

Ethnic Awareness and Development

A Study of the Kadazan Dusun, Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract

This study is concerned with the Kadazan Dusun (KD) - an indigenous people of Sabah, East Malaysia. Its starting point is the revival of the KD identity that has been seen since the early 1980s. The study aims to explore this increased ethnic awareness among the KD in the perspective of the economic development in Sabah and Malaysia. It is primarily based on a number of longer interviews conducted with representatives of the KD population during a field visit to Sabah in May and June of 2002.

During the interviews, the aim was to explore what the respondents viewed as essential for the KD identity, how they related to the process of economic development and also how they situated themselves in Malaysia and the world. The analysis of the responses has been influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Some possible points of contact could be found between ethnic awareness and development, especially in relation to agriculture, which is still the main means of livelihood for the KD and an important part of their identity. The rapid changes in economic structure that have taken place since independence were sometimes seen by the respondents as a threat to their economic well-being, but also to social values. While they were not hostile to development and modernisation, there seemed to be a feeling that it was being imposed from the outside and did not connect with the tradition of the KD. The complicated relationship to the Malaysian state, in which ethnicity and development have always been seen as closely interlinked, seems to increase the insecurity over what development might mean for the KD identity and well-being. While no clear conclusions can be drawn from the study, it still points towards some areas that should be further explored in order to better understand how a process of development can affect the importance of ethnic identity and through this also relations between different ethnic groups.

Key index words: Malaysia; Sabah; ethnicity; development; indigenous populations, Kadazan Dusun

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List of abbreviations

BN	Barisan Nasional
CDA	Critical Discourse Analysis
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
KCA	Kadazan Cultural Association
KD	Kadazan Dusun
KDCA	Kadazan Dusun Cultural Association
KLF	Kadazandusun Language Foundation
NDP	New Development Policy
NEP	New Economic Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
PBS	Parti Bersatu Sabah
UMNO	United Malays National Organisation
UNKO	United National Kadazan Organisation
UPKO	United Pasok-Momogun National Organisation
USDA	United Sabah Dusun Association
USNO	United Sabah National Organisation

Malaysian/Kadazandusun words and expressions used throughout the text

<i>Adat</i>	Customary rights
<i>Bangsa Malaysia</i>	Malaysian race/people
<i>Bahasa Malaysia</i>	Malaysian (the language)
<i>Barisan Nasional</i>	National Front
<i>Bobohizan</i>	Traditional priestess
<i>Bumiputera</i>	“Sons of the soil” - ethnic groups that lived in Malaysia prior to colonisation
<i>Datuk/ Datuk Seri</i>	Honorary titles
<i>Huguan siou</i>	Paramount leader for the KD
<i>Momolian</i>	Traditional religion of the KD
<i>Nunuk Ragang</i>	Mythic tree; origin of the KD
<i>Parti Bersatu Sabah</i>	United Sabah Party
<i>(Pesta) Kaamatan</i>	Harvest festival
<i>Tun/ Tunku</i>	Honorary title

1. Introduction

In Malaysia, the issues of ethnicity and development have been closely interlinked. Especially after the race riots in Kuala Lumpur in 1969, when more than 200 people, most of them Chinese, were killed (Andaya *et al* 2001: 298). A simplified explanation of the events is that the Malays feared becoming subordinate to the Chinese, immigrants in their society who control the larger share of capital in Malaysia. The New Economic Policy (NEP) was then invented to assure that the generally poorer Malays be able to participate in and take part of the rapid development taking place. It was also meant to terminate the connection between ethnicity and economic function. A system which had been promoted by the British colonialists on racist grounds (*ibid.*: 177-184) and which had created inequalities between groups. With the NEP, the Malays were given special privileges over the other groups as “bumiputeras” or “sons of the soil”.

In the Bornean state of Sabah, the picture is even more complex. Many indigenous groupings, not belonging to the above-mentioned groups, make up a large percentage of the population. While these have also been given bumiputera status, the term and the measures associated with this have still been focussed on the Malays (Sajoo 1994: 49). Sabah has the highest incidence of poverty in the federation (Malaysia 2001a), and the economy still relies a lot on farming and the growing of cash crops such as rubber and cocoa. An increase in living standards has been seen also here since the inclusion of the state into the federation of Malaysia, but there is reason to suggest that Sabah can be considered a peripheral state in economic terms.

