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UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY THROUGH THE STUDY OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

By

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ABSTRACT

UNDERSTANDING INDIGENOUS IDENTITY THROUGH THE STUDY OF CULTURAL TOURISM IN SABAH, MALAYSIA

By

Flory Ann Mansor Gingging

In this thesis I look at cultural tourism in Sabah, Malaysia and use it as a tool to explore issues of indigenous identity in the state. In particular, I examine ways in which the effects of colonization as well as the outside world's stereotypical images of Borneo have shaped the manner in which indigenous peoples are portrayed—and in turn portray themselves—to the visiting public. In addition, I explore how politics and commerce shape decisions about the way that cultural tourism (and the industry in general) is operated in the state.

This thesis is based in part on ethnographic fieldwork that I conducted during the summer of 2002 at Sabah Museum and Monsopiad Cultural Village, located in Kota Kinabalu and Kiau, Penampang, respectively. As well as doing interviews with employees of both outfits, I utilized the archival resources at the Museum.

for my family

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I cannot forget the kindness of my friends at Sabah Museum and Monsopiad Cultural Village, who so willingly accommodated my presence and needs. Special thank yous go to Encik Sintiong Gelet, co-deputy director of the Museum; Ms. Stella Moo-Tan, head of the Antiquity and History Division; and Encik Julinis, musician at the Heritage Village.

Finally, and most importantly, I want to express my gratitude to my family—my parents, Mansor and Amy Gingging, and my brother and sister-in-law, Wendell Gingging and Trixie Kinajil—who love and support me unconditionally.

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A Legend of the Beginning of the World

At first there was a great stone in the middle of the sea. At that time there was no earth, only water. The rock was large, and it opened its mouth, and out of it came a man and a woman. The man and the woman looked around and there was only water. The man said to the man, "How can we walk, for there is no land?" They descended from the rock and tried to walk on the surface of the water, and found that they could. They returned to the rock and sat down to think; for a long time they stopped there; then again they walked upon the water, and at length they arrived at the house of Bisagit (the spirit of small-pox), for Bisagit had made land, though it was very far away. Now the man and his wife were Kinharingan and Munsumundok. They spoke to Bisagit and asked for some of his earth, and he gave it to them. So, going home, they pounded up the rock and mixed Bisagit's earth with it, and it became land. Then Kinharingan made the Dusuns and Munsumundok made the sky. Afterwards Kinharingan and Munsumundok made the sun, as it was not good for men to walk about without light. Then said Munsumundok, "There is no light at night, let us make the moon," and they made the moon, and the seven stars, the Spring-trap and the Kukurian (the constellations). Kinharingan and Munsumundok had one son and one daughter. Now Kinharingan's people wept because there was no food. So Kinharingan and Munsumundok killed their girl child, and cut it up, and from the different portions of its body grew all things good to eat: its head gave rise to the coconut and you can trace its eyes and nose on the coconut till this day; from its arm-bones arose sugar-cane; its fingers became bananas, and its blood padi. All the animals also arose from the pieces of the child. When Kinharingan had made everything, he said, "Who is able to cast off his skin? If anyone can do so, he shall not die." The snake alone heard, and said, "I can." And for this reason, till the present day, the snake does not die unless killed by a man. (The Dusuns did not hear, or they would also have thrown off their skins, and there would have been no death.) Kinharingan washed the Dusuns in the river, placing them in a basket; one man, however, fell out of the basket, and floating away downstream, stopped near the coast. This man gave rise to the Bajaus, who still live near the sea and are clever at using boats. When Kinharingan had washed the Dusuns in the river he performed a religious ceremony over them in his house, but one man left the house before Kinharingan had done so, and went off into the jungle to search for something, and when he came back he could not enter the house again, for he had become a monkey. This man is the father of all the monkeys.

~Told by the headman of Timpalang Village near Tuaran and recorded by IVOR H. N. EVANS in *Studies in Religion, Folk-Lore & Custom in British North Borneo & the Malay Peninsula* (London: Frank Cass and Company Limited, 1923). This selection taken from the 1970 impression, 46-47.

Introduction

Cultures have stories to tell.

Tourism, and cultural tourism in particular, provides an avenue for indigenous people like the Dusun to tell their stories—to represent their culture to visitors. Just as importantly, however, because tourism necessarily involves the interaction between people from different cultures and traditions, the resulting exchange that this meeting yields amplifies and can thus inform us of the ways in which these stories are told, and what influences their telling.

In this thesis, with cultural tourism as a context, I argue that the narratives of the indigenous groups in Sabah, Malaysia have been colored by the marginal space that they have occupied and continue to occupy within international and national scopes. Specifically, I suggest that their colonial past, as well as their

status as an ethnic minority community within Malaysia, have contributed to this circumstance.

Robert Stebbins defines cultural tourism as "a genre of special interest tourism based on the search for and participation in new and deep cultural experiences, whether aesthetic, intellectual, emotional, or psychological."[1] According to this definition, cultural tourism can include the act of visiting or attending another culture's museums, galleries, historical sites, and artistic performances.

Although there is at least one scholar who has posited that Borneo is rich in only one thing—her green jungle—and that during the cultural evolution of India and Japan, the island was bypassed for more interesting places like Cambodia, Vietnam, and Java, resulting in its being a "backwater in cultural humanization,"[2] and although alternative forms of tourism such as eco-tourism seem to be more lucrative, cultural tourism in Sabah has carved a niche for itself. There *are* places of cultural interest in the state; two examples are Sabah Museum and Monsopiad Cultural Village, where, during the summer of 2002, I conducted research.

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[1] Robert Stebbins, "Cultural Tourism as Serious Leisure," *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 23 (October 1996), 948.

[2] See page 58-9.

Although the Museum and Village are no doubt important places for cultural learning, through my study, I have recognized that the term cultural tourism is more meaningful than the definition that Stebbins provides. Stebbins' definition, in my opinion, leaves out the most important element—the people that are presented and represented in the museums, in the art galleries, in the historic sites, in the artistic performances.

Through my study, I have realized that cultural tourism provides a window through which I can study the identity of indigenous peoples in Sabah. By looking at how cultural tourism is conducted in the state, their own notions—and just as importantly, the notions that they are compelled to adopt— about their place within Malaysia and the larger world are illuminated.

In the first chapter I look at how indigenous people use headhunting as one element of culture that they use to assert their identity. They understand that it is a practice outsiders or tourists may find gruesome and barbaric, but they also know that it is a part of their history that clearly distinguishes them from most other cultures.

In the second chapter, I look at the plight of the local tourist, the person who sometimes feels alienated because many of the exhibits he or she sees, especially in a museum setting, caters mainly to the stereotypical images that a Westerner has of the host cultures.

In the third chapter, I examine the debate over whether or not the commercialization of cultural products leads to adverse effects on host cultures. Within the context of the handicraft industry in Sabah, I argue that the line that seems to divide touristic culture and a peoples' culture perhaps is at best ambiguous, if not altogether absent.

Finally, the last chapter looks at the relationship between eco-tourism and cultural tourism in the state, as well as the way in which politics inevitably influences the portrayal of local cultures.

The reader will notice that the economic dimension of tourism is not explicitly addressed in this thesis. While I understand that this component is a significant one and that many governments, Sabah's included, view tourism as having an important role in their financial well-being,[3] in this work, I have chosen rather to focus on other relationships that I believe are just as considerable, specifically the one between the management of the tourism industry and issues of politics, as well as of cultural and indigenous identity.

In order for the reader to have a better context of this study, the following section provides a brief introduction to Malaysia, with emphasis on the state of Sabah.

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[3] See statement by Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, Sabah's Minister of Tourism, on page 70. Chapter 3 also discusses to some extent a related topic: the commercialization of cultural products such as handicrafts.

Malaysia: A Brief Introduction

The Southeast Asian nation of Malaysia consists of two parts: West Malaysia on the Malay Peninsula and East Malaysia on the island of Borneo. The Malay Peninsula, the southernmost part of mainland Southeast Asia, extends 1120 kilometers (700 miles) and is bordered on the north by Thailand, on the east by the South China Sea, on the south by Singapore (separated by the narrow Johore Strait), and on the west by the Strait of Malacca and the Andaman Sea. To the north of East Malaysia are the South China and the Sulu Seas, to its east the Celebes Sea, and to its south and west Kalimantan or Indonesian Borneo. On the upper Bornean west coast lies the nation of Brunei Darussalam.

West Malaysia holds 11 of the country's 13 states: Perlis, Kedah, Pulau Pinang (also known as Penang), Perak, Kelantan, Terengganu, Pahang, Selangor, Negeri Sembilan, Melaka, and Johor, as well as two federal territories, Wilayah Persekutuan, which is coextensive with the nation's capital, Kuala Lumpur; and Putrajaya, the new administrative center of the federal government. East Malaysia is separated from Malaysia by about 640 kilometeres (about 400 miles) of the South China Sea and includes the states of Sabah and Sarawak. The federal territory of Labuan is located off the northwest coast of Sabah.

Malaysia's population is diverse. Its population can be classified into four main categories: the Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples, most of

whom live in Sabah and Sarawak. The main indigenous groups in Sabah are the KadazanDusun, the Bajau, and the Murut. In Sarawak, they are the Iban and the Bidayuh. There are indigenous peoples in West Malaysia, too—the Orang Asli—but they are a minority of less than 1%.[4] According to the 2000 Census, the total population of Malaysia is 23.27 million, of which about 94% are Malaysian citizens. Of the total Malaysian citizens, *bumiputera*[5] and Malays make up 65%, Chinese 26%, and Indians about 7%.[6]

The country's population is distributed unevenly. Although West Malaysia occupies only 31% of the country's area, it has more than 80% of its people. Of the total population, most of which is concentrated on the west coast, Malays and people of indigenous descent comprise about one half of the population, Chinese one third, and Indians and Pakistanis one tenth.[7] In

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[4] Felix Gagliano, "Malaysia," *The Encyclopedia Americana: International Edition* (Danbury, CT: Grolier), vol. 18, 1999, 160-1.

[5] This term refers to "sons of the soil"—the Malays and other indigenous peoples of Malaysia.

[6] "Press Statement: Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics Report, Population and Housing Census 2000," http://www.statistics.gov.my/English/pressdemo.htm, accessed 4 January 2003. The Population and Housing Census 2000 is the fourth Census implemented since the formation of Malaysia. The previous censuses were conducted in 1970, 1980, and 1991. This press statement was released by the government on 6 November 2001.

[7] "Malaysia." http://encyclopedia.com/html/section/malaysia_landandpeople.asp, accessed 4 January 2003.

Sarawak, the predominant ethnic group according to the 2000 Census are the Ibans, and in Sabah, the KadazanDusun.[8]

The multiethnic nature of Malaysian society is salient in virtually every facet of life. The following description of the port city of Penang gives us a picture of its multi-ethnicity in both religious and social settings:

> Nowhere else, it seems, has the very human trait of dividing up a common humanity been carried out with such single-mindedness. This is particularly evident in places of worship. There are not only mosques, but the mosques serving congregations from the different Muslim regions of the Malay archipelago and the Indian subcontinent. Hindu and Buddhist temples and clan halls attest to the bewildering diversity of clans and regional affiliations within a community that is often viewed, by outsiders, as homogenous. Food stalls and restaurants, moreover, provide a kind of religious and cultural cafeteria where different dietary restrictions and preferences are carefully observed.[9]

The images one sees in the quotation above is one of many that illustrates the heterogeneous composition of the Malaysian population. The nation was, after all, created essentially out of what Craig Lockard terms "a marriage of convenience" when British leaders suggested that Singapore, Sabah, and Sarawak, join the Malaysian Federation (this is the federation that had obtained its independence from the British in 1957 and had unified the territories in West

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[8] http://www.statistics.gov.my/English/pressdemo.htm.

[9] Harold Seekins, "Historical Setting," in *Malaysia: A Country Study*, ed. Frederica M. Bunge (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1984), 40.

Malaysia) as a way of terminating their now-burdensome colonial rule over the those regions.

The multi-ethnicity that typifies Malaysia as a whole is also true of the indigenous communities of Sabah. They make up 60% of the estimated population of 2.6 million. They comprise more than 30 ethnic groups and speak over 50 languages and 80 dialects.[10] The Dusunic (of which the Dusuns and Kadazans are part), Murutic, and Paitanic groups are the largest of the ethnic groups, most of them residing in rural areas. The Dusunic family, the most dominant group, lives mainly in the western, northern, and central portions of Sabah.[11]

As well as being a multi-cultural nation, Malaysia is multi-religious. Religion in Malaysia is highly correlated with ethnicity. Nearly every Malay is Muslim, and Islam is the national and most widely professed religion; over 60% of the Malaysian population is Muslim. The majority of Chinese and Indians are Buddhists and Hindus, respectively. In Sabah and Sarawak, Christianity and tribal religions are also practiced.[12]

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[10] Felix Tongkul, *Traditional Systems of Indigenous Peoples of Sabah, Malaysia: Wisdom Accumulated Through Generations* (Penampang, Sabah: PACOS [Partners for Community Organization, Sabah], 2000), 6.

