomes Malay Muslim-dominated, and because of cultural and religious commonalities, these immigrant Indonesians and Filipinos can easily be Malayized over time and will support Malay-Muslim parties.

(2005: 116)

The strategy seems to have been successful, as demonstrated by the defeat of PBS in 1995 and the victory of UMNO in the elections held since then. The voting immigrants have until now been loyal to UMNO, knowing that their benefits would be guaranteed by the ruling party, while, as I was told by some of my Kadazan friends, the number of voting Indonesians is so high in certain areas in the East coast that they even filed their candidates and got some elected in the State Assembly.

Being Malaysian: between dissatisfaction with the government and the discourse of citizenship

The main characteristic of immigrants, whether they commit crimes or not, is that of not being citizens, and, in the case of illegal ones, their living in Sabah is already a crime. One of the most relevant ideas emerging from the analysis of the letters written to the *Daily Express*'s forum is that people perceive them as benefiting, through stealth and theft and sometimes violence, of the services that local, law-abiding citizens, are paying for through their work and their contribution through taxes. In this perception, the attitudes related to the ideology of work, and the condemnation of the 'scroungers', 'layabouts', those who get something without 'putting anything into it' (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 142) are equated with a discourse of citizenship. In their outrage against the non-citizens who enjoy rights that should by definition belong only to citizens, the writers of the letters, and the Kadazan I spoke to, who shared the same attitude, seem to have completely internalised the discourse of citizenship at the basis

of the modern state, and to think of themselves primarily *as citizens* whose rights are being violated.

Within this perspective, however, Malaysian-ness seems more a juridical category, distinguishing the bearers of certain rights on the basis of criteria defined by the law rather than on a 'way of life' that is perceived as being commonly shared. This view corresponds to the principle of popular sovereignty, established by the French Revolution, based on presupposing the identity of the people with the nation and of the nation with the state, in which the inhabitants of the country are right-bearing citizens (Chatterjee, 2004). As is the case in many post-colonial multi-ethnic states like Mauritius (Eriksen, 1993: 118), nationalism in Malaysia expresses a polyethnic or supraethnic ideology stressing shared civil rights rather than cultural roots.

These principles are clearly at odds with the fact, discussed in the previous section, that the State and Federal governments have actively encouraged and favoured the influx of immigrants and their exercise of rights that should in principle be limited to citizens, such as voting, and their naturalisation, practically 'preferring non-citizens over citizens' (Sadiq, 2005). In light of the general and widespread knowledge of this fact, the government is perceived as not fulfilling its defining function, which is that of serving the interests of its own citizens. As expressed by Bumiputera Tulin, 'the acceptance of immigrants by our past and present leaders as citizens is indication of the leaders' disregard of the country's sovereignty' (*Daily Express*, 3/9/2006). As a result, contrary to what could be presupposed from the principles at the basis of nationalism, the rejection of the foreigners in Sabah partly corresponds to a rejection of the state system and of its ruling elites, guilty of carrying out their nation building agenda at the expenses of the citizens of the country.

While traditional formulations of the state are based on the principle of popular sovereignty, the inhabitants of most post-colonial states of Asia and Africa, according to Chatterjee, would in fact be only tenuously and ambiguously right-bearing citizens in the sense imagined by the constitution, and should rather be considered as subjects of governance, a 'body of knowledge and set of techniques used by, or on behalf of, those who govern' (2004: 4). This state of things would be a consequence of the shift from popular sovereignty to governmentality, which 'operates on a heterogeneous social field' in which 'there is no equal and uniform exercise of the rights of citizenship' (2004: 60), and which is based on the division of population into different groups and classes to which special practices of governance are targeted. While in

India they took the form of castes and in Africa that of tribes, in South-East Asia these classes took the primary form of ethnic groups within the post-colonial state.

Following this principle, the Kadazan are treated, for the purpose of governance, as members of two groups: *bumiputera* and Kadazandusun. While, as *bumiputera*, the KDs benefit from special rights granted them by the constitution, in fact they do not enjoy them to the same extent as the Malays and the Malayised Muslim *bumiputera*, and, similarly to other non-Muslim indigenous peoples of Sarawak (Boulanger, 2002; Postill, 2006; Chua, 2007), they consider themselves to be, and affectively are, 'second-class *bumiputera*' (Loh, 1992; Sadiq, 2005).

The contradictions between the principles inherent in the legalistic conception of the state, based on the principle of citizenship, and reality are obvious to the KDs, who experience them in their everyday life in the form of political, economic and cultural marginality. The contradiction is made even stronger by the fact that, as *bumiputera*, they are theoretically granted special rights by the constitution. Within this condition, Malaysia becomes identified with the Government, especially with the Federal one, and therefore as an external agency, promoting development and prosperity primarily for the members of the ruling groups, often leaving behind, when not directly going against their interests, indigenous minorities such as the KDs. On the basis of this perception, it follows that the KDs cannot fully identify with Malaysia as long as they feel they are a marginalised section of a national community that is primarily defined in terms of rights and benefits. On the other hand, by rejecting the government and their marginal status within the Malaysian multi-ethnic system, the Kadazan do not challenge the system itself, but rather they take it for granted, as shown by the fact that the immigrants are primarily challenged on the basis of their being non-citizens.

Moreover, the media rhetoric of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) has penetrated the worldview of people, as demonstrated by the correspondence between the press representation of the immigrants as 'the source of all evils' and the discourse of the Kadazan about the squatters, implicitly sustaining the imagining of the nation as a community of citizens by contrasting them with what they are not, the foreigners, by defining the Self through the representation of the archetypal Other.

Being Kadazan: between rights and 'way of life'

The main perspective within which the discourse of citizenship is conjugated in ethnic terms is in what Boulanger (2002) defines as the 'numbers game', the idea that numbers are necessary to 'have a fair share' of the State and national resources and adequate political bargaining power and representation.

This view, which she found to be prevalent among urban Dayak and Melanau of Sarawak, is very common, according to my experience, also among the Kadazan. In the light of this perspective should be considered the great concern, widely shared by all KD groups, about the decrease of the proportion of the KDs within the State population from 42 percent at the beginning of the twentieth century to 32 percent in 1960, 29.9 in 1970 and to 19.6 percent by 1990 (Sadiq, 2005: 108), and to 17.5 percent by 2005 (Malaysia Department of Statistics, cited in Leete, 2007).

The relevance of this perspective is determined by the domination of the principle of governmentality, by which the population is divided into groups with unequal access to rights (Chatterjee, 2004) in the Malaysian political system, which, as argued by Boulanger (2002: 225), was itself constituted by a great 'numbers game', won by the *bumiputera*. As we have already seen, however, the real winners of the 'numbers game' is in fact just a section of the *bumiputera*, that constituted by the Malays and their Muslim allies in Sabah and Sarawak.