The Kadazan Dusun (KD) as they are currently called,¹ is the largest ethnic group in Sabah, comprising about 18,5% of the total population (Malaysia 2001b). They are normally classified, and represent themselves, as indigenous to the state. KD is in fact a label comprising several related groups, who speak Dusunic languages. The group itself is thus far from homogenous.

¹ In fact, what they are called is not very clear-cut. I choose to use the term “Kadazan Dusun”, which is used in the population census of 2000 (Malaysia 2001b), instead of the more common “Kadazandusun”. This is the official name of the language today taught in schools, and will be used as such. I have still chosen to stick to Reid’s (1997) abbreviation, which was part of his “careful attempt not to take sides”. More on naming in 7.1.

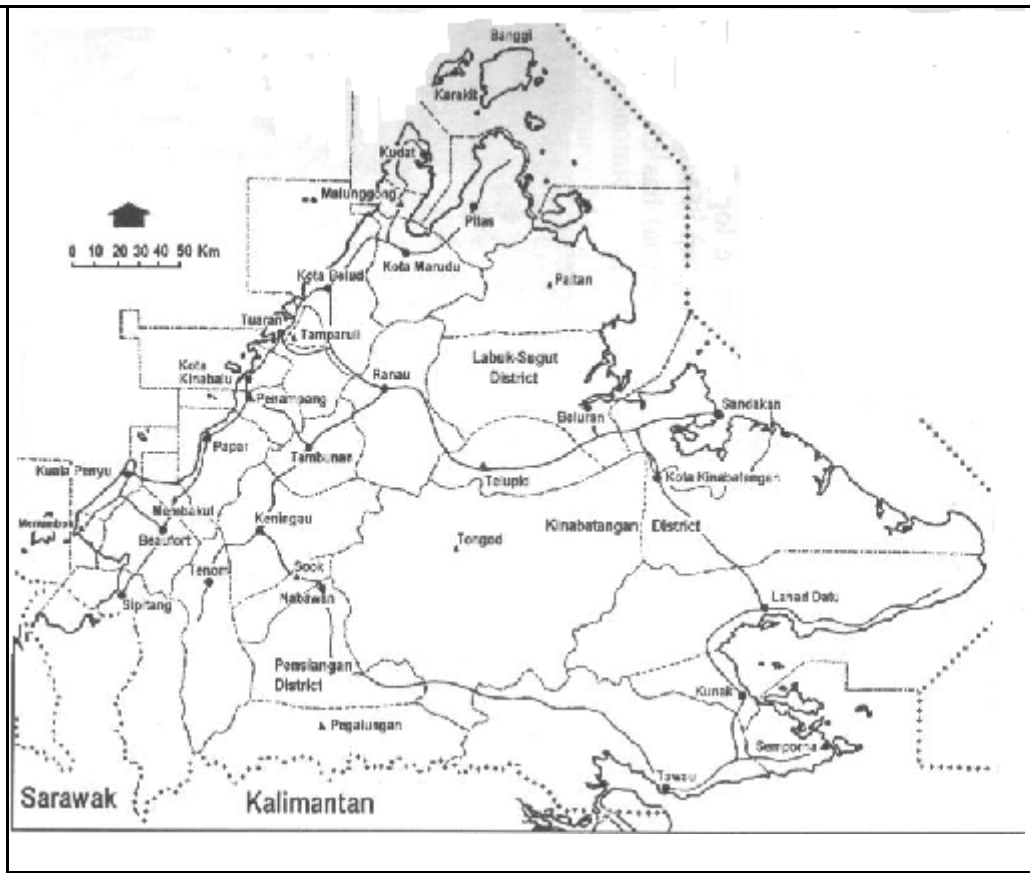


Figure 1: Map of Sabah

The KD are traditionally farmers, who primarily used to grow rice as a food crop. They inhabit mainly the Western and interior part of Sabah (See **Figure 1**). They are mostly Christian because of the efforts of European missionaries in the early 20th century, but a large number are also Muslim. Their traditional religion - still followed by some - is animistic.