[11] Ibid.

[12] http://www.statistics.gov.my/English/pressdemo.htm.

Orang Boentoet

I made enquiries in the village, and found a strong general belief in the existence of people with tails in a country only a few days' journey from Long Puti. Such definite statements were made to me on the subject that I could hardly resist the temptation to penetrate myself into the stronghold of my ancestral representatives. Tjiropon, an old and faithful servant of the Sultan, assured me, in the presence of his Highness and of several Pangerans, that he had himself some years ago seen the people in Passir. He called them "Orang-Boentoet"—literally, tail people. The chief of the tribe, he said, presented a very remarkable appearance, having white hair and white eyes—a description which exactly agreed with one I had received some time previously from a young Boegis, when traveling by steamer to Samarinda from Paré Paré in Celebes. As to the all-important item of the tail, Tjiropon declared with a grave face that the caudal appendage of these people was from two to four inches long; and that in their homes they had little holes cut or dug in the floor on purpose to receive the tail, so that they might sit down in comfort. This ludicrous anti-climax to the narrative of the trusty Tjiropon almost induced me to discredit the whole story. At any rate, I thought, the Orang Boentoet must be in very high state of development—rather, perhaps, in the last stages of retrogression—if the extremely sensitive prehensile tail of the spider-monkey had lost its elasticity in these people as to incommodate its wearer to such a degree.

The Sultan, however, was highly impressed with the truth of Tjiropon's story. He had often heard that there were among his neighbours, if not among his own subjects, a tribe with tails; but he had hitherto discredited the rumours. "Now," he said, "I do believe there are such people, because Tjiropon has told us. I have known him for twenty years, and he dare not tell a lie in my face, in presence of us all."

~CARL BOCK, *The Headhunters of Borneo: A Narrative of Travel up the Mahakkam and down the Barito; Also, Journeyings in Sumatra* (London: Sampson and Low, 1881). Reprinted with an introduction by R. H. W. Reece (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1985). This excerpt taken from the second edition, 144-45.

Chapter 1

Of *Sagaii* (Headhunters) and Cultural Identity in Sabah

I spent much of my growing-up years in Tamparuli, a small, sleepy town about 45 minutes from the capital city of Sabah, Kota Kinabalu. A river divides the town proper and the compound on which my family and I lived, so our sojourns to *tamu* (weekly market), the library, or the beauty salons required the use of one of two bridges. The first was a suspension bridge for pedestrians (although in the 1970s when it was brand-new and hardy, a Land Rover was photographed parked proudly on its wooden planks) and the other, a concrete structure for automobiles but also used by those on foot. Of the two, my friends and I considered the latter to have the more interesting history. It is said that during the construction of the cement bridge, human beings were hunted and their severed heads placed within its foundations. The builders apparently

believed that the spirits of the heads would keep the bridge strong and guard it from calamities.

As children, my friends and I loved to hear tales about *sagaii* (headhunters) and took special pride in knowing that our very own Tamparuli bridge was part of the local *sagaii* lore. But as we grew older, our hushed, frightened silences were no longer consorts to stories of headhunters. We knew that they no longer existed—modern technology had replaced what people once believed human heads could do. The fear factor was gone.

When we were in our mid-teens, we began to become aware of what it meant to be Dusun, to be natives of Sabah. We—or at least, I—started to gain more appreciation for our unique culture, our unique home. It is not easy to pinpoint the factors for this blooming maturity (in cultural matters, at least). Perhaps we finally began to take notice of the tourists who stopped in our town just to walk on the famous Jambatan Tamparuli,[13] the bridge that was the inspiration for a popular song titled "Jambatan Tamparuli" in the late 1970s. Maybe it was because around this time, a Kadazan lawyer named Joseph Pairin Kitingan formed Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) or the Sabah United Party, an opposition party that was largely made up of and supported by indigenous Sabahans. He led his party to ultimately win the Sabah general elections of

[13] Literally Tamparuli Bridge but understood to refer to the suspension bridge.

1985—a big victory for ethnic Sabahans who, for as long as their state had been a part of Malaysia, had never had a non-Muslim Kadazan leader.[14] So, even without a full understanding of the political happenings in Sabah, we comprehended enough to know that someone of *our* kind was finally in power. Whatever the reason, it was now important to us to exert our Sabahan identity.

Perhaps we took our cue from what the tourist shops were selling or what literature that promoted Sabah was saying—I do not recall—but a symbol of cultural identity that many of us embraced was headhunting. When deciding on which postcards to send to my pen friends overseas, I remember choosing the ones with images of skulls over those with pictures of idyllic paddy fields or majestic Mount Kinabalu, the tallest peak in Southeast Asia. I coveted T-shirts that said "I lost my head in Borneo."

Additionally, we began to align ourselves more with being Borneans, rather than Malaysians. For us, Borneo not only suggested headhunting (headhunting is practiced in other parts of the island, not just Sabah) but also a universal mystery, purity, a sense of the unadulterated, and as I now recall, that's how we wanted to outside world to see us.

It was not until recently that I began to question and ponder this particular episode of my adolescence. I did not think too deeply then why I felt

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[14] Pairin Kitingan held the post of Chief Minister of Sabah for nine years, between April 1985 and March 1994.

an odd closeness to headhunting, a macabre, pagan practice of years past. Nor did I spend hours pondering the reasons behind the tourism industry's decision to use images of skulls and tongue-in-cheek references to losing one's head in Borneo. I realize now that my friends and I were looking for something that could represent our Kadazan identity, and the morbid practice of headhunting seemed to fit to bill perfectly. It had the capacity to be at once attractive and repulsive. We had found just the thing to symbolize our most wonderful, intriguing culture.

Let us revisit the headhunting anecdote with which I started this paper. Although I agree with historian Graham Saunders that stereotypical images of Borneo have been exploited by both Borneans and outside parties,[15] I believe one must understand that the people of Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, and Kalimantan,[16] while recognizing the implications of being further seen by the outside—the moneyed, the White, the "civilized"—world as being a culture that is behind all others, have deliberately and consciously identified headhunting (or other images that contribute to their "savagery") as one tool through which they can assert their uniqueness. In short, they have embraced their "otherness." This

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[15] Graham Saunders, "Early Travelers in Borneo," in *Tourism in South-East Asia*, eds. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King, and Michael J. G. Parnwell (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 271.

[16] As well as the Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak, the Sultanate of Brunei and Indonesian Borneo or Kalimantan make up the island of Borneo.

desire among them to assign to headhunting such an important responsibility can be seen as an example of what Michael Herzfeld labels "cultural intimacy." Herzfeld defines cultural intimacy as "the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered as a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with the assurance of common sociality."[16] In other words, although my childhood friends and I recognized that headhunting had the potential of being seen by the Outside as grisly and primitive, we accepted and saw it as a part of the history and culture that we as Dusuns shared.

In the following section, I will examine some historical examples of cultural intimacy and how it relates to the tourist syndrome, which, in my opinion, is essentially one that is characterized by a chasm between the observer, the tourist, and the observed, members of the host community. (This could translate into such typical tourist behavior as trying to capture everything on camera so that he or she has something to show his or her friends at home.)

Saunders suggests that many of the images—headhunters, orangutans, longhouses—now associated with the island of Borneo, the island on which Sabah is situated, have, in part, been created from the impact of its early visitors,

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[16] Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3.

particularly those from Europe.[17] These early visitors came to Borneo in various capacities—some were diplomats, others were business people, still others were explorers—and their contacts with the people of Borneo contributed to European knowledge about the island. Additionally, these encounters helped to create an image of Borneo in the European mind. According to Saunders, however, those who contributed most in this respect were those travelers who journeyed to the island for their own interest and pleasure and then wrote about their experiences afterwards.[18]

The first Englishman to write about his travels in Borneo was Daniel Beeckman, who went to Banjarmasin (present-day capital of South Kalimantan) on business in 1714. His accounts about life in Banjarmasin were often astute, but his portrayal of orangutans is of "a creature of fable, the progenitor of those mainly mythical Wild Men of Borneo," to which, says Saunders, tourist literature still alludes.[19] Another visitor to Borneo was Carl Bock, a Norwegian, who was appointed by the Governor-General of the Netherlands East Indies in 1879 to travel through and write about the interior or southeast Borneo. (Kalimantan and the rest of Indonesia was then under Dutch rule.) Bock's report was first

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[17] Saunders, ibid.

[18] Ibid.

[19] Ibid, 273.

published in English in 1881 under the title *The Headhunters of Borneo,* a rather fantastic report of his travels that includes an account about cannibalism among the Tring Dayaks as well as of his attempts to locate a tribe of men rumored to have tails. A second edition in German and Norwegian published the next year contributed greatly to the ubiquitous image of Borneo as a place inhabited by the "wild head-hunters and dusky bare-breasted women."[20]

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the tourist syndrome seemed to take hold. Ella Christie's diary entries on a short May 1904 visit to Sarawak illustrated this syndrome well. Her 9 May entry reads as follows: "[The Commandant of the Sarawak Rangers, Sir Percy Cunynghame, provided] a show of Dyaks for me to Kodak. All in war-paint, really savages. I do hope they will come out. I did Sir Percy beside them in one, as a contrast...I have got some very good Borneo savage relics and hats."[21]

By the early decades of the twentieth century, the tourist image of Borneo had made a considerable appearance as evidenced by the title of Elizabeth Mershon's 1922 book: *With the Wild Men of Borneo.* When Edward, Prince of Wales, visited Singapore in the same year, he was welcomed by Dayak warriors brought over from Sarawak, who performed war dances in complete traditional

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[20] Ibid, 280.

[21] Ella Christie, "The First Tourist: Astana Guest, Kuching, 1904," *Sarawak Museum Journal,* Volume X, nos. 17-18 (July-December 1961), 43-49.

attire. Pictures from the Prince's voyage show modestly-covered Dayak women, lined up for his arrival and a Dayak woman holding, according to an accompanying caption, "the skull of a fallen enemy tribesman." Another picture bears the following description: "Wild Men of Borneo at Singapore." In Sabah, the prince visited Labuan and Jesselton (now Kota Kinabalu). In Jesselton, he is said to have spent three hours with "wild tribesmen."[22]

These deep-rooted images of a (supposed) Borneo backwardness, should, according to Saunders, be recognized as a reflection of reality—the reality of "images that grew out of the experiences, observations, and imaginations of travelers who saw and reported—and interpreted."[23] Accounts that perhaps misrepresent Borneo's cultures such as the ones I have introduced in the preceding paragraphs are necessarily those belonging to travelers who, along with physical baggage, carry with them their own intellectual and cultural baggage. As Saunders states, "they interpreted what they saw and accommodated what they observed to their own prejudices, to their own cultural values, to their own intellectual world."[24] In so doing, however, they created, developed, and passed on an image of Borneo—a place that is exotic, unknown,

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[22] Percival Phillips, *The Prince of Wales' Eastern Book* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1922). Cited in Saunders, 284.

[23] Saunders, 284-285.

[24] Ibid, 285.

timeless; a place where "noble savages" live close to nature—that has taken a life of its own, as the existence of the tourist industry testifies.

Travel guidebooks are a good place to witness the perpetuation of the notion of an exotic, unknown, and timeless Borneo. Victor King, in his essay "Tourism in Southeast Asia," says the following of the way in which the Insight Guides portrays Borneo jungles and peoples: "[They] are 'ageless', and the overpowering images of Borneo peoples are of traditional war-dancing, bloodthirsty, belligerent headhunters, who live in longhouses and whose women are barebreasted."[25] (This comment refers to the 1989 edition of the Insight Guide to Malaysia. Published in Singapore by APA Publications.) The *Holiday Which?* Guide provides another example of the mystification of Borneo to tourists. In its Malaysia issue, one section reads: "You'll spend an interesting day among shrunken heads, blowpipes, and tattooed men in sarongs, earrings, and striking head dresses."[26]

These images have not only influenced the way those outside the island think about who Borneans are and how they live—the images have also greatly affected the attitudes and self-perceptions of the people of Borneo themselves. It

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[25] Victor T. King, "Tourism and Culture in Malaysia," in *Tourism in South-east Asia*, ed. Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King, and Michael J. G. Parnwell (London and New York: Routledge, 1993), 111.