Religion emerges as an essential element of distinction: the upholding of Christianity by the majority of the KDs is at the same time a rejection of the government's Malayisation agenda and a rallying around what has established itself as a central element of identity for a great part of the KDs since its modern elaboration in the 1950s, as described in chapter 3.

Christianity is the element that distinguishes the Kadazan from their 'internal' Other: the Malays. The importance of this role played by Christianity is evident from countless examples, such as the connection between the Catholic Church and the first Harvest Festival, the defence of the foreign missionaries and Christianity in general during the period of Mustafa rule or the emphasis on Christianity put by all KD leaders, just to mention a few. Christianity also played an essential role within the protest against the relocation of the Sri Tanjung squatters in Maang, as one of the reasons for the opposition to the resettlement on the site was constituted by the fact

that it is the site where an important Good Friday procession takes place, in which people ascend the hill, stopping at various crosses placed on the ground, performing the Stations of the Cross ritual. The procession taking place on the 14th of April 2006, at the height of the public attention over the possible relocation, seemed, despite a lack of direct reference to the issue, an implicit affirmation of the importance of the site for the people of Penampang and of the determination to defend what was felt to be not only a sacred site, but a symbol of Kadazan-ness in the form of a territory inscribed by a 'Kadazan way of life', one main element of which is Christianity. Similarly it was the case with the celebration of *Kaamatan* at the same site, at the foothill, on the 10th of June, an occasion in which the political leaders who were presenting made explicit reference to the issue of the relocation in their speeches, assuring those present that they were doing everything they could to stop the plan.



Figure 25 The Good Friday procession going up the Maang hill.



Figure 26 The final prayer on the top of the hill.

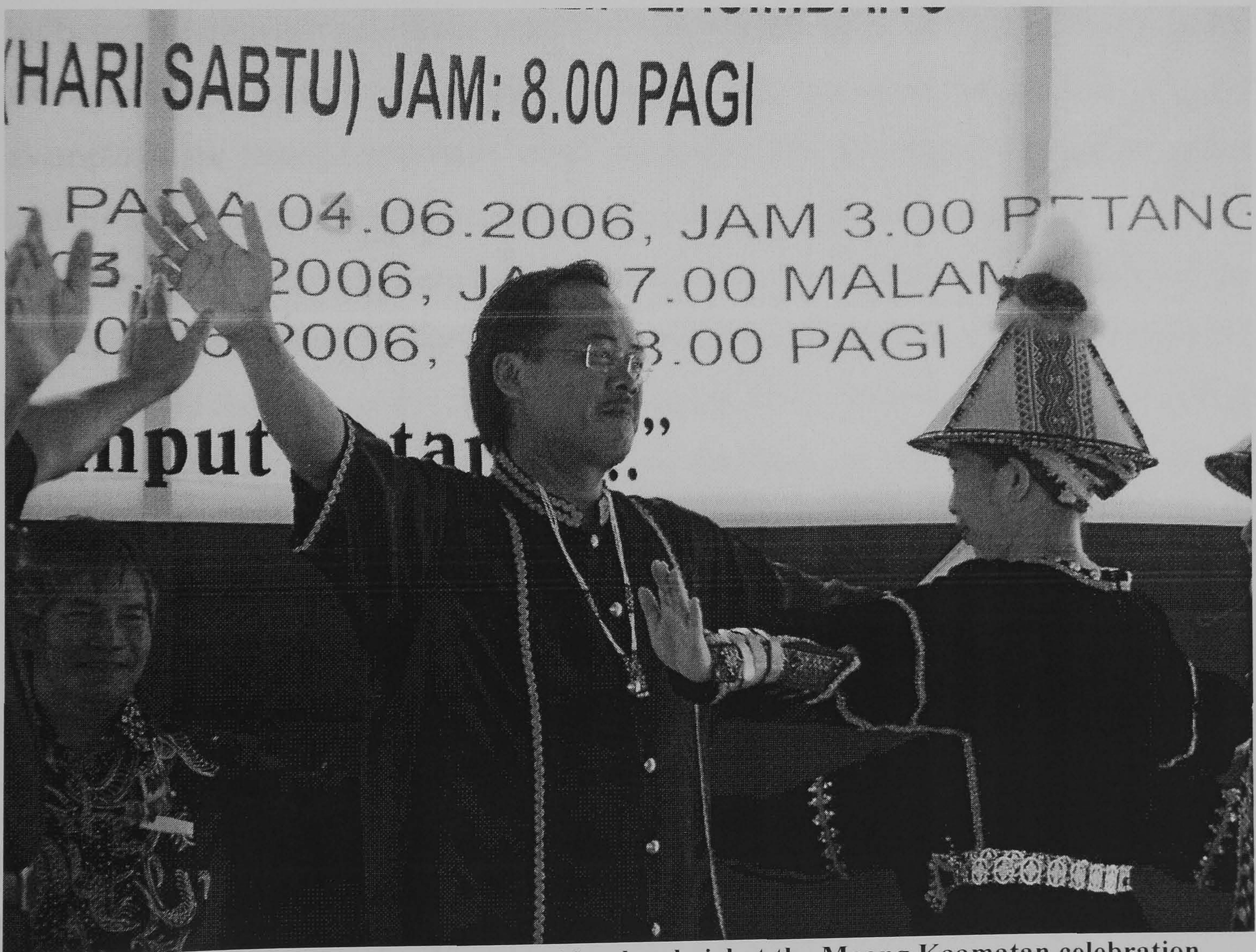


Figure 27 A Kadazan politician dancing with a local girl at the Maang Kaamatan celebration

These instances, by mobilising key identity markers, show how the possible relocation and more generally the problem of immigration are felt by the Kadazan as constituting not only a threat to their interests, but to their ‘way of life’ and ultimately to their very existence *qua* Kadazan. Kadazan identity, therefore, becomes embodied in a narrative of resistance against the forces of the Other – internal (the Malays and the government) and external (the immigrants) – by a people who can overcome it by holding tight to their traditional values, expressed in the ideology of the *kampung* I have already described: solidarity, cooperation, respect for people and for the environment, modesty. This conservative ideology is based on some of the same images of society described by Hall *et al.* (1978) for England: respectability, work, discipline, the family. Differently from England, however, this ideology does not contemplate an image of hierarchy or of the city, while it strongly upholds those of solidarity and of the village.

Differently from that of England, which is based on the idea of superiority of the English over all other nations, based on its imperial past (Hall *et al.*, 1978: 147), the image of the Kadazan is based on the perception of a state of inferiority, determined by being a relatively peripheral minority within a relatively peripheral country. The solution for the Kadazan, as referred to me by a KD leader, is that of ‘following the example of the Jews’, a relatively small population who have been able to reach great success thanks to their initiative and the emphasis on culture and learning.