In the 1980s, what could be termed a new ethnic movement became important in bringing a KD leader to the post of chief minister in Sabah. The unity and strength of the movement have somewhat weakened in later years, but the KD identity remains an important issue in the state.

I am interested in how this KD movement relates to the economic development in Sabah. It seems that economic development and modernisation has not brought a more homogenous society, as some theories would suggest. The state is an interesting case, with unclear ethnic boundaries, making it possible to “switch” identities and transcend these borders with relative ease. Still, it is often left out of an analysis on ethnicity and development in Malaysia. I have made a two-month long field visit to Sabah in 2002, and have made longer, unstructured

interviews with nine members of the KD population to explore these issues, and some possible connections between development and the increased ethnic awareness among the KD.

2. Aim and Relevance of the Study

How might a certain course of development lead to increased ethnic awareness for a group, and thereby (possibly) lead to larger differences between groups? During the 1990s as well as before, the emotional and mobilising power invoked by an ethnic/racial rhetoric has repeatedly come to the fore. Should the borders between different ethnic groups be re-enforced with economic development, serious conflicts could arise. Many developing countries are far from “ideal” nation-states and comprise several ethnic groupings, much because of the colonial heritage. This makes the area an important one to study from the perspective of peace and development research.

2.1. Specific questions

- What aspects of the KD identity are being highlighted by the KD themselves, and how do the members distinguish themselves from other groups?

- How do the KD view and respond to development in Sabah and Malaysia?

2.2. Delimitations

The comprehensive nature of both the aim and the specific questions, combined with limited pre-knowledge because of lack of literature, makes for an explorative study. I will not be able to generalise my findings to the entire KD population, much less to minority groups elsewhere. Instead I aim to identify areas that can provide basis for further research.

Whether development has been good or bad for the KD is not the direct focus of this study. Nor will I try to directly present the impact of different development paradigms on indigenous populations. What I aim to do is see how the KD relate to development, and what importance this might have for their identity.

The relationship between the central government in Kuala Lumpur and the oppositional KD movement has been the focus of various studies.² It will be touched upon here in relation to issues of national integration as part of a development project, and the central government's role in the development of Sabah, but the functioning of the Malaysian democracy is largely beyond the scope of this study.

3. Plan of the essay

In order to make the essay a more accessible read, I have aimed to integrate most of the theoretical reasoning with the presentation of the results. This means that there is no separate chapter on theory, but there is nevertheless one on the concept of ethnic awareness. Inevitably, theories of ethnicity are present in this discussion as I try to present the perspective I have adapted on the issue. That chapter is followed by one on methodology. The analysis is then divided into three chapters. These chapters and subsections do of course reflect the way I have categorised the responses, and are not 'natural', although I hope they are at least illustrative. Having said this, the issues and themes are closely entangled with each other, and I have repeatedly made references to other sections. I hope this will not slow down the reading too much. Before the discussion on ethnic awareness, I will now offer a very brief background to the study, presenting Sabah and parts of its history in a schematic fashion.

4. Background

Sabah is one of thirteen States in the federation of Malaysia. It is located in the Northeast of Borneo, bordering the Indonesian state of Kalimantan, the Southern Philippines, and the Malaysian state of Sarawak (See Figure 2). The surface of Sabah is 73,619 square kilometres, and its population in 2000 was about 2.6 million (Malaysia, 2001b). Most live in or near the coastal

² See Chin (1997); Loh (1992); Luping (1994); Means (1991: 153-165); Mohammad (2000).

regions, as the interior areas are quite inhospitable with mountains and dense rainforests. The state capital is Kota Kinabalu, located on the west coast (See **Figure 1**).