[26] *Holiday Which?*,1990 (January), 45.

is true, Borneans have responded to European contact in ways that have helped develop the European image of Borneo, but according to Saunders, "they have also themselves been affected and influenced by that image so that their behavior has been changed by it."[27] He further suggests that this change in behavior is most evident within the context of tourism. He cites the way in which Borneans exploit the tourist image of Borneo in order to fulfill the expectations of the modern travelers as an example of this phenomenon.[28]

As a Sabahan, I am reluctant to admit that I flagrantly "exploit the tourist image of Borneo" in order to "fulfill the expectation of the modern traveler," but as I have suggested, I delight in telling my Western friends tales of headhunters and how it might still exist today (recently, a credible source [my mother] told me that there is a headhunter on the loose looking for heads to support the foundation of a bridge being built in Brunei). Generally, however, I have observed that Sabahans (including me) do not themselves, and among themselves, find headhunting *that* fascinating. They understand that headhunting was, in former times, an important component in many indigenous belief systems. The stories connected with headhunting are, of course, gruesome, but because of repeated telling, they have for many become almost banal,

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[27] Saunders, ibid.

[28] Ibid.

innocuous. In short, for many Sabahans, including myself, headhunting holds little meaning.

But enter tourists, those from the outside. The tourist syndrome has resulted in visitors' fascination with the amazing, with the unbelievable, with the shocking—everything that is not part of their existence but belonging to a backward, primitive, and perhaps even sub-human peoples, people who have not quite completed their evolution, people with tails.[29]

With tourists in the picture, the headhunting past that many indigenous groups share takes not just a commercial value but a cultural one as well. As suggested elsewhere in this chapter, in the process of decolonizing themselves, Sabahans have recognized that by assuming agency over their culture and especially by embracing those aspects that are potentially embarrassing and implicating, their chances of putting forth an image of an independent, proud, and strong Sabah are greatly increased.

Monsopiad Cultural Village, a site where I conducted research during the summer of 2002, is a place where I propose that cultural intimacy is clearly at play. Situated on the banks of the Moyog River in Kuai, a village just outside Kota Kinabalu, the Village was opened in 1996 by a tour company called Borneo Legends, Myths and Tours, Sdn. Bhd. as a memory to Monsopiad, a legendary

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[29] See *Orang Boentoet* on page 10.

Kadazan warrior and headhunter who, over 250 years ago, roamed the land on which the Village stands today.

The Village, which is run by direct descendants of Monsopiad, portrays itself as a site dedicated to the preservation of a powerful figure in Kadazan history. One of its attractions is the *gintutun do mohoing* (stone monolith). Weighing two tons and standing at four meters, this massive stone is an imposing presence in the middle of the compound and is said to have been placed in its position by villagers with the help of *bobohizan* (Kadazan high priestess) and other unknown forces from the spirit world after being commanded by Monsopiad to build a monument to his honor. Adding to the Village's self-given status as a museum, visitors can also visit *kotos di Monsopiad* (Monsopiad Main House), a reproduction of the warrior's original house. The house features displays of indigenous implements one would expect to find in a traditional abode such as jars of rice wine, rice sifters, as well as local fruits and medicines.

The Village also promotes itself as a cultural center—it is a "living museum," a venue that offers "a vibrant and interactive insight" into the daily life of the Kadazans, the largest ethnic group in Sabah.[30] Additionally, according to information on its official web page, it aims at becoming the "center of

[30] "Introduction—Visit the Monsopiad Cultural Village," http://www.monsopiad.org/aboutus.asp, accessed 16 May 2002.

research and of information for the cultural, historical, and natural history of the Kadazan people."[31]

It is clear, however, that the most important product the Village is selling is headhunting. The opening remark one finds on the Village's website is an enticing one: "Learn everything you always wanted to know about headhunting!" And its main attraction is undoubtedly *siou di mohoing* or the House of Skulls. Constructed out of bamboo in the traditional Kadazan style, it is the dwelling place of 42 human skulls, which are hung in a row on a long pole among the rafters. These skulls, according to legend, were heads that, at one time, belonged to powerful warriors before they became Monsopiad's conquests. (It should also be mentioned that the House has a Keeper—he is the Keeper of the Skulls. He is a direct descendant of Monsopiad and is recognized not just as the physical but also as the spiritual caretaker of the skulls.)

The Village's willing and conspicuous association with headhunting (and the unfavorable connotations that it carries) takes us back to the Herzfeld's idea of cultural intimacy. The Village's owners have taken the concept of headhunting and gory images of skulls and have made it a part of their Kadazan *id*entity. It is of no consequence that images of a backward and mystical Sabah

[31] Ibid.

that visitors— inhabitants of the outside, "civilized" world—may be further confirmed.

Tourism, of which the Village is very much a part, is an industry where the phenomenon of cultural intimacy is illuminated. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson in their article "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," point out that it has become the convention to view "geographical territories" or space as a "neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization are inscribed."[32] In other words, when studying cultures, there is always an "inside" and an "outside." Hence, there are outside and inside perceptions of a phenomenon. What the outside perceives as truth may not be reality. Cultural intimacy exists because of the disparity between these perceptions.

Headhunting in Sabah sells because the outside views it as bizarre and primitive, while, in truth, it no longer exists, and even when it did, it was not a widespread or commonplace activity.

While tourism may be an industry, one of its nobler goals is the cultural edification and mediation that happens when people from different countries meet and communicate. It is ironic, then, that in many cases, visitors to places

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[32] Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology*, 7/1 (February 1992), 7.

like Sabah, where fantastic stories and images of skulls or people with tails are used to lure them, go away with a greater sense of divide.

A Journey to Borneo

The Chinamen live on a small island in the middle of this riverpaved town (Brunei), and the street outside our dining-room was full of little Chinese children, who with a quantity of Malay men examined our performance through the door and the window bars with the most eager interest...

At first we thought it a bore having every mouthful of food that we ate criticised in a whispered under-tone by such an admiring audience. But it is wonderful how one can become acclimatised to the scorching gaze of the multitude in this worn-out world. Anyway, they *seemed to enjoy it and think us extraordinary.*

It seemed, looking out at these naked savages, as though we had suddenly got back to the early morning of history. We were now in a country where almost every adjunct of civilization was unknown—a country where marmalade, beer, and potatoes had never been introduced—and, after all, our being eyed from the street was merely savage curiosity...We stayed at Brunei two or three days, cruising about in a family boat, as, like the rest of the inhabitants, we had to annex a boat to pace the street in. We wandered through the city taking photographs of nearly all we saw. I say of nearly all, *as the females always ran away as soon as our eye was fixed on them...We were looked at everywhere as quite strange beings, so that in wending our way amid the watery streets of the town we felt almost incongruous mortals.*

-WALTER J. CLUTTERBUCK, *About Ceylon and Borneo, Being an Account of Two Visits to Ceylon, One to Borneo, and How We Fell Out on Our Homeward Journey* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1891), 217, 221-22.

Chapter 2

The Local Tourist

Last August, before beginning my work at Monsopiad Cultural Village, I decided that I would be a tourist and would take part in a two-hour tour of the Village. After paying the RM20[33] admission fee (RM30 for foreign visitors), several other guests and I were ushered to the waiting area, an open-air structure built in a stylized, traditional style. It soon became clear to me that I was not the typical visitor to the outfit. I first sensed this when the other guests, all of whom were from Europe, were offered *lihing*, a Kadazan rice wine, and I was not. At that time, however, I dismissed it as an honest oversight on the part of the hosts.

Later, as the other tourists and I witnessed a performance of traditional gong music and dances, our guide, a young Kadazan woman, sat with me and

[33] About US$5. RM stands for Ringgit Malaysia. One Malaysian ringgit equals about US$0.26.

we started a conversation. During our brief exchange, I got the feeling that she did not think I was part of the tour group; rather, I sensed that she thought I was there in another capacity, but it was not immediately apparent to me what she thought that capacity was.

A few more such incidences during the course of the tour led me to conclude that the Village did not see me, a local indigenous person, as a typical consumer of what it had to offer. Towards the end of the tour, however, the guide realized, somewhat sheepishly, that I was indeed a *bona fide* tourist and a little apologetically, confessed that she had thought I was a tour guide or a tour operator, there only to accompany the Western visitors.

Time has allowed me to examine the event I described above more dispassionately. On that day, however, I felt angry and offended and was unable to appreciate the way I was treated. I thought, Just because I am a local, they think I am too poor to pay the admission fee? Just because I am local, they think I cannot speak English (at one point, the guide had asked me if it would be all right if she conducted the tour exclusively in English)? Just because I am local, they do not expect me to want to learn about local culture? I fumed all day and got into several animated arguments with my brother, who at that time worked as a tour guide.

My anger about what happened has subsided, of course, but the questions I asked myself that day have remained. Why did being local mean not being a tourist? Did the operators of the Village think that what they offered would not appeal or not be relevant to Sabahans?

As I ponder these questions, I am reminded of an incident that I believe raises similar queries. During a break from research at the Sabah Museum one day early last August, I had a conversation with a young Chinese tour guide accompanying a group from Taiwan. He said, "Oh, they'll be out soon. They find all this stuff boring. Taiwan has indigenous peoples, too—they've seen this sort of thing before." Sure enough, not long after that, his charges emerged from the museum.

As much as I am loathe to admit it, as I visited some of the exhibits during my research, I found myself more than a little bored. I felt connected to the brassware, the rice-harvesting implements, and the "bamboo technology" on display, of course, but having had grandparents who stored their betel nut in brass boxes, having harvested rice, and having lived in a bamboo house, the exhibits did little more for me than to remind me of my own life, the life I was used to. My experience at Monsopiad Cultural Village and my exchange with the tour guide at the Museum have prompted me to reflect on what it really

means to be a local tourist—what do I want to really see in an exhibit? How do I want my people to be presented?

Malaysia, like other new nation-states, is interested in building for itself an identity in the global community. However, according to Thomas Turino, in order to do this, nations must possess "cosmopolitan institutions, roles, and emblems (diplomats, finance and foreign ministers, airports, national sports teams and dance companies, flags, anthems) homologous with those of the other members of the global family of nations so as to be recognizable like them."[34]

The museum is one example of a cosmopolitan institution that is frequently used by states—Sabah included—as a venue for asserting this identity. It is a fact that, for most tourists, the museum has become a necessary stopover. People recognize the museum as a cultural center, as a repository for cultural artifacts of the people whose country they are visiting. Museum curators, too, see their role as fulfilling this expectation—they aim to give tourists an essence of what it means to be a Malaysian or a Sabahan person.

In an interview I had with Robin Fidelis, the assistant curator of the Heritage Village division[35] of Sabah Museum, he told me as much. Mr. Fidelis

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[34] Thomas Turino, *Nationalists, Cosmopolitans, and Popular Musics in Zimbabwe* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 15.

[35] The Heritage Village of the Sabah Museum is situated within the Ethnobotanical Gardens of the Museum. It has 11 traditional houses, and according to the Museum's website, "the houses were built by the various relevant ethnic groups themselves to ensure [their] quality and authenticity."

said, "We have many different kinds of visitors. One type wants a real village experience, and the other wants a choreographed type of village...If you have enough time to stay in this country, you can go to the real village...but if you don't...say, you only have two hours in KK (Kota Kinabalu), you can come to the Heritage Village to experience traditional village life."[36]

However, in an effort to engage the foreign tourist (who, as I discuss elsewhere in this thesis, more often than not expects the stereotypical images of a wild and mysterious Sabah), the museum—or similar institutions such as Monsopiad Cultural Village—runs the risk of alienating those whose "local distinctiveness" they rely on—the local indigenous person.

Visitors to Sabah expect images that they have seen in travel brochures, which generally portray the state as a rural and somewhat backward place. In my opinion, the bamboo technology exhibit at Sabah Museum serves to fulfill this expectation—whether or not the decision to install it was subconscious or deliberate. This exhibit features about 30 objects, most of which are implements used on Sabah's west and east coasts, as well as in the Interior. Included in the

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(Footnote 35, cont.) ...The houses are also furnished with traditional artifacts in order to "create a true atmosphere." Information gathered from http://www.mzm.sabah.gov.my/heritagevillage/hvintro.htm, accessed 28 July 2003.

[36] Robin Fidelis, interview by author, tape recording, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, 6 August 2002.

display are a *tongkungon,* a musical instrument, a *torosod,* a rice wine filter, a *barait,* a basket, a *rangahan karabau,* a buffalo trap, and a miniature *walai,* a house.

It does not matter that perhaps the real goal of this particular display is simply to educate the general public about the various bamboo species in Sabah as well as the creative ways in which indigenous peoples utilize this giant grass—foreign tourists most likely still see the exhibit as a realization of the images they expected to see on their trip. However, to the local person like myself for whom bamboo-house living is second nature and for whom it "is no big deal," the bamboo technology exhibit did not do very much. It did not tell me what I did not already know. What could it teach me? The Museum, then, in an honest attempt to engage the foreign tourist, had alienated me.