To conclude, the contradictions inherent in the nation-building agenda and the propaganda supporting it, resulting in the attempted Malayisation of the *bumiputera* of Sabah and Sarawak and in the overt damaging of the interests of those not willing to become Malayised in Sabah, constitute the basis of the unwillingness of the Kadazan to imagine themselves as members of a national community beyond its aspect constituted by the sharing of common rights. Within this situation, then, cultural distinctiveness becomes strengthened and becomes the basis of an oppositional form of identity politics in which, ironically, the sense of being discriminated against or persecuted becomes an essential element of that same distinctiveness.

Being Sabahan: a common 'way of life'?

Hilter says he feels Sabahan first, then Kadazan, but not much Malaysian. 'Those Malaysians' he says 'do not respect our religion and try to make it disappear. Why is it that in Indonesia it is legal to marry a Muslim and remain Christian, but not in Malaysia?'

The primary image of society at the basis of Sabahan-ness is that of tolerance. This widespread connection is well expressed by an article published by the *Daily Express* (11/9/2006) within the fortnightly column 'Sabah's Architectural Heritage' by Richard Nelson Sokial. The sharing of a unique crossed-braced roof ornamentation in the Kota Belud district by three different ethnic groups, the Dusun Tindal, Bajau and Iranun, is considered by the young Kadazan architect to be an example of strong integration between different ethnic communities and as reflecting 'the spirit of mutual respect, harmony and goodwill that is a common aspect of all local communities in Sabah'. Further, he argues Sabahans represent 'the ideal model of racial integration for Malaysia'. This principle is well expressed by a contrast with other realities dealing with everyday experience: 'where else in Malaysia', Richard asks, 'can one see a Malay man having a drink with his Chinese or Kadazan counterpart in a Chinese coffee shop?'. Unfortunately, the author argues, 'certain negative elements are at play', brought in by those who 'endeavor to stamp their authority based on a narrow-minded perception of race'. These remarks are directed to some people within Sabah but, primarily, to the Other compared with Sabah, the Malay Peninsula. In the same article, the difference between Sabah and *Semenanjung* is thrown into relief through the telling of the author's personal experience of being the object of prejudices, including views of Sabahans as culturally inferior or even 'still living on the trees', and discrimination while a student in Kuala Lumpur. Moreover, Sabahan graduates would be 'pressured to feel guilty and ashamed for interacting so freely with other races', according to principles of seclusion that would be common not only to university but also to the working environment in the Peninsula. According to the author the situation in *Semenanjung*, which is in stark contrast with the picture presented in the national unity advertising campaigns broadcast on television, should be defined as one of 'restrained racial tolerance' rather than 'racial integration'.

This view of Sabah as ‘happy island’ of racial integration compared with the segregation of *Semenanjung* is a very common *topos* not only in the discourses of Kadazan like the author of the abovementioned article, but also of Sabahans of a different ethnic origin. That was the case when some Malay friends of mine, running a guesthouse in Kota Kinabalu, reacted with annoyance to the suggestions of a guest that they should mix as little as possible with Christian people as that was not ‘appropriate’ for them, and they commented with me that these ‘people from *Semenanjung*’, especially the Malays, not only cannot understand the openness and racial and religious integration of the people of Sabah, but also unfortunately, they try to impose their way of doing things on the people of Sabah.

The discourses of racial integration and of discrimination by the *Semenanjung* are just aspects of a more general idea of a ‘Sabahan way of life’, defined by characters that are uniquely Sabahan and that distinguish Sabahans at the same time from people of the Peninsula and from foreigners. This way of life is primarily determined by unique conditions of life that determine a certain type of life experience. These material conditions are many, but they mainly derive from living in a geographically and politically peripheral territory with a few densely populated urban and suburban areas and a vast sparsely populated hinterland, with a population divided between more than 30 ethnic groups and between two main world religions, Islam and Christianity, with an economy still primarily based on the extraction of natural resources, and with a much lower development of infrastructure than in the Peninsula.

The geographic, economic, ethnic, religious and social conditions of Sabah, as well as its history, are therefore the primary elements determining material conditions of life that are relatively similar within Sabah and different from those found outside. As expressed in a joke, circulated by e-mail among some of my friends, ‘you are a Sabahan if’, among other things, ‘have candles always ready at hand in the house’, a reference to the very erratic electricity supply, ‘own a *bakakuk*’, a home-made shotgun used to hunt wild animals, conjuring an image of rurality as well as of not having problems in ‘bending a few rules’, such as the fact that a licence be needed to own a gun. References to things being done in ‘Sabah style’, that is informal and relaxed yet obtaining the desired result are often heard, as are those made to ‘Sabah time’, a *masa gumi*, (M. ‘rubber time’) often found in Malaysia and Indonesia, which, as described by Postill (2006: 187), is a practice of which foreigners are warned by well-meaning locals, but, as is often the case, the warning is given with a

sense of pride in what is an element of Sabahan 'way of life', which the visitor cannot but accept.

Finally, the close proximity with two other countries, Indonesia and the Philippines, a proximity that is even more relevant if we consider that those two countries are much closer to Sabah than Peninsular Malaysia and that Manila is closer than Kuala Lumpur, coupled with the great numbers of immigrants from these countries present in the State, makes the situation of Sabah unique in the region and distinguishes it even from its neighbour Sarawak, which is similar on many counts.

All these characters qualify Sabah as a borderland, defined by Augelli (1980, cited in Kaplan, 1999: 37) as a 'zone of cultural overlap and political instability where the national identity and loyalties of the people often become blurred'. Kaplan (1999: 37) lists three main spatial identities, linked to different geographical scales, at work in borderlands: that based on the state controlling the area, that based on the nation with which local people mostly identify, and a borderland identity 'generated from the occupance and the symbolism of the borderland itself'. While the former two correspond to the national (Malaysian) and ethnic (Kadazan) identity, Kaplan gave a clue to the recognition of another essential level of collective identity, which I would define as sub-national (Sabahan).

Coming back to the issue with which the chapter began, the significant presence of immigrants and their constant influx, as well as the role they play in the local economic, political and social scene, has had a constant, although changing, impact on the material conditions of life of all Sabahans. The consciousness of the similarity in conditions of life, and the belief in the fact that there could and should be commonly shared solutions to the problems inherent to them, illegal immigration *in primis*, are what constitute and give substance to a sense of being Sabahan, which coexists alongside, and at times in conflict with, that of being Malaysian, members of a certain ethnic group or of a certain region or *kampung*. This sense of being Sabahan seems to be felt as strongly substantial, especially within the context of discourses dealing with problems of the State, as expressed by Bumiputera Tulin, who argued that 'Sabahans' and not *bumiputera* or Kadazan, being outnumbered by the immigrants 'are beginning to show signs of "extinction", like what happened to the aborigines in Tasmania' (*Daily Express*, 3/9/2006). On the other hand, however, the population of Sabah is highly heterogeneous in terms of ethnicity, religion, social and economic status, and this sub-national form of identification is sustained neither by the attachment to the

familiar and everyday of the *kampung* belonging, nor by the powerful symbols and discourses of ethnicity, religion or the nation.