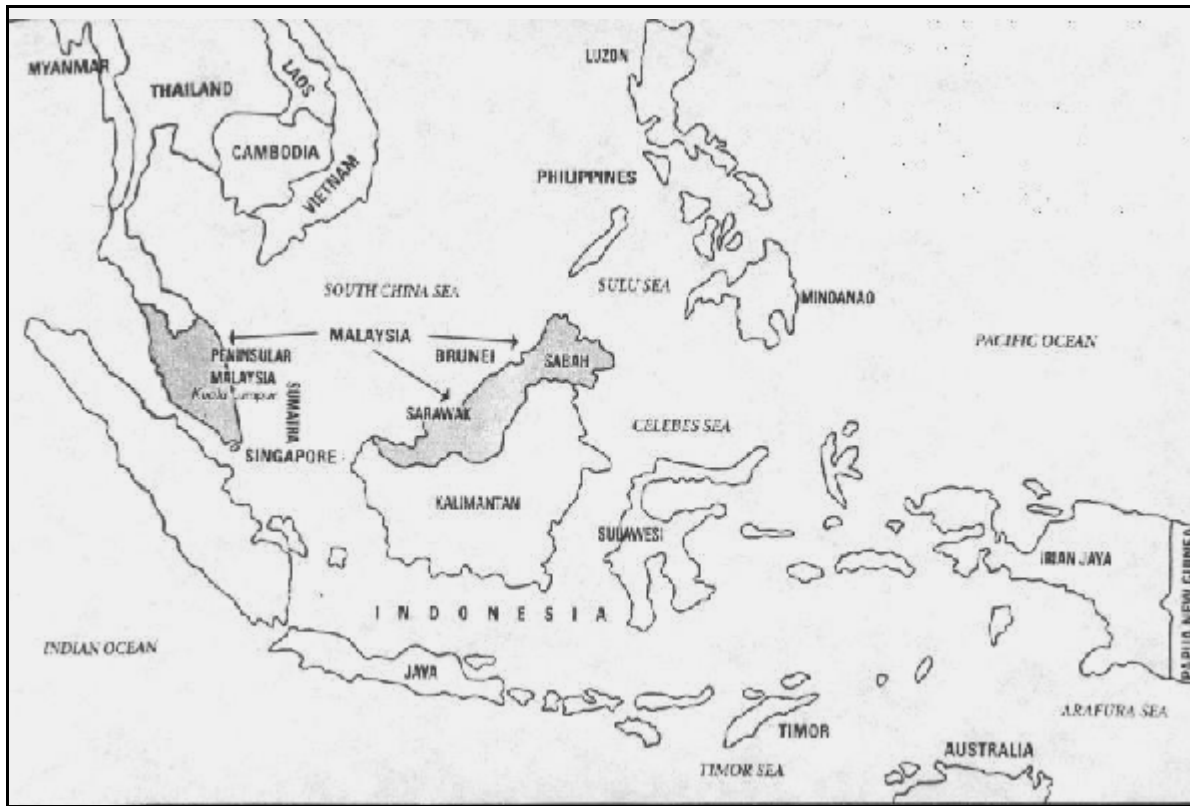


Figure 2: Location of Sabah

4.1. Sabah Becomes Malaysian - A Brief History³

In precolonial times, few ties existed between the Malayan peninsula and Borneo. With the ascent of the British as the foremost colonial power in the nineteenth century, what is today Sabah gradually became drawn towards what was to become Malaysia. Still it was not until after the Second World War that what was then North Borneo came under more direct British control. The Borneo states were however not included in the British proposal for a Malayan Union, which later became the Federation of Malaya. North Borneo and Sarawak were found to be too different from the peninsular states - culturally, politically and economically. Instead, they were administered as British Borneo.

When Malaya declared itself independent in 1957, the Borneo territories were quite naturally not included. It was, however, clear that North Borneo would eventually be cut loose from the

³ This section is based on Andaya *et al*, *op cit.*, except where otherwise noted.

British Empire (Roff, 1974: 42). The years under more direct British rule had served to lessen some of the differences between British Borneo and Malaya. It was still a surprise, though, when in 1961 *Tunku* Abdul Rahman, Malaya's Prime Minister, suggested the formation of a Malaysian Federation which was to include Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak, Brunei, and North Borneo (*ibid.*: 51).

The Federation of Malaysia was formed with Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and North Borneo (which changed its name to Sabah) on 16 September 1963. Brunei had declined the offer. An important bit of the agreement was the so-called Twenty Points, which gave the Borneo states special privileges. They are a continuous source of debate today. Because Malaysia is a federation, Sabah has its own State Assembly, and the most important post is that of chief minister in the State Cabinet.