Turino says that this is not a unique phenomenon. In fact, many new nation-states who want to build a unique identity find themselves in the same predicament, a predicament he calls "twin paradoxes." The first paradox of nationalism, he says, is that "nation-states are dependent on cosmopolitanism, but are simultaneously threatened by it [and] unless nation-states maintain their unique identity; they will disappear as distinct, and thus operative, units on the international scene..." The second paradox of nationalism, according to Turino, advances that "nation-states celebrate and are dependent on local distinctiveness,

but they are simultaneously threatened by it" as too much local diversity could threaten national unity.[37]

In this chapter, I argue that in its quest to be recognized as being a worthy part of the larger global community and in catering to the stereotypical images of Borneo, centers of cultural learning such as Sabah Museum, run the risk of possibly compromising the cultural education of the local person, the local tourist. Also, I think it might be worth exploring the implications of formerly colonized nations such as Malaysia using the museum, an institution that is largely recognized as having European/Western roots and sensibilities, to communicate ideas about culture.

Even though museums and their exhibits are in principle "morally neutral," they, in reality, make "moral statements,"[38] and every museum exhibition, say Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, "inevitably draws on the cultural assumptions and resources of the people who make it. Decisions are made to emphasize one element and to downplay others, to assert some truths and to ignore others."[39] Lavine and Karp go on to assert that the manner in which cultures are presented is largely determined by the exhibitor's or

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[37] Turino,15.

[38] Ivan Karp, "Culture and Representation," in *Exhibiting Cultures* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Press, 1991), eds. Ivan Karp and Steven D. Lavine, 14.

[39] Steven D. Lavine and Ivan Karp, "Introduction: Museums and Multiculturism," in *Exhibiting Cultures* (Washington, D. C.: Smithsonian Institution, 1991), 1.

exhibitors' views on power and authority and can make "claims about what a nation is or ought to be as well as how citizens should relate to one another."[40] Further, according to Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, the collections one finds in a museum "cannot be divorced from the larger cultural contexts of philanthropy and ethnic and national identity formation [and] anthropologists and 'natives' are increasingly engaged in a dialogue out of which cultural identity emerges." They also argue that museums "contribute to the larger process by which popular culture is formed."[41] In short, a place's politics and history, as well as its collective stance on its identity within the larger world are embedded in every display or exhibition.

In the case of Sabah, its colonial history and the repercussions of the colonial presence on its population play greatly into how information about the indigenous cultures in the state are presented at Sabah Museum, which is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports. The 43-acre Museum complex lies atop Istana Lama Hill in Kota Kinabalu and houses the museum proper, a heritage village, as well as an ethno-botanic garden. The Museum, which prides itself in being "the most prestigious museum in the Sabah

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[40] Ibid, 2.

[41] Arjun Appadurai and Carol A. Breckenridge, "Museums are Good to Think: Heritage on View in India," in *Museums and Communities: The Politics of Public Culture*, eds. Ivan Karp, Christine Mullen Kreamer, and Steven D. Lavine (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 35-6.

and is the State's showcase of its rich cultural heritage and exhibits Sabah's history, culture, social and natural history in one place," [42] is a popular destination particularly for tourists—tour packages frequently include a two- to three-hour sojourn to the place.

As I related in the beginning of this chapter, my experience as visitor at the Sabah Museum was, in plain words, a little boring. Many of the objects on display were too much a part of my life—the indigenous person's life—to be fascinating. I did not find the exhibitions particularly relevant. One reason for this is a museum's tendency, Sabah Museum included, to exhibit what they think the visiting public might find interesting, and this usually means what the Western world thinks is exotic, such as the bamboo implements that I mentioned earlier in the chapter. But as the museum is essentially a Western cultural institution, museums in places like Sabah are left with a dilemma in their hands. How can they present and represent indigenous cultures with Western tools?

Appadurai and Breckenridge, who have done studies about how museums are largely a showcase of imperialism, say that in India, museums are less a "product of philanthropy and more a product of the conscious agenda of India's British rulers, which led them to excavate, classify, catalogue, and display

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[42] http://www.mzm.sabah.gov.my/, accessed 9 December 2002.

India's artifactual past to itself."[43] In other words, exotic objects find their way to local museums through a process of Western imperialism and colonial appropriation; the only story such objects can tell is the history of their status as trophies of imperial conquest.[44]

Museum curators are no doubt aware of the relevance that exhibits have to have for local people. In "Tourism: The Sabah Museum Perspective," a paper written by Rita Lasimbang and Ismail Charles on behalf of the Department of Sabah Museum and State Archives for the Borneo Research Council meetings in July 1992, they say that most of their visitors are mainly local people and that this was encouraging as "our target group are the local people." The Museum, say Lasimbang and Charles, "is the custodian of Sabah's rich cultural heritage and its main objective is to preserve Sabah's heritage. The Museum therefore encourages local people to learn about, document and preserve their cultural heritage in order to fulfil this objective."[45]

But the museum in Sabah and in other colonized locales has at least two dilemmas to deal with. First, as an institution whose roots are Western, how

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[43] Appadurai and Breckenridge, 36.

[44] Karp, 16.

[45] Rita Lasimbang and Ismail Charles, "Tourism: The Sabah Museum Perspective," 2-3. This paper is a prepublication copy and a draft version of the one presented during the Second Biennial International Conference of the Borneo Research Council held in Kota Kinabalu in July 1992.

does it use foreign conventions to present and represent non-Western cultures? Second, as Linda Tuhiwai Smith says, "Imperialism still hurts, still destroys and is reforming itself constantly."[46] In other words, colonization continues long after the colonizers leave, and museum curators, faced with the task of presenting a place's indigenous cultures to outsiders, often times respond to their stereotypical expectations.

As a result, a large number of exhibits in former colonies emphasize the agrarian, organic, and lyrical existence of indigenous peoples. The bamboo technology exhibit at the Sabah Museum, as well as its display of traditional household implements (some examples include a *gantang,* a wood container for measuring rice; a *gerudi,* a wooden hand saw; and a *sigupan,* a Murut tobacco pipe made of bamboo) and of traditional basketry (examples: *tadang,* a back-strap basked made from sago front used for carrying agricultural produce; a *kukurungan manuk,* a chicken coop; and an *ambung,* a rattan basket used in bird's nest collection). In my opinion, these exhibits clearly underscore the clichés that outsiders—*and* insiders—have of indigenous peoples: that they are a rural and untouched people and should remain so.

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[46] Linda Smith Tuhiwai, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (London and New York: Zed Books Ltd. And Dunedin, New Zealand, University of Otago Press, 1999), 19.

In *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class,* Dean MacCannell argues that for modern middle-class people to understand their identity, they should "follow the tourists," suggesting that by following the tourists, "[they] may be able to arrive at a better understanding of [themselves]."[47] If I may, I would like to put a twist on his postulation, for in the time that I have spent looking at the relationship between indigenous cultures and tourism in Sabah, I have found that following the tourists—in particular, local tourists —might also provide a way of understanding the way in which cultural centers such as Sabah Museum present and represent local cultures in the wake of colonization.

[47] Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1999), 5.

Sabah in 1890

From the above remarks it will be gathered that the main race inhabiting British North Borneo, the Dusun, are in all probability descendants of a mixed aboriginal and Chinese ancestry, and that as we come nearer to the coasts the sub-tribes mix and blend with each other and with aliens, till on the east there is very little of the native type left at all, a race rapidly springing up there of very cosmopolitan origin. On the west coast, there are more natives and fewer aliens, but much the same thing is occurring there on a smaller scale.

The Dusuns in character are quiet and orderly,...and no doubt would be industrious if occasion arose; a very good rural population, with somewhat rustic notions. Any slight bloodthirsty tendencies, to which circumstances and the want of proper restraint have driven them, are gladly abandoned wherever the Company's influence has spread. They show every symptom of thriving and increasing,...and there is no fear of their melting away and disappearing like so many races have done when brought into contact with the white man.

Much the same thing may be said of the sea-coast races, who also possess many good workaday knockabout qualities, but not to the same extent as the Dusuns. Of these, the Bajaus are probably doing the best in some districts, Sandakan particularly, as they bring their great strength to bear on fairly rough work, are increasing and multiplying rapidly, and are even beginning to build houses. The Sooloos are the principal fishermen, and take not a small share of the trade amongst the islands, while all are glad to seize the opportunity of living quieter and more secure, if less adventurous, lives than they used to do in the old days.

At first there was difficulty in persuading some of them to settle down to a more orderly state of things; but for long past matters have been going on smoothly and quietly, except in some of the quite outlying districts; while it is not an uncommon thing to see large bodies of people—men, women, and children—from other parts, generally under some grave and peace-loving chief, come sailing into the Company's waters to settle under its flag.

~*Handbook of British North Borneo* (London, 1890). This selection taken from "Sabah in 1890," in *Sabah History and Society* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Malaysian Historical Society, 1981), compiler Khoo Kay Kim, 37.

Chapter 3

Understanding Culture Through Tourism

The growth of cultural and ethnic tourism, of cultural museums and theme parks, and of artifacts consumed not only by tourists but also by members of ethnic groups as declarations of their identities has resulted in the commercialization of ethnicity in specifically touristic ways—in short, commercialization inevitably accompanies tourism. Although the state is typically in charge of promoting and endorsing certain types of cultural representations (the case in Sabah is discussed in more detail in the proceeding chapter), I concur with Jocelyn Linnekin that "entrepreneurial capitalism disseminates these images far more efficiently and effectively than could any government body" and that "profit seeking...takes up where the state leaves off

in purveying commoditized culture to the public."[48] In other words, even though governments' interest in tourism may be partly monetary, it is the businesspeople of a nation that ultimately turn products of culture into marketable and sellable goods such as handicrafts, tours, and exhibits.

But whether or not it is the state or individual entrepreneurs that should be held accountable, one point is clear: Commerce (and all its derivatives) is never very far away from tourism. In this chapter, I will discuss the relatively widespread view that commoditization of culture can lead to compromising effects on the values and ways of life of indigenous peoples, as well as the wider implication of this stance. Rather than agreeing, however, I stress that the culture of a people is not constant—like a river, it is always moving—and suggest that it is perhaps more constructive to think of tourism as just one of many agents that shapes it and gives it new meaning.

Commercialization related to tourism is by no means a new or singular phenomenon—it has long been the scapegoat for what many call the deterioration of culture. In her book, *See the Third Word While It Lasts: The Social and Environmental Impact of Tourism With Special Reference to Malaysia,* Evelyn Hong explores what she sees as negative consequences of tourism development

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[48] Jocelyn Linnekin, "Consuming Cultures: Tourism and the Commoditization of Cultural Identity in the Island Pacific," in Picard and Wood, 219.

in Malaysian culture and society, asserting that it has undermined and degraded Malaysian culture. In an effort to "pander to whims and fancies of the tourists," Hong says, "some local people have abandoned their own cultural values."[49] A specific example of this "cultural deterioration," according to Hong, is the way in which the nation's arts and crafts, under the impact of tourism, have become commercialized. She writes:

> Today we can find dozens of batik factories along the northern coast Penang which mass-produce batik to satisfy the tastes of the souvenir-hunting tourists. Batik, which was once traditionally printed on natural fiber, is now commercially produced on synthetic materials such as lawn, voile, silk, jersey, and velvet. Malaysian pewter ware made from...refined local tin is pandered in a wide range from the utilitarian to the decorative—beer mugs, ash trays, candle holders, goblets, salvers, coffee or tea sets and time pieces...[50]

Hong's frustration is apparent. In a time when culture is viewed as sacred—as the very essence of a people—many deem its preservation crucial. So when efforts taken towards its maintenance and posterity are seemingly threatened—in this case, by commercialization due to tourism—it is natural to share in Hong's disgruntlement.

This disgruntlement is also felt in Sabah. It is a general feeling among many that indigenous culture is slowly being sidelined by Western ideas and

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[49] Evelyn Hong, *See the Third World While it Lasts: The Social and Environmental Impact of Tourism With Special Reference to Malaysia* (Penang, Malaysia: Consumers' Association of Penang, 1985), 58.