Conclusion

The intensity of the reaction against the relocation of the squatters in Maang shows the extent to which the issue of illegal immigration is perceived by Kadazan villagers as a threat not only to their interests but to their very way of life. This perception has its source in the media discourse identifying the immigrants as the sources of all ills and equating their activities with crime. A common reaction to this threat among Kadazan individuals is to position themselves as Malaysian citizens and expect the government to defend their rights. The realisation that the government 'prefers non-citizens over citizens' (Sadiq, 2005), however, materialises as the ultimate source of marginalisation and lack of participation. These individuals therefore situate themselves as Malaysian citizens against the state but also as Kadazan, a marginalised and oppressed ethnic and religious minority, and as Sabahan, a population living in marginal borderland, left behind in the development promised by the nation-building propaganda, sharing common life experiences derived from this broken promise of development as well as from the struggle to be recognised as full members of the Malaysian nation. These reactions also define belonging through the contrast with three forms of Other: Kadazan as non-Malay, Sabahan as non-West Malaysian, Malaysian as non-foreigner.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

The effects that being part of a colonial and later post-colonial state have had on the Kadazan can hardly be over-emphasised. Like many other indigenous peoples of the Borneo interior and more generally of South-East Asia (Dentan, 1976), the Kadazan did not have precise ethnic categories in the pre-colonial period, and identified themselves as belonging to their village and to river-based groups defined by the sharing of dialect and *adat* customary laws. They also distinguished themselves from the Muslim coastal dwellers, with whom they had a long history of interaction. The village constituted their only political unit and the level at which the prescriptions and sanctions of *adat* were applied (chapter 2).

The development of the British-controlled colonial state of North Borneo brought fundamental changes which have had lasting consequences on the future of the Kadazan. The most important innovations were the establishment of formal education, the spread of Christianity and the building of infrastructures connecting different areas of the territory. The needs of the colonial administration also led to the collection of information about the inhabitants of North Borneo, which primarily took the form of reports, ethnographic accounts and censuses. As in the rest of what was to become Malaysia (King and Wilder, 2003), this classificatory effort determined the creation of ethnicity through the creation of clearly defined ethnic categories, which were broader than the units previously used by the indigenous population to classify themselves.

A part of the Kadazan elite internalised this classificatory approach and its power to provide a sense of belonging and common aim from their Western mission education and contact with the colonial administration and became active in the promotion of a sense of unity among previously divided indigenous groups. The formation of this sense of unity was based on the elaboration of a common culture, which came into being through a process of selective preservation, aiming at salvaging those elements of traditional culture that could be adjusted to the modernist and Christian values informing the worldview of this 'intelligentsia'. This process involved the objectification (Wagner, 1981; Winzeler, 1997a, 1997b) of these selected cultural traits and their ascription as defining features of the ethnic group that was being put into being. This process set the conditions for the Dusunic peoples to

imagine themselves as members of a group defined by this culture. The creation of a common culture was accompanied, as it is the case in classic cases of nationalism (see Gellner, 1983; Roff, 1969) by the idea of a common goal and the consciousness that the sense of unity formed among a larger group of people could constitute the basis for acquiring some form of political power. The Kadazan therefore emerged as both a community of imagination and a community of alignment.

The Kadazan experienced even more substantial changes as a result of the formation of Malaysia through the joining of the colony of North Borneo with Sarawak, Malaya and Singapore. While the Dusunic peoples had constituted a majority within North Borneo, they found themselves to be an ethnic and religious minority with little weight within a modern, multi-ethnic state. Immediately after formation, the Malaysian government embarked on a nation-building project aiming at reaching economic development and political stability, but also at generating a national culture and identity. The process of building a national culture involved the use by the state of what Postill considers to be 'foundational media forms', 'propaganda, writing (literacy), television and clock-and-calendar time' (2006: 3). The effective use of these media was achieved through the establishment of state control over the educational system and the broadcast media, which became the essential means of the propagation of the state ideology and of the official language, Malay and, in a more indirect way, of the official religion, Islam. The nation-building agenda also involved the sidelining of minority cultures, especially those of the indigenous peoples of Borneo, and the creation of conditions that effectively limited their development and mediation and the use of languages other than Malay. This project took the form of a direct attempt to assimilation to Malayness and closing of all Kadazan-language media outlets in the 1970s. The assimilationist tendencies softened in the 1980s, but the Kadazan nevertheless found themselves mostly unable to defend their culture and language against the hegemony of a state-promoted and, to a certain extent, already established national culture. While the Chinese and the Indian minorities were able to obtain some space in the media, the Kadazan and other non-Muslim indigenous groups were relegated to a position from which their voices cannot be heard at the national level, and they can only appear as exotic tourist attractions or repositories of colourful ethnic traditions that can enrich, within the limit of 'tolerable difference' (Rival, 1997) the national culture (chapter 3).

Differently from what Postill (2006) argued about Sarawak, however, the Kadazan of Penampang, as well as other Dusunic peoples (see Doolittle, 2005), do not seem to smoothly internalise the government propaganda, but rather in many cases assume an oppositional stance towards it, seeing it as being aimed at increasing the Federal control rather than at improving the material conditions of life of villagers. The same anti-government and anti-Malay attitude can be found in the way Kadazan villagers position themselves in relation to media products such as Malay TV dramas, a popular reality show, and newspaper articles (chapter 4). The same unwillingness to accept the government's nation-building can be found in the dismissal of the *Kaamatan* 'open house' organised by the Federal Government, perceived as an attempt to de-Kadazanise the celebration and to appropriate it as a Malaysian cultural event whose meaning is established by the government. This is particularly significant considering that the *Kaamatan* constitutes the most important 'celebration and assertion of Kadazan-ness' (Loh, 1992: 243), and 'the most important symbol' (Loh, 1992: 247-48), and that it has historically had a great significance as a site of struggle between the Kadazan and the Malaysian state (chapter 6).

Finally, the problem of illegal immigrants constitutes a very significant, possibly the most significant, cause of conflict between the Kadazan, and all inhabitants of Sabah, and the government. The fact that the massive presence, and continuous flow, of illegal immigrants in Sabah is widely believed, by academics as much as by Kadazan villagers, to be encouraged by the government as a means to alter the ethnic and electoral balance of the State against the Dusunic peoples cannot but be a source of great resentment on their part. In this case, the Kadazan feel not only treated as second-class citizens vis-à-vis other Malaysian citizens, but also in comparison to foreign illegal immigrants (chapter 7).