4.2. Kadazan Dusun in Sabah

The KD Rise and Fall from Power

After British rule in Sabah was terminated, and Malaysia was formed, the KD Donald Stephens became Chief Minister. He had succeeded in uniting the non-Muslim indigenous population and enjoyed strong support for his party: The United National Kadazan Organisation (UNKO). After Singapore (which is predominantly Chinese) left in 1965 Stephens became more and more concerned that the KD (and all other non-Malay peoples) would play a subordinate role in the new state. After the 1967 elections, when Stephens's United Pasok-Momogun National Organisation (UPKO)⁴ fell back somewhat, the more Muslim-oriented United Sabah National Organisation (USNO) and its leader *Tun* Mustapha gained power in the state. Stephens then dissolved UPKO, asking its members to move into USNO and create a truly multiracial party (*ibid.*: 97).

Tun Mustapha did not seem to agree, but embarked on an intense Malayisation campaign, which was continued by his successor, *Datuk* Harris Salleh of the Berjaya party (Chief Minister 1976-1984). During this time the Kadazandusun language (then Kadazan) ceased to be taught in schools, to favour the adoption of Malay, or *Bahasa Malaysia* (literary,

⁴ In 1964 UNKO merged with the Pasok Momogun, another party based in the non-Muslim native population, which had been against the formation of Malaysia. The merged party took the name United Pasok-Momogun National Organisation (UPKO), with Stephens as leader. It is very telling of Sabah's volatile politics that since independence, only one party has survived more than three elections.

Malaysian language) as it is officially called (Loh *op cit.*: 230). The KD had effectively become a rather powerless group in the state, lacking leaders and organisation.⁵

KD Revival

In the early 1980s, the KD again became a political force in Sabah. The Kadazan Cultural Association (KCA) had been in existence since 1963, but had not been very active under the Mustapha government and the early Berjaya years. With the ascension of a new KD intelligentsia, its work intensified (*ibid.*: 241).

Several top figures in the KCA, including its president *Datuk* Joseph Pairin Kitingan, also worked in the ruling Berjaya party. Pairin became a state cabinet minister in 1980. However, after persistently raising several issues of concern to the KD community, such as preservation of language and culture, the work of “unqualified” Muslim missionaries and the large influx of illegal immigrants⁶, he started to come at odds with the Chief Minister Harris Salleh (Means *op cit.*: 156).

In June 1982, Pairin was ousted from Berjaya and his post in the Cabinet. Officially, he resigned from parliament, which meant that his seat in the State Assembly would be filled with a by-election.⁷ Pairin contested the election held in his home town of Tambunan (See **Figure 1**) and won a crushing victory. Back in the Assembly, Pairin formed a new party, Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS), which were to win the next state elections in 1986. Perhaps more importantly in this context, the Australian-educated lawyer was installed as *huguan siou* [paramount leader] of the KD in 1984. In the past, this title had been accorded to strong KD warriors by their own villages, but normally they would not be recognised as leaders outside of the village. In modern times, the title was first installed in Donald (Fuad) Stephens⁸ in 1964. When he died in a plane crash in 1974, it was not passed on until the installment of Pairin. The title carries no formal powers but considerable symbolic importance, and is given

⁵ Roff (1976), cited in Loh (*op cit.*: 230)

⁶ The illegal immigrants have become very unpopular among many Sabahans and are blamed for most things, among that increased criminality (Hassan 2000). Given their numbers this is perhaps not surprising. See also note # 26.

⁷ Harris Salleh submitted to the Speaker a signed and undated letter of resignation from Pairin, which stopped him from remaining in the Assembly as an independent. Similar letters had been asked by all Berjaya candidates in the election of 1981 (Means *op cit.*: 156).

⁸ Donald Stephens converted to Islam in the early 1970s, changing his name to Fuad.

for service to the people, and to a person judged a suitable leader (Loh *op cit*: 249; Pugh-Kitingan 1989: 362; Felix, int.).