[50] Ibid, 61.

values. In the 13 June 1993 edition of the *Sunday Star*,[51] the then-president of the Tanjung Aru branch of the Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association (KDCA), Datuk Jipanus Molukun,[52] laments the fact that many KadazanDusuns (especially the youth), do not do their part in helping to preserve their culture. According to Datuk Jipanus, "the KDCA needs to be very active to be effective," particularly "now when traditional customs and cultures are being gradually replaced by newer and more Westernized practices."[53] That the KadazanDusun language is gradually losing its popularity because many people have stopped using it, speaking Bahasa Malaysia and English in its stead, is indicative of this trend, says Datuk Jipanus. The article ends with an appeal from him: "The ball is at our feet. If we do not do anything to preserve the basic elements of our culture, we as a race will lose in the end. Wouldn't that be a shame?"[54]

This sense of loss is underscored in a 10 October 1994 *Daily Express*[55] feature. Jenne John Laijun writes, "There is no doubt that Kadazan have lost a lot

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[51] The English-language *Star* (daily) and its sister paper, the *Sunday Star*, enjoy the largest readership and circulation in Malaysia.

[52] The word *Datuk* means grandfather in Bahasa Malaysia, but in this case it indicates a title, like *Sir* to the British.

[53] Agatha Matayun, "Clinging on to the Last Vestiges of a Proud Culture," *Sunday Star*, 13 June 1993.

[54] Ibid.

[55] The *Daily Express* was established in 1963 and is the daily with the largest circulation in Sabah. It is published in English, Bahasa Malaysia, and Kadazan.

of their culture in the name of growth and development. The once-rich cultural background is slowly withering and now, you may even see a Kadazan not knowing how to speak their language or have any idea of its traditions."[56] She says that this "withering" of culture is also evident in the way weddings are now conducted. No longer are they elaborate seven-day celebrations. Jinilis Jounin, a woman Jenne interviewed for this story, compares her own wedding in 1948 to present-day ones: "Weddings nowadays are so simple. Where once even holding hands would result with a *sogit* (fine),[57] nowadays, the couple [is] allowed to mingle before their actual wedding takes place."[58]

Deputy Chief Minister Datuk Lajim Haji Ukin's speech at a traditional music competition in Membakut on 1 June 2003 indicates that his views are in harmony with Jenne's and Datuk Jipanus's. He says that safeguarding Malaysians' cultural and traditional heritage would not only create a strong sense of "cohesiveness in a community" but that it would act as the "best defense against the increasing number of 'foreign culture' flooding into the country"...in

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[56] Jenne John Laijun, "Kadazan Weddings Have Lost Much in Culture," *Daily Express*, 10 October 1995.

[57] *Sogit* or *Osogit* means "cold" in Kadazan, but in this case, it refers to some sort of compensation—for example, a goat—given to the offended community, family, or person to "cool down a situation." The concept of *sogit* in KadazanDusun culture ensures that "any torn relationships between two parties are restored to normalcy." Information gathered from Tongkul, 10, 15.

[58] Laijun.

a time when young people are susceptible towards foreign influence and culture.[58]

While none of the above accounts claims that the integrity of the KadazanDusun language, Kadazan weddings, or Sabah's cultures as a whole has been compromised because of tourism, they do make one point clear: Many people in Sabah believe that aspects of KadazanDusun culture have been "undermined" and "degraded" because of a value shift that favors the Western way of thinking.

Even the state government of Sabah seems to be getting on the bandwagon, taking measures to "preserve" traditional ways of doing things. In a 3 March 1991 *Borneo Mail*[59] article, Mark Kong writes about the opening of a handicraft center in Ranau, a small town that is a frequent stopover for tourists on their way to Kinabalu National Park. He states, "Sabah hopes to get its handicrafts to do for the state what the kimono has done to promote Japan and the windmill for Holland" and that the opening of the handicraft center would

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[58] "Lajim on Preserving Cultures," *Daily Express*, 3 June 2003, http://www.dailyexpress.com.my/print.cfm?NewsID=19289, accessed 8 July 2003.

[59] On 2 July 2003, *Borneo Mail*, one of four multi-lingual newspapers in Sabah, halted its operations.

"help to steer what was previously a village pastime into a commercial venture for the world market."[60]

Does commercialization sully the authenticity of culture, and, as Hong claims, result in the culture's deterioration? Some scholars think so. Davydd Greenwood, in his essay "Culture by the Pound: An Anthropological Perspective on Tourism as Cultural Commoditization," looks at the *Alarde,* a public ritual in Fuenterrabia, Guipúzcoa, in the Spanish Basque country. He maintains that by deciding that the *Alarde* should be a public event to attract outsiders into the town to spend money, the municipal government in Fuenterrabia made it one more of the town's assets in the competitive tourism market. However, according to Greenwood, it also "violated the *meaning* of the ritual, definitively destroying the authenticity and its power for the people." Greenwood believes that the people of Fuenterrabia are confused and concerned about their *Alarde,* feeling that even though they can still perform the outward forms of the ritual for money, "they cannot subscribe to the meanings it once held because it is no longer being performed by them for themselves."[61]

Alan Goldberg studies a similar situation in Haiti but concludes with an analysis that is quite the opposite (he cites Greenwood's findings in his writing).

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[60] Mark Kong, "Handicraft to Symbolise Sabah," *Borneo Mail,* 3 March 1991.

[61] Davydd Greenwood, "Culture by the Pound: An Anthropological Perspective on Tourism as Cultural Commoditization," in *Hosts and Guests,* ed. Valene L. Smith (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 1977), 136. Emphasis Greenwood's.

Performers who take part in *vodou* shows targeted specifically for tourists, says Goldberg, do not feel "alienated from their culture and in no sense can they be described as selling out."[62] In short, unlike the Basque case that Greenwood examines, the Haitian participants find meaning in the performance—they accept its "authenticity and "ritual efficacy" even if tourist onlookers see it as a party.[63]

Annette Sanger's study of villagers in Singapadu, Bali provides an example that emphasizes Goldberg's point: that the modifications local people make to a cultural performance in order to suit the needs of tourists are not necessarily viewed by them as a denigration of culture. Tourists visit Singapadu three or four times a week where they witness presentations of *barong* dance dramas. The dramas that are performed now, however, started out quite differently. For example, the performances used to be three hours long but have now been shortened to appeal to tourists. Also, female dancers have been brought in to play female parts, which had previously been performed by men. Additionally, tourists found the trance dances with *kris*[64] unpleasant and did not

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[62] Alan Goldberg, "Commercial Folklore in Voodoo in Haiti: International Tourism and the Sale of Culture" (Ph. D diss., Indiana University, 1981), 228.

[63] Ibid, 228-9.

[64] A dagger.

enjoy watching some dancers coming out of trances by eating live chickens. Sanger says that these sections have now been modified.[66]

At least one other scholar agrees that the effects of the commercialization of culture are not as dire as some make it seem. A. Fuat Firat says,

> Cultures of all types—ethnic, national, regional, and the like—that are able to translate their qualities into marketable commodities and spectacles find themselves maintained, experienced, and globalized. Cultures that cannot or do not (re)present themselves in terms of marketable qualities, simulated instances, experiences, and products are finding themselves divested of members. In particular, traditional cultures...find that the way to keep their members interested in maintaining their culture is to involve the young people in the marketization of the culture, especially the touristic spectacle, through their music, dances, food, clothing, and thereby, the ability to participate in the larger global market...Cultures that cannot succeed in translating some of their qualities into spectacles or commodities seem to vanish only to become museum items.[67]

In short, Firat is of the opinion that unless a culture actively sells itself, chances of its having a long life could very well be jeopardized.

In his piece "The Impact of Tourism Upon American Indian Arts and Crafts," Lewis I. Deitch's study of how mass tourism has affected the Indian crafts of the Southwest seems to support Firat's postulation. Instead of being

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[66] Sanger, Annette, "Blessing or Blight? The Effects of Touristic Dance-Drama on Village Life in Singapadu, Bali," in *The Impact of Tourism on Traditional Music* (Kingston: Jamaica Memory Bank, 1988). Cited in Michael Hitchcock, Victor T. King and Michael J. G. Parnwell, "Tourism in South-East Asia: Introduction," in Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell, 10.

[67] A. Fuat Firat, "Consumer Culture or Culture Consumed?" In *Marketing in a Multicultural World: Ethnicity, Nationalism, and Cultural Identity,* eds. Janeen A. Costa and Gary J. Bamossy (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publicatons, 1995), 118.

"disruptive," tourism and the interaction with Anglo society—an extended market—has actually "served to heighten artistic productivity," and the revival of Southwestern handiwork has "served to strengthen Indian identity and pride in heritage."[68]

Nestor Garcia Canclini takes this idea a step further. In *Transforming Modernity: Popular Culture in Mexico,* he asserts that capitalist modernization related to tourism (in this particular case, the sale of handmade articles made by Purépecha artisans in Michoacán, Mexico) "does not always destroy traditional cultures as it moves forward; it can also appropriate them, restructure them, reorganize the meaning and function of their objects, beliefs, and practices."[69] Garcia Canclini is suggesting that rather than jeopardizing traditional cultures, what he terms capitalist modernization can, in fact, enrich and broaden them, symbolically and concretely. In the chapter entitled "From the Market to the Boutique: When Crafts Migrate" of the same book, he gives an example of how the significance attached to a traditional skirt can be transformed according to the context—whether it is rural or urban or whether the garment is "authentic" or bought at a boutique—in which it is found and used: ..."[A]n embroidered

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[68] Lewis I. Deitch, "The Impact of Tourism Upon American Indian Arts and Crafts," in *Hosts and Guests,* ed. Valene L. Smith (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, Inc., 1977), 184.

[69] Nestor Garcia Canclini, *Transforming Modernity,* trans. Lidia Lozano (Austin: The University of Texas Press, 1993), viii.

skirt for a village's patron saint's day can change its function and meaning within a few hours as it becomes a decoration in an urban dwelling, while the Indian woman who wore it in her village, having moved to that city, will keep alive many years those beliefs that summoned her to the *fiesta.*"[70]

It seems, then, that the ramifications of a commercialized culture can vary widely. In my opinion, those studies that point their fingers at tourism (and its inevitable connection with commerce), naming it the corruptor of authentic culture, propound the limited view that tourism can be isolated from culture—that tourism and the "sins" that it carries cannot be separated from local reality, *making* it a part of culture. According to Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell, "when culture is conceived of as a static entity, lacking the dynamics of change, the actions, motivations and values of local participants are ignored...host communities both adapt to and modify tourism in such a way that tourism cannot easily be divorced from the cultural mainstream."[71] They cite the Indonesian island of Bali as a prime example where "touristic culture,"[72] as Picard dubs it, and local culture have been become so fused, partly due to the long history of tourism in the area. John Allcock's piece "International Tourism

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[70] Ibid, 69.

[71] Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell, 9.

[72] Cited in Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell, 9.

and the Appropriation of History in the Balkans," emphasizes the postulations of the King, et al, and Picard. He says, "Tourism does not stand apart from the host cultures as a kind of obstrusive appendage...The forms and rhetorics of tourism stand on all fours with the other resources" that shape culture.[73]

While the tourism industry in Sabah is in relative infancy, there are indications that the line that is said to separate touristic and traditional (or what some call "authentic") cultures rarely exists. Let us take, for example, local consumption of handicrafts sold at the Filipino market in Kota Kinabalu.[74] Although the goods (and prices) offered are quite apparently geared towards foreign visitors, there are indigenous peoples—like me—that frequent the market in search of such things as fashion accessories, traditional art, and batik sarongs. The significance of these (touristic) items clearly changes depending on who the

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[73] John B. Allcock, "International Tourism and the Appropriation of History in the Balkans," in *International Tourism: Identity and Change*, eds. Marie-Françoise Lanfant, John B. Allcock, and Edward M. Bruner (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Studies in International Sociology, 1995), 110.

[74] A feature article in the 31 January 1993 edition of the *Daily Express* comments on the fact that many of the keepsakes tourists purchase are Filipino—and the Filipino market in Kota Kinabalu is the place where most do their souvenir shopping. In the piece, Ahmad Long, the Sabah director of the Federal Tourism and Cultural Centre at the time, says that while many foreigners are impressed by the state's natural beauty and "even make it a point" to climb Mt. Kinabalu, the highest peak in Southeast Asia, when they return to their home countries, the reminders they have of their visit are often Filipino handicrafts. According to Long, this is because Filipino handicrafts are usually smaller and lighter and can therefore fit easily into their luggage. Sabah handicrafts, by contrast, says Long, are bulky and "rather crude in finish." I should mention that not everything at the Filipino market *is* Filipino. There are handicrafts made by indigenous groups—bead necklaces and woven baskets made by the Rungus of Kudat are two examples—as well as products of Malay, Indonesian, or Sarawakian origin.

customer is. If a Dusun villager buys a sarong at the Filipino market and brings it home, does it, because it participates in a rural existence, become a part of local material culture? And does the batik fabric that a European tourist buys and displays in his or her living room remain a touristic item forever?