The attitude towards the state that I have observed and described can be understood as the reaction to the experience of being a second-class marginalised group. Following Rosaldo (2003), it can be attributed to the 'striv[ing] to be treated with what they define as respect' (2003: 1) and as a form of struggle over the definition of what belonging to the nation 'means[s] in practice' (2003: 3). So, while the Malaysian state asks the Kadazan to become assimilated in order to become full citizens, they make claims to full citizen rights, including rights to have their religion and way of life respected, their land kept safe, their voice heard, and to enjoy at the same time the other benefits of the development as other groups. In sum, these are

claims to the right to participate as full members in the nation, while, at the same time, to be able to do so without stopping to 'be who they are' (Rosaldo, 2003: 1).

These claims are made against a state which, thanks to the nation-building efforts of the government - but also to non-state nation making (Foster, 2002) - has come to correspond, as argued by Postill (2006: 192-196), to Anthony Smith's definition (1995: 56-57) of a nation as a 'named human population which shares myth and memories, a mass public culture, a designated homeland'. The Malaysian state, however, as already pointed out by Postill (2006: 196) does not provide 'equal rights and duties for all its members'. In this respect, while the Kadazan are classified within the category *bumiputera*, whose members enjoy special rights over the non-native Chinese and Indian, they are in fact second-class *bumiputera* (Loh, 1992; Sadiq, 2005). The second-class status of the Kadazan derives primarily, as demonstrated by Loh (1992) and expressed on various occasions by my informants, from their being Christian, a fact that makes their presence hard to reconcile with a national community - or at least *bumiputera* community - imagined as Muslim by the Malay ruling elite.

While religion is the central point of the marginalisation of the Kadazan, and other indigenous peoples of Borneo, it is not the only one. Other important aspects of marginality involve the lack of representation in the national seats of political, economic and cultural power, the limited amount to which they have enjoyed the benefits of economic development and modernisation, the fact that their voices cannot be heard at the national level. Moreover, they experience a further marginality as inhabitants of a State, Sabah, which itself has a marginal role within Malaysia, being primarily a resource-producing State with a low level of industrialisation, the lowest GDP of all Malaysian States and the lowest literacy rate (Leete, 2007).

The status of the Kadazan can therefore be considered as one of marginality, defined as a condition of limited participation dominated by the aspect of non-participation (Wenger, 1998: 166), within the institution of the Malaysian state. I attribute the limited development of a sense of belonging to the Malaysian nation among the Kadazan to the marginal position, and therefore limited participation in it. As argued by Wenger (1998: 169-172), institutional non-participation can lead to the developing of practices of non-participation, which, in turn, can be the basis for the constitution of identities. The identity derived from the sense of belonging to groups

different from the nation, such as the ethnic group and the *kampung*, can therefore, to a certain extent, be considered as an identity of non-participation in the nation.

The boundary between participation and non-participation, however, is blurred, as the Kadazan identify themselves and their practices as Kadazan, Malaysian and belonging to the *kampung* at different times under different circumstances. I have highlighted the, often implicit, positioning of individuals within different categories at different times (a concept already considered by Dentan, 1976 and Nagata, 1974) in various instances in this thesis. An example of this phenomenon is the implicit self-identification as Malaysian in relationship to news items dealing with foreign affairs or Malaysian international relations, as in the case of the Singapore bridge case, or in relation to some home affairs such as the Sipadan incident, but as a Christian minority in relation to the Danish cartoon events (chapter 4). Another instance is the way in which my informants categorised themselves as Kadazan in discussions about the *Kaamatan*, yet attributed its 'authentic spirit' to the celebrations taking place within a restricted community of practice (chapter 6). The most striking example is constituted by the way in which the Kadazan oppose the presence of illegal immigrants through a discourse of citizenship rights and a call to the law while at the same time protesting against the way in which the state uses the situation to destroy the ethnic and religious homogeneity of the 'Kadazan heartland' of Penampang and, more generally, to alter the demographic and political balance against the Kadazan and Christians (chapter 7).

Many of the articulations of belonging to collective categories also make use of dominant discourses and ideologies propagated by the state, as is the case in the identification with *kampung*, which is based not only on Kadazan tradition, but also on a hegemonic discourse about rurality widely circulating in the media (chapter 5).

Finally, Kadazan (and non-Kadazan) individuals identify themselves as Sabahan on certain occasions, as in relation to the issue of illegal immigration or when distinguishing themselves from the people of *Semenanjung*. The Sabahan identity is defined negatively in contrast to a Peninsular Other, but also positively as emerging from a 'borderland status' (Kaplan, 1999) as well as material conditions of life, problems, styles of inter-ethnic relations and from the sharing of a marginal status within Malaysia.

Moreover, the enduring of forms of identification alternative to the nation can be attributed to the ambiguity inherent to the Malaysian nation-building, which bases its political and economic actions on a well-defined modernist ideology, but does not

have a coherent strategy in regards to issues of culture and identity. The nation-building project has been ambiguously swinging between a pluralist model, based on the 'unity in diversity' principle, and a drive towards deeper integration, aiming at creating a more culturally homogeneous population, either through assimilation to the majority, the Malays, or through the creation of a hybrid culture mixing selected and decontextualised elements of the different ethnic groups (Nagata, 1979). This ambiguity can be attributed to the fact that, while aiming at forming a cohesive national culture, in continuity with the way in which the colonies that were to form Malaysia had been administrated, Malaysia was imagined and institutionalised as a multi-ethnic, 'plural' state.

The ambiguity between these different models of nation-building, all of which are and have been applied in different circumstances, can therefore be considered as another reason for the relative lack of success obtained by the Malaysian nation-builders in establishing national belonging as the primary form of identification for its citizens. More specifically, the influence of the 'plural model' within present-day Malaysian official institutions and discourses, as well as in the sphere of the media, economy and everyday life, continuously renews the role of ethnic-based distinctions as the primary sources of identity for individuals.

However, the identification as Kadazan, member of the *kampung* or Sabahan should not be simply considered as a form of resistance or a reaction to a marginal status determined by the configuration of power within the Malaysian state. I consider identity as ultimately deriving from lived experience, and therefore the sense of belonging to a group as arising from actual interaction and shared experiences leading to the formation of similarities or to the possibility to imagine their presence. From these premises, the sense of belonging to the *kampung*, the Kadazan, Sabah or Malaysia can be attributed to the similarity between the lived experiences of those identifying themselves as fellow members of such groups or to the plausibility of imagining fellow members as sharing common experiences. From this point of view, the closer to direct experience a form of identification is, the stronger can be predicted to be the sense of belonging and attachment to it. However, each of these collective forms of identification has a correspondence with some relevant experience of its members: personal knowledge and frequent interaction for the *kampung*, a common language, a similar way of life and marginal status for the Kadazan, similar material conditions of life, common problems and a common history for Sabah. Finally, while

the Malaysian nation-building can be considered to have failed in generating a strong sense of belonging to the nation, its success in creating national political and economic institutions, a public mass culture and educational system, a mediascape and a shared consumer culture has had a significant impact on the conditions of life of all Malaysian citizens. These conditions of life generate a limited sense of common belonging but also, more importantly, provide the context and frame of reference within which the experience of marginality crystallises into different forms of identification.