With PBS in power and Pairin as chief minister, the KD community again had an important position in the politics of Sabah. Now followed some stormy years, with continued ruptures between the PBS government and the federal government in Kuala Lumpur. The low tide came in 1990, when PBS withdrew from the Barisan Nasional (BN) coalition one week before the federal elections. BN has governed the country since independence, and is dominated by the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO). The Prime Minister and chairman of the BN, *Datuk Seri* Dr. Mahatir Mohammad, accused Pairin of “a stab in the back”. Shortly after, several KD were detained under the Internal Security Act (ISA), accused of a plot to take Sabah out of the federation by armed struggle. Among them were Pairin’s younger brother, *Datuk* Dr Jeffrey Kitingan, and Benedict Topin, executive secretary of the Kadazandusun Cultural Association (KDCA).⁹ They were later released without ever being taken to court.¹⁰

PBS and Pairin managed to hold on to power in the state until 1994, when the BN retook government (see further p. 51). It seems that Pairin now has accepted that it is easier to work within the BN, and in early 2002, PBS was readmitted into the coalition, making the Sabah State assembly 100 per cent BN (*Daily Express*, 24 Jan., 2002.). It would appear that there has been another “rise and demise of Kadazan nationalism” as Roff (1969) termed the rise and fall of Donald (Fuad) Stephens. But this time the effect has been more profound. The PBS is still a working party (making it the most persistent in the history of Sabah)¹¹, and Pairin is still important as the *huguan siou*. The KD identity is still at the fore of many issues in Sabah, and the power-sharing agreement which the BN introduced in 1994 allows for a rotation of the chief minister-post between the Muslim bumiputeras, their non-Muslim counterparts (mainly KD), and the Chinese community. This increased importance of the KD identity is worth studying, and I will now elaborate on some theoretical and methodological tools for this.

⁹ KDCA is the new name of KCA. See p. 27.

¹⁰ Mohammed 2000: 527-30. For an insider perspective on conflicts during the PBS years, see Luping (*op cit*: 425-87). For a good comparative study of Kuala Lumpur’s dealings with ‘deviant’ states, see Chin (*op cit*).

¹¹ See note # 4.

5. A discussion on concepts

5.1. The Meaning of Ethnic

Many have previously written about questions involving an ethnic aspect, but more often than not have they failed to define the concept itself (Eriksen 1993: 4) I will try not to make the same mistake. A dictionary describes the word ‘ethnic’ as “of or relating to large groups of people classed according to common racial, national, tribal, religious, linguistic, or cultural origin or background <ethnic minorities> <ethnic enclaves>”.¹²

Constructivism and Primordialism

As can be seen from the above definition, the term ‘ethnic’ has to do with classification of people. If this is the case, the concept is only relevant in relation to an Other. This is a constructivist view of ethnicity, stating that ethnicity does not exist in isolation. If everybody in a hypothetical isolated village is seen as having the same ethnicity, the concept becomes obsolete. It does in a sense not exist. Herein lies the key to the perspective which sees ethnicity as a social construct, and not something which is inherent in every individual. It is always created in relation to another person or - more commonly - group (Eriksen *op cit.*: 11f). According to constructivists, such as the Norwegian anthropologists Fredrik Barth and Thomas Hylland Eriksen, there are no objective criteria for what makes people belong to different ethnic groups. The border between groups is ‘negotiated’ in social interaction, and consists of a set of symbolic differences - “ethnic markers” (see **Chapter 7**). These are not natural categories, and the content of a culture is not only created through interaction with other groups, but also within the group itself. Ethnic identity then also becomes situational, changing in importance and manifestation with different social contexts.¹³

Such a view of ethnicity is today the most common one among academics. However, this is not how it is perceived by the individual in everyday life. Ethnic identity can be highly emotional, much because it is seen as ancient (something which is shared with the ancestors) and unchangeable. It “...helps to explain origins... [and to] rationalize human destiny” (Fishman in Hutchinson *et al* 1996: 66).

¹² Merriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary is found at www.britannica.com.

¹³ See Eriksen (*op cit.*); Barth (1969a).