Furthermore, there is something to be said about how the passing of time can augment the value of even the most inelegant trinket. Cheap, touristy items produced and sold at one point in history can, in fact, be seen as an artifact of traditional culture at another. Lewis Hill has demonstrated how objects made specifically for tourists in one period, such as the 1930s, may be valued by the host community as a legitimate cultural artifact at a later date. For example, there are cases of Balinese *kris* from the early days of tourism being acquired by the Balinese now and being used as genuine examples of traditional craftsmanship.[75]

In short, products of culture that are marketed to tourists may not be as far removed—either in modes of consumption or production—from local culture as one may think. Additionally, unabashedly touristy items may with history on their side, be viewed by the indigenous communities that inspired them as "authentic" products in which they can find cultural meaning.

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[75] Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell, 11. Lewis Hill's findings were obtained from him by the authors through personal communication.

It is perhaps also important to note that in Malaysia, especially on the mainland, the adverse effects of tourism are felt principally in the realm of religion, namely Islam.[76] Hong speaks of how, in tourist hotels, the religious beliefs of local Muslim workers are disregarded and that the "moral dignity" of local women are open to abuse.[77] For instance, female employees working at Rasa Sayang, Palm Beach, Casuarina, Bayview, and Holiday Inn Hotels, complained that they were made to wear "provocative" dresses—dresses with high slits and plunging necklines.[78] Kadir Din underscores the complaints of these female workers. He notes, "Mass tourism as an industry characterized by

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[76] According to a 7 July 1998 BBC report entitled "A Puritan's Paradise," in Kelantan, a state in northern Peninsular Malaysia where Muslim laws are strictly implemented, visitors are not allowed to gamble or drink. Further, if they kiss in public, they might be slapped with a hefty fine. The absence of alcohol, and by extension, a nightlife scene, should be seen as an asset, say tourism officials, as rowdiness or other disturbances stemming from intoxication is eliminated and Kelantan would then be able to offer "the most peaceful beaches in the region." Readers might also find it interesting that cinemas in the state must show films with the lights on. The reason? According to the chief minister, Yang Amat Berhormat Guru Dato' Haji Nik Abdul Aziz b. Nik Mat, "It's easy to get these films on video and watch them in your own home, so if people go to the cinema it must be for something else. That can lead to adultery and fornication, so we think it's better to switch on the lights." Information gathered from http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/128067.stm, accessed on 27 July 2003.
A related note: In October 2002, the hardline Islamic government of neighboring Terengganu, announced that sunbathers on its beaches would be asked to cover themselves up. Information gathered from "Malaysia Tells Tourists to Cover Up," an article by Jonathan Kent of the BBC. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/2579775, accessed 27 July 2003.

[77] Hong, 60.

[78] Cited in Hong, 61. Hong obtains this information from the 27 December 1983 edition of *The Star*.

hedonism, permissiveness, lavishness, servitude, foreignness, with a lack of cross-cultural understanding and communication, obviously diverges from what tourism ought to be in an Islamic framework."[79]

But just as tourism alone cannot be blamed for the ills it is causing Muslim practitioners in Malaysia, so tourism alone cannot be viewed as the sole agent in what writers like Hong and Greenwood call the denigration of culture. As Firat suggests, it may be necessary for a culture to market itself in order to keep in its memory traditional ways of doing things, such as making handicrafts. And, in his article, "The Dynamics of Change in Tourist Arts," Nelson H. H. Graburn concludes that in many cases, "the only real significance of souvenir arts to the producing culture is the fact that they can be sold."[80] In other words, the effects of active producing and selling of handicrafts to foreigners may, at best, be neutral, and that members of the host cultures take part in such enterprises do so simply to make a living.

It is of course very likely that tourism has affected the ways in which the handicrafts of a host community are produced. As I have previously discussed, tourists' images of a host society at times differ quite substantially from reality,

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[79] Kadir Din, "Islam and Tourism: Patterns, Issues and Options," *Annals of Tourism Research* 16/4 (1989), 551.

[80] Nelson H. H. Graburn, "The Dynamics of Change in Tourist Arts," *Cultural Survival Quarterly* 6(2), 8.

so that producers of ethnic handicrafts, responding to a lucrative external market, may make changes to design, style, and the materials used. This is exactly the phenomenon that Hong refers to.

Erik Cohen, in his study of the Meo and Yeo of Northern Thailand, surmises that the "commercialization of folk art is not identical with their destruction."[81] And neither is it identical with the destruction of a culture. As Wood says, a people's culture or ethnicity is not something that is "fixed" or "bequeathed from the past, but rather something constantly reinvented—or reimagined, if we adapt Benedict Anderson's felicitous term—symbolically constructed and often contested."[82] And tourism—along with its various accompaniments—is just one variable among many that both brings forth and informs us of the new ways in which cultures are continually constructed.

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[81] Erik Cohen, "The Dynamics of Commercialized Arts: The Meo and Yeo of Northern Thailand," *Journal of the Naitonal Research Council of Thailand* 15(1), 21.

[82] Wood, 18.

British North Borneo or Sabah

...The country is traversed by a mountain range averaging from 5000 to 8000 feet in height, and rising to the noble altitude of 13,700 feet, crowned in lofty grandeur by Kina Balu, deemed by the natives sacred, as are the heights of Mount Shasta by the American Indians in California, and Fusiyama [sic] *in Japan. Many picturesque spurs branch off from this mountainous backbone of the country, terminating in rich undulating hills, watered by stream and torrent, diversified by plain and forest, rich in tropical verdure, and presenting many possibilities of mineral treasures, besides adding to the advantages of agricultural and other operations in a hot country the cooling breezes of high lands, that go down in a rush of torrent and rocky majesty to the open seas. Among the many rivers of British North Borneo are the Paitan, Sugut, Sibuco, and Kinabatangan. The latter forms a perfect waterway from the east coast into the heart of the country, and can be navigated for 200 miles with small steamers.*

The spurs and slopes of Kina Balu are peculiarly fitted for growing coffee, tea, and cinchona; while the rich plains that mark the course of the Kinabatangan and other rivers lend themselves to the culture of indigo, tobacco, cotton, rice, and the other well-known tropical products. Such villages as the traveler meets with on excursions in the interior are fed and maintained by agriculture, the successful features of which belong to the natural fertility of the soil rather than the science of the native farmer. Take for example the little village of Tamparulie on the banks of the Tawaran. En route *from Labuan to make the ascent of the Kina Balu mountains, you pass this native hamlet. You cross a plain of rice, bananas, coconut-trees, and other luxuriant vegetation. You see the native cultivator at work, his rude plough drawn by buffaloes, flocks of white padi birds sailing aloft, or a few solitary cranes adding an oriental touch to the picture. You halt on the river-bank amidst tropical groves, here and there relieved by neatly-kept gardens fenced down to the water's edge, and containing plentiful supplies of sweet potatoes, cucumbers, maize, and kaladi. Farther on, at Kolawat (a native village backed by a grove of plumed palms, the betelnut variety, yellow with fruit) you will find a village built on poles in a morass, with herds of swine and flocks of tame bees as part of the local treasures.*

Along the valleys that go upwards to the hills you pass straggling huts and bamboo cottages surrounded by irrigated patches of rice, with maize and sweet potatoes growing nearest the houses, and in many cases clumps of bananas at the very doorways. Now and then you meet natives laden with baskets of tobacco and beeswax going towards the coast on trading expeditions; the gentle manners of the people, their means and mode of life, being characterised by great simplicity. While you thus at intervals come upon evidences of village life and agricultural work, you may travel hundreds of miles without any other signs of life than those belonging to the "forest primeval," Nature's splendid legacy of

fertile soil and umbrageous woods being literally given over to the orang-outang and other strange examples of animal life. You may steam along the Kinabatangan River for a hundred miles at a stretch without seeing a human being, though all the time you are passing through a country presenting unrivalled opportunities for the cultivation of rice, sago, sugar-cane, tobacco, pepper, and other tropical merchandise. Face to face with these scenes of "luxurious nature," the European traveller cannot fail to regret that such "lands of plenty" have remained so long unavailable for the stimulating exercise of capital and labour and the useful arts of cultivation.

~JOSEPH HATTON, *The New Ceylon* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd., 1881), 57-83. This selection taken from "British North Borneo or Sabah," in *Sabah History and Society* (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia: Malaysian Historical Society, 1981), compiler, Khoo Kay Kim, 2-4.

Chapter 4

The Relationship Between Eco- and Cultural Tourism in Sabah

In a 1969 article on the traditional instruments of Sabah, Datuk James Ongkili, a former minister in the Prime Minister's Department, makes the following statement:

> Even the greatest apologist can state no more than that Borneo is rich in only one thing: her green jungle. Whereas the rich heritage of Cambodia and Java includes the cultural fame of Angkor Wat and Borobudur, the closest that we can attribute to Borneo in this regard is the numerical predominance of its relatively primitive indigenous peoples.[83]

[83] James P. Ongkili, "The Traditional Musical Instruments of Sabah," *Journal of the Historical Society University of Malaya* Vol. VIII (1969-1970), 35-41. This selection is from *Sabah: History and Society,* a volume of essays compiled by Khoo Kay Kim and Malaysian Historical Society (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1981, 100. (This article was originally a paper presented at the International Conference on the Traditional Drama and Music of Southeast Asia, Kuala Lumpur, August 1969.)

In the quotation above, Datuk James refers to the remains of ancient Buddhist temples in Cambodia and Central Java, suggesting that only those products of high culture, such as historical ruins are what make a culture "rich" and thriving.

Although Datuk James contends that Borneo was a "backwater of the cultural humanization of Southeast Asia," having been bypassed during the cultural evolution of India and China for "more interesting" places such as Cambodia, Vietnam, and Java,[84] cultural tourism does have a place in present-day Sabah. The Sabah Tourism Board as well as major cultural centers and bodies such as Sabah Museum, Monsopiad Cultural Village, and the KadazanDusun Cultural Association (KDCA) have made a marked effort to promote and preserve the various cultural products of the different ethnic groups. Also, tour packages frequently include home-stays at Rungus long houses and trips to the Filipino market in Kota Kinabalu for local handicrafts.

Through my personal observations, however, I have seen that what seems to be emphasized is eco-tourism (defined as "tourism to protected areas of outstanding natural beauty, extraordinary ecological interest, and pristine wilderness with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the

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[84] Ibid.

scenery and its wild plants and animals found in these areas"[85]) and that Sabah's peoples and their way of life—at least its indigenous ones—are promoted within the context of the state's "eco-treasures."[86] Consider the following description of the way of life and cultures of the people of the Lower Kinabatangan River, a river about 560 kilometers long and said to have the largest concentration of wildlife in all of Malaysia:

> ...All 8 species of hornbills found in Borneo...have been spotted in [the lower Kinabatangan]. The region is also renowned for colourful tropical birds, crocodiles, huge monitor lizards, wild pigs, otters, and several species of monkeys and tree snakes. It is a haven to the rare proboscis monkey, orang utan, the oriental darter, king-fishers and more...An unforgettable experience is the peaceful and serene village-life...as dawn creeps through the river...gentle mists shroud the surreal atmosphere...voices may be heard across the water as you catch the silhouettes of children floating past in their boats...amidst the birds' singing and the animal calls.[87]

According to this account, Sabah is the place for adventure; it is where you will encounter a wild (but idyllic) natural beauty teeming with indigenous peoples, many of whom still live and work in the unspoiled beauty. The state, a major actor in tourism (it not only provides the infrastructure for services but also creates the images and symbolic representations that shape tourist

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[85] Frank Yong, ed., "Environmental Protection Through Ecotourism," *Alam Sekitar* (Magazine of the Environmental Protection Society Malaysia), 16/1 (1991), 1.

[86] "Eco-treasures" is the prevalent theme of Sabah Tourism Board's promotional campaign.

[87] "Sabah, Malaysian Borneo: Alluring East Coast; Eco-treasures from Mountain High to Ocean Deep," (Kota Kinabalu, Sabah: Sabah Tourism Promotion Corporation, 2002), 21. [Brochure]

experiences[88]), has made a decision—a decision that is arguably both commercial and political—to portray indigenous peoples' connection to land (and its accompanying flora and fauna) as part and parcel of their culture. This decision, however, inevitably fashions the way in which cultural tourism—and perhaps more importantly, culture— is viewed and practiced in Sabah.

In the following section, I provide a summary of secondary literature that pertain to the relationship indigenous peoples have with land and make connections between them and their counterparts in Sabah. As well, I will explore how the significance of land plays a role in the state's eco-tourism industry.