The contribution to knowledge offered by this thesis

This thesis provides a contribution to the understanding of the effects of being part of the Malaysian state on the Kadazan of Sabah. By doing so, it partially fills a gap in the ethnographic knowledge about the Dusunic peoples, which has generally paid limited attention to the importance of the state presence. The findings I have proposed here also add empirical knowledge about the relationship between nation-building processes and the way of life of the Kadazan. This knowledge can possibly be relevant to broader contexts, including other peoples of Malaysia and, to a certain extent indigenous peoples in other parts of South-East Asia and the rest of the world. This empirical knowledge can give insights useful to the understanding of nation-building processes worldwide, showing how their effects can be various, unpredictable, reversible and often different from those initially planned by the nation builders.

My enquiry into the relationship between the state and its nation-building efforts and the indigenous people has mainly focused on one aspect, the formation of and everyday positioning in collective forms of identification. This is an aspect that, despite its importance, I feel has often been neglected in studies of nation-building. The findings of this research also provide empirical knowledge that should prove useful in the understanding of the dynamics of formation and situational use of collective forms of identification. These empirical insights would hopefully provide a small contribution to the reaching of a deeper understanding of identity and to the elaboration of theorisation of it that may be more systematic than the ones presently available.

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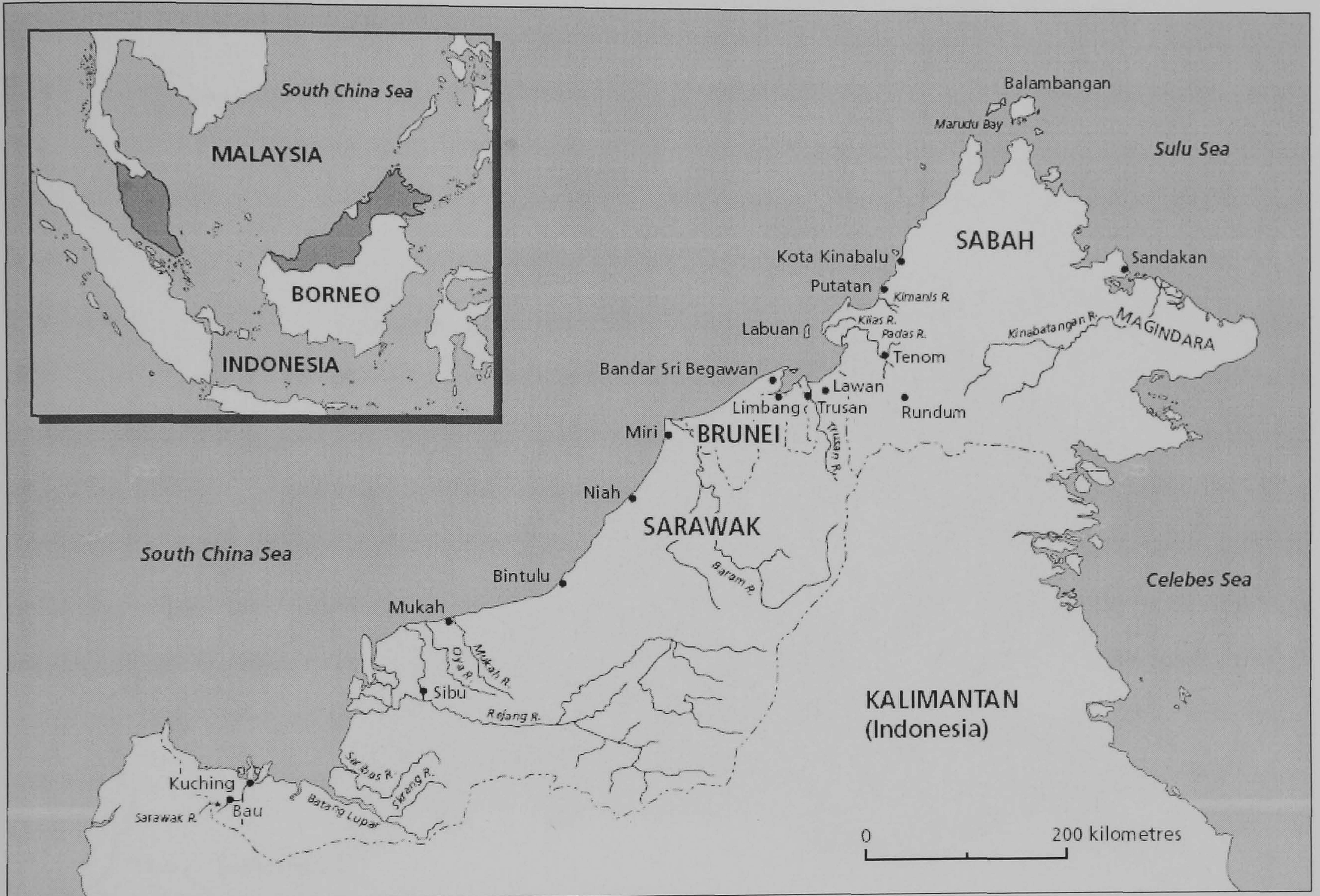
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Appendix 1: Maps