As a form of extended family, a system of kinship, our ethnic identity becomes deeply rooted in us. These aspects - the experience of belonging to a given culture, with values that are deep-rooted in the individual and in the communal sphere - are emphasized by writers such as Geertz.¹⁴ This school is labelled 'primordialist' and often accused of treating ethnic groups as given. This contrasts with the instrumentalist approach, which takes constructivism as its point of departure. It puts much emphasis on the role of elites, and how these can use ethnicity as a way of furthering their interests. Basically this weighs the costs against the benefits of participating in collective (ethnic) action, using variables such as private reward from participating (X_3), expected punishment for not joining (X_6), and likelihood of injury from participating (j).¹⁵ On average, an individual is expected to make a rational decision, participating when the benefits are greater than the costs. Although no one of course sits at home looking at this equation, it is supposed to make explicit the considerations influencing a decision. This rather brave, quantitative approach is quite typical of rational choice theory. Both these schools highlight important aspects. The primordialists alert us to the emotional experience of ethnicity, questioning whether it can really be used in a wholly instrumental way. In order to use ethnicity in such a manner, wouldn't the members of the elite have to detach themselves from 'irrational' ethnic sentiments? This is something which anthropologists and others penetrating the issues themselves find problematic in everyday life.¹⁶ In fact ethnic sentiments seem to lead many actors, including elites, into thoroughly irrational behaviour - with unforeseen and unwanted consequences. Certainly the instrumentalists also have a point - ethnicity *is* often politicised, and defining the contents of a culture can become important for holding power in a society. I also ascribe to their view that ethnicity is socially constructed.

5.2. Ethnic awareness

The nature of ethnicity should be the focus of further debate. BUT, from where the difference stems need perhaps not be of ultimate concern here. As a social science student, I am more concerned with how people act than how they are. And ethnicity is not just being, it is also

¹⁴ See Geertz in Hutchinson *et al* (*op cit*), for a further discussion.

¹⁵ Hechter *et al.* (1982: 419f) provide the equation trying to predict when ethnic collective action is likely to occur: $Y = (X_1 * Z + X_2)p + X_3 - X_4(1-p) - X_5 * j + X_6$

¹⁶ "Although I may know, on an epistemological level, that my identity is constructed from the mix of elements in my particular society, I do not, and I think, cannot, experience my identity as this fluid construction. On the level of experience, I must know myself as a stable self, as the entity that provides continuity to the disparate elements of my life, as the deep self who makes choices possible". Hekman (1999:19) quoted in Stern (2001:36).

doing - acting upon the supposedly ancient values and traditions of your own group (Fishman in Hutchinson *et al, op cit.:* 65).

When focussing on how ethnicity is manifested in action, the gaze is actually turned towards society at large. Because the changes in human actions must in some way be a response to changing conditions in society. Human society can be separated into a social and a material sphere, both arguably influencing each other.¹⁷ An occurrence of, or increase in, ethnic awareness, should thus lead to the conclusion that either the material conditions of society, or its social organisation, or both, have changed. This change could be a meeting between two formerly isolated cultures, but it could also be a change in the organisation of production, for instance. Before this change there might exist a difference and there might not - either way it is not relevant in society.

The concept of ethnic awareness is an attempt to draw from two different theoretical approaches, and to focus on the actions and not so much the nature of ethnicity. To see the ethnic awareness as a form of response to changing conditions is essentially a constructivist view. But because of the primordial sentiments invoked by ethnicity, I argue that this response need not be a conscious, or even rational, one. This makes it hard to ask what the 'ethnic awareness' manifested in action is meant to achieve. But this study is more about to what this awareness is a response. The main question is *why and how* differences have become important - what is the change induced in society?

5.3. Development

For this study I focus on changes brought about by economic development, and the means used to achieve this development. Like ethnicity, development is a fought-over concept. Most economists tend to work with the idea that economic growth equals development, as this normally raises the average living standard. To achieve this growth has been a major concern for decolonised nations and the means to try and achieve it have been numerous. The major aim has been to make markets function more effectively, changing from an economy of affection (family units, subsistence farming) to a more modern structure (based on profit-incentives, and normally with more manufacturing) (Ray 1998). This process has been

¹⁷ A Marxist would of course say that it is the material sphere that creates the preconditions and framework for the sphere of culture and ideas, whereas Weber is a well-known advocate for the preponderance of ideas over material conditions.

undertaken mainly within the borders of different states. While other (mainly socialist) routes have been tried, they have shared with the dominant paradigm the focus on modernisation, and the state as the main unit.

This study brings up some changes that are part of the process of development in Sabah¹⁸ and views the KD have on them. The study itself then becomes a way of problemizing development, highlighting issues that are not seen when one merely talks about economic growth and about development policies in terms of economic outcomes. It can therefore be read as an attempt to broaden and put the discussion on development into a context.¹⁹ Now follows a discussion on methodology, to further explain how I aim to do this.