Importance of the Land: Comparison of Keanae, Hawaii and Sabah

The evident link between eco- and cultural tourism in Sabah evokes a related phenomenon in Hawaii. In her book *Children of the Land,* Linnekin examines Keanae, a community on the island of Maui known for its simple and carefree charm where its members still observe the traditional Hawaiian way of life. Linnekin describes Keanae's seeming unadulterated beauty and culture: "The quilt of watered taro fields is broken by clumps of banana trees; sugar cane grows on the banks between the patches. The casual visitor might feel

[88] Dahles, 4.

transported back to the time of Captain James Cook but for the automobiles parked in front of the residents' houses."[89]

According to Linnekin, Keanae is important to students of Hawaiian culture because it is one of the few places in the state where Hawaiians have held on to their lands and where they still grow taro, the Polynesian staple. For this reason, for many Hawaiians, Keanea signifies what Linnekin dubs "the real old style" or how Hawaiians of old used to live.[90]

Although it is in many ways a modern American community, Keanae's retention of Hawaiian land—and the meanings suggested by this retention—has made it a "potent symbol" for the nationalist movement in the state, and is particularly relevant to one of its most important demands: reparations from the federal government for the lands lost during the past century.[91] In fact, says Linnekin, the movement's slogan, *aloha 'aina*, "evokes the identification of the Hawaiian people with the land."[92] In short, indigenous peoples all over Hawaii have recognized that the association they have with "the land," like their

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[89] Jocelyn Linnekin, *Children of the Land: Exchange and Status in a Hawaiian Community* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1985), 1.

[90] Ibid.

[91] Ibid, 11.

[92] Ibid.

counterparts in Keanae, is a tool through which they might attain economic and political regard.

Similarly, the government of Sabah has recognized that eco-tourism, the main selling point of Sabah's tourism industry, benefits largely from the emphasis on indigenous peoples' connection with the land.[93] Like the nationalist movement in Hawaii, the Ministry of Arts, Culture, and Tourism, the federal unit that oversees tourism, as well as the state agency that is in charge of tourism, the Ministry of Tourism, Environment, and Science and Technology, have identified the value of playing up indigenous peoples' affiliation with their natural surroundings. In Malaysia, the official designation for its original inhabitants—the Malays and Orang Asli[94] of Peninsular Malaysia and the indigenous groups in Sabah and Sarawak—is *bumiputera*, a word from the Sanskrit meaning "sons of

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[93] While a large part of Malaysia relies on its natural beauty to attract visitors, the BBC reports that Penang, a state off the west coast of the Peninsula, is finding alternative ways of appealing to tourists—by offering plastic surgery, specifically breast augmentation. Beautiful Holidays is one specialist tour company in Penang that provides packages combining both fun times at the beach as well as cosmetic surgery. Datuk Kee Phaik Cheen, Penang's tourism minister says, "When you're promoting an international tourism destination, we get a lot of competition from Phuket, Hong Kong, and even Bali, they're our competitors. But when you go into niche marketing, like medical tourism, Penang has a competitive edge." Information gathered from Kean Wong's article "Malaysia Targets Breast Surgery Tourists." http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/asia-pacific/2524665.stm, accessed 27 July 2003.

[94] *Orang asli* (literally "original" or "first" peoples) are the indigenous minority peoples of Peninsular or West Malaysia. It is a collective term that refers to 18 sub-ethnic groups. In 1997, the *orang asli* numbered 0.5% of the total national population. Information gathered from Colin Nicholas, "The Orang Asli of Peninsular Malaysia," http://www.xlibris.de/magickriver/oa.htm, accessed 25 June 2003.

the soil," underscoring the strong symbolic attachment that *bumiputera* have to land, and by extension, the inherent qualities of the land.

The close association between land and indigenous groups that certain quarters in Sabah and Hawaii have constructed is, of course, not unique. For the purposes of tourism and economics, more often than not, countries that were once colonized promote and sell their most mysterious and exotic qualities—or rather, what the Outside deems mysterious and exotic. The image of thick, virgin forests, with wild natives that roam in them, is one instance of an exotic characteristic that is most touted in Sabah. According to Wood, very often

> ...the most evident and most easily marketed forms of cultural uniqueness are often the lifestyles and artifacts of subnational ethnic groups—which are considered "backward" by the dominant ethnic majority. Indeed, even the ethnic markers touristically identified with majority ethnic groups are often marginal and premodern...[95]

As I have suggested elsewhere, the reputation that *bumiputera* have of being supposedly pre-modern (for example, many indigenous peoples still live in very rural surroundings [and in fact, about 70% of those in Sabah still do]) is used in tourism promotion to surround host cultures with an air of mystique and quaintness.

As I have discussed in a previous chapter, travel guidebooks and brochures are a good place to witness the perpetuation of the notion of an exotic,

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[95] Wood, 6.

unknown, and timeless Borneo, a notion that has been in the making since independent travelers began visiting Borneo in the early 18th century. Victor King, in his essay "Tourism in Southeast Asia," says the following of the way in which the Insight Guides portrays Borneo jungles and peoples: "[They] are 'ageless,' and the overpowering images of Borneo peoples are of traditional war-dancing, bloodthirsty, belligerent headhunters, who live in longhouses and whose women are barebreasted."[96]

In her article "Culture, Conservation and Community Reconstruction: Explorations in Advocacy Ethnomusicology and Participatory Action Research in Northern KwaZulu Natal," in which she talks about her work among the people of the Dududuku Forests of the Greater St. Lucia Wetlands Park Authority in South Africa, Angela Impey underscores King's and Wood's assertions that cultural tourism supports stereotypes that the Outside have of marginalized and underdeveloped countries, stating that "...[cultural tourism] has the tendency to reduce identity to a singular, generic 'Other' [and] feeds on mediated images of the 'noble savage.'[97] For example, says Impey, the Kwazulu Natal capitalize on the "global imagination of the Zulu as the quintessential

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[96] King, in Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell, 111. This comment refers to the 1989 edition of the Insight Guides to Malaysia. Published in Singapore by APA Publications.

[97] Angela Impey, "Culture, Conservation and Community Reconstruction: Explorations in Advocacy Ethnomusicology and Participatory Action Research in Northern KwaZulu Natal," *Yearbook for Traditional Music* 34 (2002), 11.

African Warrior Nation, an image that is framed in an idealized, historic moment, and that perpetuates their representation as authentic, potent, and uncontaminated."[98]

Impey goes on to say that just as cultural tourism uses the "global imagination" of the Zulu as a promotional tool, so "eco-tourism trades on the recurrent tropes of the African landscape based on images of an endless, pristine wilderness teeming with wildlife, and into which are inserted 'natural' but soon to vanish cultures."[99]

As Impey suggests, cultures in marginalized nations such as South Africa and Malaysia are frequently portrayed as "vanishing." In a previous chapter, I refer to Wood's thoughts on the idea of "vanishing cultures"—he says that perhaps there is no such phenomenon, as culture is not "fixed," that it cannot, in fact, be divorced from responses to and changes stemming from such external factors as modernization.[100]

The politics of a state greatly influences touristic endeavors. In *The Politics of Tourism in Asia,* Linda Richter writes, "Tourism is a highly political

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[98] Ibid.

[99] Ibid.

[100] Wood, 18.

phenomenon."[101] As we have established, multiethnic nations such as Malaysia are very much interested in "asserting and creating unique national cultures."[102] And one way in which governments can do this is by determining what all indigenous groups seemingly share, in the case of Malaysia, their *bumiputera*-ness, their being children of the same soil. In the following sections, I will demonstrate the ways in which the Ministry of Tourism in Sabah consciously makes use of native peoples' identification with land to market the serene mountain, sea-, and land- scapes of Sabah to the psyche of the modern traveler who is in search of peace and quiet, as well as to the spirit of the environmentally-conscious visitor, who sees the natural beauty the state boasts as in danger of being adulterated or destroyed.

The Role of the State in Tourism in Sabah

The principal actor on Sabah's tourism stage, the Ministry of Tourism Development, Environment, Science and Technology (the Ministry has five agencies under its jurisdiction: Sabah Parks, Department of Wildlife, Sabah Tourism Board, Department of Environment and Conservation, and the Science and Technology Unit), certainly sees the promotion and conservation of its

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[101] Linda Richter, *The Politics of Tourism in Asia* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 2.

[102] Wood, 6.

natural environment as one of its most important goals. On its official website, www.sabah.gov.my/mocet, the Ministry cites the following as its objectives:

> To encourage and help promote the development of tourism in the state.
>
> To protect, preserve and maintain the Sabah Parks and areas of tourism potential, their natural landscapes' beauty and the environment for the inheritance of the present and future generations and in the interest and promotion of tourism.
>
> To protect the natural environment by regulating land and industrial development as to ensure that the destruction of the environment will not cause pollution thereby endangering the well-being of the populace, wildlife and plants.
>
> To protect, conserve and manage the fauna of Sabah through conservation of viable and representative samples within their natural habitat and where appropriate to develop the economic potential of wildlife resources through tourism.[103]

The Ministry's mission echoes its objectives:

> To encourage and promote the orderly development of the tourism industry in the State. To protect, conserve and preserve the natural beauty of the environment in its natural state by managing industrial and land development so that environmental degradation which may threaten our well-being, as well as endanger our wildlife and flora [might not occur].[104]

Yang Berhormat (The Honorable) Datuk Chong Kah Kiat, Sabah's Minister of Tourism since 1999, underscores his office's mission and objectives in

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[103] "Ministry of Tourism Development, Environment, Science & Technology/Our Objective," http://www.sabah.gov.my/mocet/ministry-objective.htm, accessed 10 December 2002.

[104] "Ministry of Tourism Development, Environment, Science & Technology/Our Mission," http://www.sabah.gov.my/mocet/ministry-mission.htm, accessed 10 December 2002.

his welcome address to visitors of the Ministry's website.[105] He acknowledges the tourism industry's responsibility in improving the state's (and the nation's) financial well-being especially in light of hardships that has plagued Malaysia and other parts of Asia since the economic crisis of 1997. He states,

> With the recent economic crisis, which assailed many countries in Asia and other parts of the world, tourism became an important economic sector for Malaysia. The tourism industry was identified as a leading sector to assist in the national economic recovery. Sabah with its many natural assets and tourism icons such as Mount Kinabalu, its beautiful beaches and islands, its unique flora and fauna, its pristine rainforest and renowned wildlife conservation centers, has all the ingredients to become a major tourism destination in this region. In recent years, the State Government has worked closely with the private sector to promote Sabah as a "Premier Nature Destination" for both international and domestic markets."[106]

With goals stated so explicitly and so emphatically, it is no wonder that eco-tourism has gained a considerable degree of importance in Sabah.[107]

In Sabah, the emphasis on eco-tourism remedies at least one dilemma that the government and the Ministry face: How can the diversity of cultures in Sabah be presented without undermining one or more groups? Cultural

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[105] Datuk Chong Kah Kiat was also Sabah's Chief Minister from March 2001 to March 2003. The current leader of the state is Yang Berhormat Datuk Musa Aman.

[106] "Ministry of Tourism Development, Environment, Science & Technology/YB Minister's Message for Tourism, Culture, and Environment," www.sabah.gov.my/mocet/message.htm, accessed 10 December 2002.

[107] Wai-Teng Leong, "Culture and the State: Manufacturing Traditions for Tourism," *Critical Studies in Mass Communications* (6), 355-375.

tourism, which inevitably involves the task of picking and choosing which native groups to emphasize over the other, brings to the forefront issues of politics and how the state deals with them. Leong, in his piece "Culture and the State: Manufacturing Traditions for Tourism," makes the observation about the connection between tourism and the state: "...A natural affinity exists between the nation-state and tourism in terms of a shared interest in presenting a place as unique and distinctive. Because of this relationship, the state's interest in tourism is both political and economic."[108] As with other once-colonized multiethnic nations confronted with the work of nation building, Malaysia has had to address the need for what Sarkissian dubs a "common denominator," i.e. cultural activities that are "consonant" with the needs of the nation, in which Malay, Chinese, Indian, and a host of indigenous groups co-exist.[109]

In Sabah, it seems less difficult for the Ministry to tout what all Sabahan cultures have in common: the natural setting in which they live. One can probably argue that the lack of a cohesive culture has led to those in decision-making arenas to focus on something "innocuous," i.e. nature. That way, the rather contentious climate connected with indigenous identities does not have to be addressed and revisited. In fact, according to Dahles, in Malaysia, "the

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[108] Margaret Sarkissian, "Tradition, Tourism, and the Cultural Show: Malaysia's Diversity on Display," *Journal of Musicological Research* 17/3 (1998), 89.

representation of its diverse ethnic groups and their cultures is a very sensitive matter, having to accommodate the delicate balance between different groups in this multi-ethnic society, and not lose sight of the significant role of Islam which frowns upon frivolities so often associated with tourism."[110] Therefore, says Dahles, tourism in Malaysia focuses rather on "uncontentious cultural elements," including, as has been briefly discussed, the natural and unspoiled surroundings that is part of the experience of all Malaysians living in the country.[111]

There is every reason for the Tourism Ministry in Sabah to be wary. As early as 1960, the uneasy relationship between the Kadazans and the Dusuns, the two major ethnic groups in the state, was part of the political discourse. Donald Stephens, the then-president of the Society of Kadazans (and later the first Chief Minister of the state),[112] in his 30 June 1960 piece in the *Sabah Times*[113] entitled "Dusun or Kadazan?", echoes the indigenous community's ongoing conflict

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[110] Dahles, 14. Additional note: On the subject of Islam, according to Victor King, the official religion is distanced in official promotions and "the only aspects of the religion which are given attention are mosques, the festivals, royal towns, and palaces of the Sultans, and Hari Raya Puasa, the ceremony to mark the end of the Ramadan...[and] in the more detailed tourist brochures covering each state, it is noticeable how much information is provided on the historical dimensions of Islam." King, in Hitchcock, King, and Parnwell, 109-10.