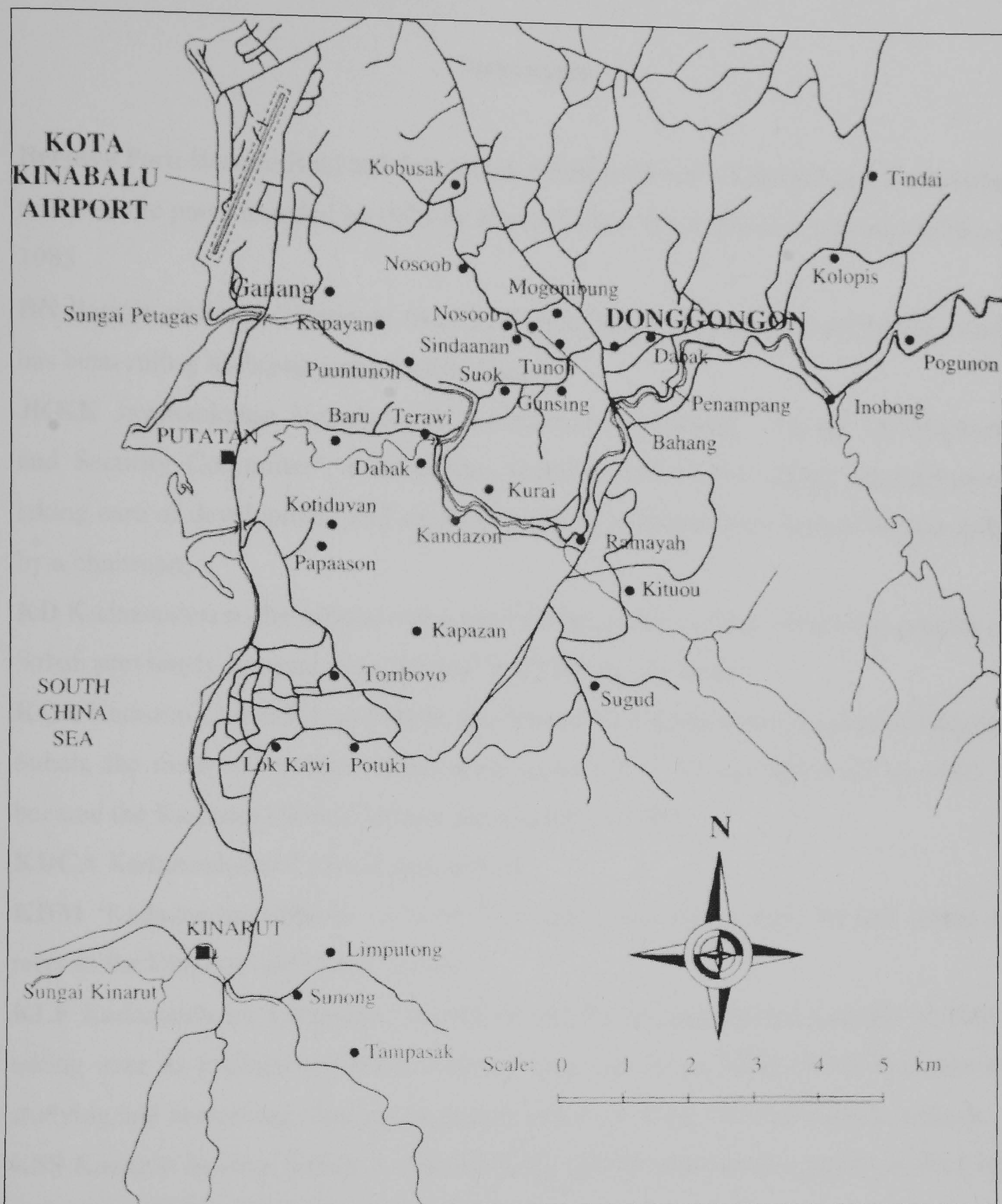
Map 1 The location of Malaysia within South-East Asia and that of Sabah and Sarawak (East Malaysia) within Malaysia and Borneo

Source: Postill (2006: 2)



Map 2 Sabah with its administrative districts.

Source: Leete (2007: 1)



Map 3 The Penampang plains; note the fieldwork setting, Kituau (spelt as Kituou) near the centre of the map and Kota Kinabalu's southernmost part at the top left corner. Source: Phelan (2001: 36).

Appendix 2: Glossary

Acronyms

Berjaya Parti Bersatu Rakyat Jelata Sabah ('Sabah People's United Front') a Sabahan multi-ethnic party founded in 1975 by Harris Salleh; it ruled Sabah between 1976 and 1985

BN Barisan nasional ('National front') the coalition of parties, led by UMNO, which has been ruling Malaysia since its formation

JKKK Jawatankuasa Kemajuan & Keselamatan Kampung, 'Village Development and Security Committee', a committee forming part of the village administration taking care of development and security issues; it is formed by residents and presided by a chairman

KD Kadazandusun, the official name used for the portion of the indigenous peoples of Sabah previously referred to as 'Dusun' and later as 'Kadazan'

KCA Kadazan Cultural Association, also known as Sinompuuvan Koubasan Kadazan Sabah, the main KD cultural association formed in 1964 and registered in 1966; it became the Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association in 1989

KDCA Kadazandusun Cultural Association

KDM 'KadazandusunMurut', a label first used in the press since the late 1990s to refer to the Dusunic and Murut peoples

KLF Kadazandusun Language Foundation (KLF), an organisation founded in 1995, taking over its predecessor Kadazandusun language Centre (KLC), with the aims of studying and preserving Dusunic languages and to promote their teaching in schools

KSS Kadazan Society Sabah, a cultural and political association created on the 27th of January 2007

PAS Parti Islam Se-Malaysia ('Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party'), the name taken in the 1970s by an Islamist party active during colonial times in Malaya and contesting in the general election of 1955 as *Pan-Malayan Islamic Party* (PMIP). It is one of the main opposition parties of Malaysia and is particularly strong in the Peninsular States of Kelantan and Terengganu

PBS Parti Bersatu Sabah ('Sabah United party'), a multi-ethnic Sabahan party, founded by Joseph Pairin Kitingan in 1985, its electoral basis and leadership mostly consists of Kadazandusun

RTM Radio Televisyen Malaysia, the Malaysian public radio and television broadcast company

SAMORA Sabah Momogun Rungus Association (Persatuan Momogun Rungus Sabah), an association promoting the culture and interests of the Rungus Dusun

SKKS Sinompuuvan Koubasan Kadazan Sabah, the Kadazan name of KCA (see above)

UMNO United Malays National Organisation, the main Malay Malaysian party and main component of the BN ruling coalition

UMS Universiti Malaysia Sabah, the only national public university present in the State, opened in 1994 in Kota Kinabalu

UNKO United National Kadazan Organisation, a Sabahan party founded by Donald Stephens and other Kadazan leaders in 1961

UPKO United Pasok Momogun Kadazan Organisation, one of the early parties of Sabah, constituted by the merger between Stephens' UNKO (see) and Pertubuhan Pasok Momogun Bersatu (United Pasok Momogun Organisation), formed by G. S. Sundang. It is also the acronym for United Pasokmomogun Kadazandusun Murut Organisation, a present-day Sabahan party founded after 1994 Sabah State elections by Bernard Dompok

USDA United Sabah Dusun Association, formed in 1967 by the advocates of the label Dusun as a reaction to the establishment of the label Kadazan through the Society of Kadazan

USNO United Sabah National Organisation, one of the early parties of Sabah, founded by Tun Mustapha, it represented the Muslim indigenous population

Terms

Adat term used in the Malay world to refer to the traditional customary laws of a group

Agong short form of 'Yang di-Pertuan Agong', the Malay term used to refer to the elected Head of State of the Malaysian Federation, literally it means 'He who is made Lord', but it can also be translated as 'King'

Ahasu (alasu) ‘hot’ in Kadazan, a term used to refer to the state of heat in the spiritual world caused by the breach of **adat** rules