[110] Ibid.

[112] The late Datuk Haji Mohammad Fuad Stephens was Chief Minister twice: during 1963 and 1964 and again between April and June 1976.

[113] *Sabah Times*, which, along with *Daily Express*, *Borneo Mail* (now defunct), and *Borneo Post*, is published in English, Bahasa Malaysia, and Kadazan, was launched in 1953 by Datuk Haji Mohammad Fuad Stephens. In 1998, after a three-year break, the newspaper reemerged and assumed the name *New Sabah Times*.

about which of the two terms—Dusun or Kadazan—is more correct and should be adopted officially.[114] Stephens is of the opinion that Kadazan is the more appropriate term as Dusun is an "imported word used by traders along the coast and the Brunei overlords and then accepted by the Chartered Company as the generic name for the Kadazan people." In fact, says Stephens, Dusun means "people of the countryside" or "people who plough the land." Stephens agrees that it is a good definition of the Kadazan people but that it is also the case that "many are inclined to use the word...in a derogatory sense—the same way as we refer to the country folk as 'yokels.'"[115]

More than 25 years after Stephens' article, the disagreement over which term the indigenous community feels is more accurate continues as evidenced in a piece by Pung Chen Choon in the 21 December 1986 edition of the *Sabah Times*. A statement made by a Dusun senior government servant summarizes the bickering that one hears even today: "The Dusuns are dejected with the superiority complex of the Kadazans. They feel that there is no reason for such an attitude because they are from the same stock." A colleague of this official has similar thoughts on the matter: "...Nowadays there seems to be a trend where

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[114] Many now use the collective term KadazanDusun to refer to the Dusunic family (to which the Kadazans and Dusuns belong), the largest indigenous community in Sabah. The Dusunic peoples occupy the western, northern, and central parts of the state.

[115] Donald Stephens, "Dusun or Kadazan?", *Sabah Times*, 30 June 1960.

Kadazans from a particular area are considered better than those from the others, and sadly even the government seems to have the same attitude."[116]

Ruben Sario's 14 March 1989 report in the same publication speaks of the Dusun community's frustrations over a 1961 resolution to change their ethnic name from Dusun to Kadazan, and Kalakau Untol, the deputy president of the United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA) is quoted as saying, "We recognize and accept all ethnic names, including the Kadazans, hence we demand the full measure of respect and recognition due to us, and we will not accept any form of pressure to change our ethnic name."[117]

The instances cited above offer only a brief look at the conflicts that are present within the indigenous community, and the Kadazans and the Dusuns are but two of the players. For the purposes of tourism, then, it seems the best course of action for the Ministry of Tourism in Sabah is for it to disassociate itself from anything that could potentially further ignite conflicts that have been broiling for a long time.

This Ministry's decision to do so brings to mind what Raymond Williams brands "selective tradition." He says that people in the present—in our case, government agencies in charge of tourism—rely on selective tradition: they look

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[116] Chen-Choon Pung, "Kadazans or Dusuns, What's the Difference?", *Sabah Times*, 21 December 1986.

[117] Ruben Sario, "The Term Dusun Must Stay," *Sabah Times*, 14 March 1989.

to the past "to ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future" but at the same time, they make "selective connections," that is, they "[dismiss] those [they do] not want to as "'out of date'" or 'nostalgic'," and [attack] those it cannot incorporate as 'unprecedented' or 'alien.'"[118] So as to uphold Malaysia's "unity in diversity" motto, the state, in its choices about tourism, has continued stereotypical ideas about indigenous peoples (which are accepted by most) and in its promotion have made locals part of Malaysia's natural landscape.

Through the tourist literature that I have studied, it is evident that the government is very conscious about not stepping on any toes: they focus on largely uncontentious elements, in this case, the natural surroundings that is part of the locals' existence. For example, in many of the brochures, indigenous peoples are usually portrayed in rural settings. (It is worth noting that the Chinese, most of whom are merchants [and generally considered more progressive and affluent] are frequently pictured in urban settings—business people with brief case in one hand and mobile phone in the other.) In the tourist guides that I have read, photographs of Bajau fishermen and their intricately carved boats and of Dusun villagers planting rice—images of native peoples in natural surroundings—abound. The text that accompanies these pictures makes more explicit the suggestion that in Sabah, eco-tourism frames cultural tourism,

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[118] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 116.

that Sabah not only offers natural beauty but also cultures that draw from and exist within this beauty. What is implied—and what tourists must understand—is that nature is the lens through which culture must be viewed. The "treasures" in "eco-treasures" extend beyond Sabah's natural offerings to include the indigenous peoples' "natural" way of life.

One thing is clear in these pictures. The people portrayed have been depoliticised, that is, the emphasis is largely the rural and native—and therefore pure and unspoiled—nature of the people of Sabah. The Bajau fishermen and the Dusun rice farmers are a homogenized groups of villagers, as a rural peoples who are one with nature—generally, peoples who are removed from the busy, capitalistic world that most tourists want to escape. Those in charge of tourism have consciously selected (to invoke Williams' expression) to portray the indigenous groups in Sabah as simple communities with no other interest—particularly, in asserting themselves politically—than to continue leading a rustic lifestyle. This deliberate decision results in political sentiments going unsaid—but the peace is kept.

Much of the promotional literature illustrates this. In one brochure, one reads the following: "Welcome to Sabah, the land of eco-treasures...where you also meet some of the friendliest, warmest people in the world. And join in their

colourful festivals and traditions that will take you back centuries."[119] The phrase "traditions that will take you back centuries" implies that indigenous peoples are primitive and unchanging. It is as if they are museum objects, destined to be displayed in the same manner and in the same case forever.

It is evident that the Ministry charged with overseeing the tourism industry has determined that promoting and advertising the connectedness that indigenous peoples have with nature—and this is, in fact, the intrinsic charm of Sabah—is a sound business decision. The two examples below of tourist literature framing culture within the scope of eco-tourism make this clear:

In the following passage (taken from a brochure that is part of the *Eco-Treasures* series), one sees that eco-treasures is a vast, exotic stage, and the people are actors without any conflicts:

> What kind of people live in the land of eco-treasures? All kinds, colours, and creeds. The population of about 2 million comprises over 30 different races speaking over 80 local dialects. The beautiful thing is all these diverse ethnic groups live together harmoniously while at the same time preserving their own culture, traditions, beliefs, and customs, to make Sabah a multiculturally exotic experience unlike any other.[120]

Not only does this literature paint a false picture of the supposed harmonious existence of indigenous peoples, it also depoliticizes indigenous peoples—they

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[119] "Sabah, Malaysian Borneo; Eco-Treasures from Mountain High to Ocean Deep," (Kota Kinabalu, Sabah: Sabah Tourism Promotion Corporation, 2002), 5. [Brochure]
[120] Ibid, 10.

are, as alluded to elsewhere, just a bunch of "primitive villagers" always reveling in each other's company.

The following example describes the Bajau of Semporna, a coastal town in the lowest, most eastern corner of Sabah. As can be expected, they are first encountered through the locale's natural assets:

> ...The town with its feet in the sea, Semporna and its many islands are like a dream come true...pure white sandy beaches, coconut palms and tranquil waters lapping over colourful reefs in the beautiful turquoise waters of the Sulawesi Sea. The richness of the sea, fishes of all kinds, sea cucumbers, shells, pearls...all have attracted seafarers and fisher-folks to Semporna and its islands. The early Bajau people lived their entire lives aboard their boats. Today, most live along the coasts, perched on stilts over shallow reefs, where they continue their love affair with the sea...[121]

In the example above, an eroticised language is used to play up the Bajaus' one-ness with the sea. An inspection of the way in which the above descriptions are worded makes immediately evident that what is being sold are the mystery, allure, and seduction of these attractions. It conjures up the image of what Turner and Ash call "lotus-eating"—"a permanent state of blissful drowsiness."[122] A celebration of the natural and primitive and the feeling that one is eating "forbidden fruit" is clear in the descriptions that I have included

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[121] "Sabah, Malaysian Borneo, Alluring East Coast; Eco-Treasures from Mountain High to Ocean Deep," 26. [Brochure]

[122] Louis Turner and John Ash, *The Golden Hordes: International Tourism and the Pleasure Periphery* (London: Constable, 1975), 151.

above, and a whole series of ideas are brought together—romance, love, myth and mystery—to entice the tourist.

Through my personal observations, often times the tourist brochures promoting Sabah virtually make no mention of people, emphasizing rather the locale's total removal from civilization and suggesting that Sabah is the place to visit if you want to escape the human population and want to be one with nature. For example, Maliau Basin, of which more than 80% is unexplored, is actively promoted in literature as the "The Lost World of Sabah"; if one reads between the lines, one most likely comes away with the impression that even locals are not familiar with this place, further emphasizing its mystery and removal from the rest of the world.

The Danum Valley Conservation Area, which is about two hours from the town of Lahad Datu, is described in one brochure as being "one of the last remaining reserves of primary lowland rainforest...and said to have the world's most complex eco-system." Further, it is an untouched paradise "home to 275 bird species, numerous reptiles, amphibians, fishes, and insects, its uniqueness [lying] in the dipterocarp forests covering over 90% of the area, a haven for various indigenous plant species and over 110 mammals, including the rare Sumatran rhino, clouded leopard, orang utan and proboscis monkeys."[123]

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[123] "Sabah: Malaysian Borneo/Alluring East Coast," 23.

Nowhere in this description are indigenous peoples mentioned; the nature of eco-tourism provides a convenient escape for the Tourism Board—and by the extension, the government—from having to make commentaries on issues of ethnicity.

One sees the same scenario in another brochure's description of yet another tourism icon, Mt. Kinabalu. In a brochure entitled "Sabah, Malaysian Borneo, Mt. Kinabalu," the following description is given for the mountain and the park that contains it:

> Imagine being surrounded by the wonder of nature's lush garden dating from the dawn of time. Stand at the highest summit of Borneo as dawn peeks over the horizon to reveal Sabah's splendours far and wide. Reflect on the quiet, sacred moment when you experience the most magnificent sunrise of your lifetime. Stroll amidst the treetops at the rainforest canopy walk and gaze up close at centuries-old wonders. Soak in the healing balm of a magic spring as colourful butterflies flutter around you. Admire the world's largest flower at your feet. Or lunch next to plants that lunch on insects.[124]

Again, indigenous peoples—the people for whom the mountain and the area which surrounds it is most significant—have been taken away from the scene.

It is clear that the role of state agencies in controlling a nation's identity, as well as how this identity is promoted and marketed, is vast. It is also evident that how Sabah is portrayed in tourist literature is merely an abstraction of a

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[124] Sabah, Malaysian Borneo/Mt. Kinabalu; Eco-Treasures form Mountain High and Ocean Deep," (Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: Sabah Tourism Promotion Board, 2002), 4.

generalized view of the state's indigenous communities. As long as eco-tourism remains one of Sabah's main sources of economy, the necessary relationship between tourism and the government will continue to perpetuate the idea of a Sabah that is primeval, where people, along with wild animals, continue to live in forests, just as in the "days of old."

Epilogue

I started my thesis with a story of creation, the story about God (Kinharingan) and his wife Munsumondok—a story told expressly from the point of view of the Dusuns, my people. Through my study of cultural tourism, I have seen that my people's narratives are shaped by their colonial past, shaped by their sense of "Otherness," shaped by their government's vested commercial and political interests.

But just as in the legend of the beginning of the Kadazan world, where Kinharingan and Munsumondok saved their people by from sure death by killing their girl child, so the indigenous peoples of Sabah have survived—not without sacrifices—the various hegemonies in the past and present, and their stories, though shaped differently, remain intact.

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