Angpau a Chinese term used to refer to a small gif of cash, usually given in a red envelope, traditionally for Chinese New Year. The term has been adopted by the Kadazan of Penampang

Aramaiti (alamaiti) a term deriving from the Austronesian root **ramai** (‘many’), used in Kadazan, and more generally in Sabah, to refer to a get-together of people which involves eating together, merry-making and often the consumption of alcohol

Bakakuk a Sabahan term used to refer to a home-made shotgun used to hunt

Bambaazon (Bambarayon) the Kadazandusun spirit of rice, responsible for the growth of the crops

Bambangan a sour fruit belonging to the mango family used in various Kadazandusun recipes

Bangsa a Malay term (**bansa** in Kadazan) through which the concept of ‘ethnic group’ is usually expressed in Malaysia; it can be translated in different contexts as ‘race’, ‘ethnic group’, or ‘nation’

Batik a wax-resist dyeing technique used on a textile, or any garment decorated with such a technique and patterns (literally ‘baju batik’); batik-decorated shirts constitute a common form of formal dress in Malaysia, particularly for the Malays

Bilek (Bilek-family) an Iban term meaning the ‘room’ or ‘apartment’ (Malay ‘bilik’) of a longhouse; the term was used by Derek Freeman and later social anthropologists like to refer to the basic dwelling and economic unit of the longhouse, the household

Bobohizan (Bobolian) a Kadazandusun traditional religious specialist, most often female

Bumiputera, ‘son of the soil’, the legal category comprising all native peoples of Malaysia, with the notable exception of the *Orang Asli*, the pre-Malay indigenous peoples of the Malay Peninsula

Dewan Raya a public building found in all Malaysian villages, used for any type of village-level meeting or celebration as well as for receiving officials

Dunia Moden ‘modern world’ in Malay

Gawai Dayak the indigenous peoples’ festival (the tem literally means something like ‘Dayak Festival’), and the corresponding public holiday, celebrated in Sarawak every 1st of June, it can be considered Sarawak’s equivalent to Sabah’s **Pesta**

Kaamatan

Gotong-royong a form of collective labour freely offered by participants for a specific task

Hinava a traditional Kadazan dish consisting of raw fish marinated in lemon juice and flavoured with chillies and **bambangan** seeds

Hisad (Silad) a type of palm (*Licula* sp.) whose leaves are dried and made into bundles used by **bobohizan** during rituals and worn by men as decoration while dancing **sumazau**

Huguan Siou a Kadazan term variously translated as 'brave leader' or 'paramount chief', traditionally referring, according to Luping (1994: 33), to a 'descent group chief', guiding war and head-hunting raids; in modern times the title was conferred upon Donald Stephens in 1964 and Joseph Pairin Kitingan in 1984

Joget a very popular Malay folk dance, performed at weddings and other social events

Kaamatan (Pesta Kaamatan) the Kadazandusun Harvest Festival and corresponding public holiday, celebrated every 30th and 31st of May in Sabah

Kampung Malay and Kadazan word for village

Kedai Kopi Malay term for 'coffee shop', usually selling food as well as beverages

Kedai Runcit Malay term for 'grocery shop'

Ketua Kampung 'village headman', also informally referred to as **orang tua** ('old man')

Lihing (ihing) traditional Kadazan rice wine

Malu a Malay term which can be translated as 'shy', 'modest', 'reluctant' or 'ashamed'

Masih 'still' in Malay; implying a sense of traditional and backwards

Masa Gumi, 'rubber time', an expression used to refer to a very flexible concept of time present in the Malay world

Magavau a ceremony officiated by the **bobohizan** to recover grains of rice that might have been lost during the harvest or left in the field for some reason, carrying the

Bambaazon with them and therefore causing a scarcity of future crops

Mitatabang 'working together', a Dusunic term referring to the practice of sharing labour between individuals belonging to different families, especially at particular times such as harvest

Moginakan a traditional ritual of the Dusunic peoples held on occasion of particularly good harvests, reconstruction of a house, delivery of a baby or recovery

from illness; it consisted of a feast lasting up to three days in which great amounts of food and alcohol were consumed and it involved great expenses for the family holding it

Monogit, also referred to as **makan sogit** ('the eating of the sogit'), a traditional Dusunic ritual, usually officiated by a **bobohizan**, carried out to cool the heat (**ahasu**) produced by a breach of adat; it involved the offering of an animal (its type being determined by the gravity of the offence) from the offending to the offended party

Omong Kosong 'empty talk' in Malay

Orang Putih 'white man' in Malay, term used to refer to the Westerners

Pinang the Malay and Kadazan word for betel nut

Pribumi a term used in Indonesia to refer to the whole of the members of indigenous groups; the term was adopted in Sabah by the Berjaya government and, after strong opposition by the representatives of Dusunic peoples, its use was terminated by the PBS government when it came to power

Pusas a Kadazan term used to refer to small portions of food eaten while drinking alcoholic beverages

Rakyat 'people' in Malay

Rinait sacred verses traditionally used by ritual specialists of various Dusunic groups

Rumah Terbuka 'open house', a Malaysian custom, supported and institutionalised by the Ministry of National Unity, according to which prominent (and non) members of an ethnic and religious group celebrating a holiday open their house to those who wish to participate, offering them food and hospitality

Semenanjung the Malay name for Peninsular Malaysia, also referred to as West Malaysia

Senang 'easy' or 'happy' in Malay

Sepuluh-Tiga literally 'ten-three' in Malay, the expression is used to refer to the custom of selling three cans of beer (a 'set') for ten ringgit, a custom common in various Sabahan coffee-shops and pubs thanks to the availability of beer smuggled from the duty-free island of Labuan or from the Philippines

Sigah a colourful Kadazan headgear worn with the black and gold traditional dress

Sogit 'cool' in Kadazan, a term used to refer to a state of peace in the spiritual realm, the opposite of **ahasu**; it can be restored through the **monogit** ritual

Sompoton a form of mouth-organ constituted by a dried gourd and eight bamboo pipes; it is one of the most characteristic instruments of the Dusunic peoples

Suku a term used by the indigenous peoples of Sabah to refer to sub-groups (for example the Kadazan of Penampang) of ethnic groups (such as the Dusunic peoples or Kadazandusun), characterised by their own dialect and **adat**

Sumazau traditional Kadazan dance

Tabang a group whose members regularly provide free labour (practice **mitatabang**) to each other at particular times when it is most needed

Talak a traditional Kadazan distilled liqueur made from rice.

Tamu a periodic market, held either weekly or more rarely, typical of Sabah

Tangkob a traditional rice container used by the Dusunic peoples

Tapai a Kadazandusun alcoholic drink made from fermented rice

Tuahi a bamboo nose flute played to express grief after death in the Penampang area