¹⁸ Sabah is a rather distinct region in Malaysia, and the focus lies on the development of this state (which is also the only state where there is a significant KD population).

¹⁹ For more direct critiques of development theory, Hettne, B.: *Development Theory and the Three Worlds*, Longman: 1995; Sen, A. & Drèze, J.: *The Political Economy of Hunger*, Clarendon: 1991; and Ekins. P.: *A New World Order*, Routledge, 1991, are recommended.

6. Methodological Issues

The study deals with issues concerning identity and perceptions of development. These are difficult to quantify. The study is also an explorative one. To me it was quite natural to base it on a qualitative method, more specifically on longer, unstructured interviews. With an explorative study, you aim to identify the *categories and connections with which your respondents think about a subject*. The unstructured interview is well suited for this. With this form of interviewing, the interviewer stays as unobtrusive as possible, letting the respondent talk freely, provided that (s)he stays on the subject (McCracken 1988: 37-41).

6.1. The Interviews

The Sample

During my time in Sabah, I conducted interviews with nine respondents, all of whom belonged to the KD population. I was not looking for a random sample, but instead tried to find respondents as varied as possible. Not to be able to generalise the results to the whole population, but to try to cover in categories that might differ greatly in views on some issues, and thereby getting a somewhat broader picture. The variables I found most relevant (in no particular order) were education, gender, religion and residence (rural/urban). My logic was that the level of education can be taken to have a large influence on how we think on many issues. Gender and identity are often closely intertwined, and the large contrasts between rural and urban areas in Sabah made me suspect that it could also matter where the respondents lived. What concerns religion, it has often been lifted up as a main factor in the KD ethnic revival, but the fact that the KD comprises people of different confessions seems to have been little discussed (See further the section on religion, p. 28 onwards).

Having said this, urban, educated persons, are over-represented in the sample. Most of the respondents were also involved in NGOs in some way or another. These are the primary actors and promoters of KD 'identity politics' and I therefore found it most important to interview them. The language was also a factor. Since I do not speak Kadazandusun or Malay, all but two of my interviews were conducted in English. The language made also for a problem of access to non-English speaking groups; to get to them I had to go through someone else. Going through an interpreter would mean that the answers of non-English-speaking people would be "filtered" through a member of the "elite", who might influence them, and translate according to their own frame of reference. This was in fact the experience

I had during the interviews conducted in this manner. More information on the respondents is found in the appendix.

For some interviews, I relied on recommendations from my other respondents - a method known as snowball sampling (Bernard 1994: 97) - but I also tracked down some respondents independently (including the original referents, obviously). Even though a snowball sample is convenient in that it allows you to track down people you probably would not have been able to find otherwise, it can lead to a biased selection. I did find that the advantages were greater than the problems. I was also pleased to find that the people I was referred to seemed to know very little, if anything, about my project when I met them - indicating that they had at least not been “prepped” by my earlier respondents and their answers can therefore be treated as independent of the others..

Course of the Interviews

At the start of the interviews, I explained to the respondents that I was writing an essay about the KD and their views on development. The questions as such and the order in which they were posed were varied slightly from time to time. During a qualitative study with open-ended questions, there is little point in aiming for standardisation; the goal is to have the respondent speak extensively about a few subjects. This is done by prompting, and also by (where possible) phrasing the questions in a form of language the respondent communicates in (Troost 1997: 80). The questionnaire consisted of five “start-up” questions, which were to lead in on the subjects I wanted them to talk about:

- What is typically Kadazandusun?

I wanted to identify what ethnic markers there are, and it seemed like a good start to have the respondents recount some things they saw as signifying for the people.

- The history of the people.

This question was to see how the respondents would describe the KD as a people. Would ancient myths enter into the description? How would interaction with other groups (Malay, British, etc. be described?

- The changes that have taken place over time.

This is related to the former question, but it was more meant to bring out changes seen in modern times, and how they had been experienced by the respondents. I suspected that many of the changes would be related to economic development in some ways, since this has been a very rapid process in Sabah.

- The challenges for the community today.

This was an attempt to identify the problems the respondents saw in today's society, and it was somewhat overlapping with the previous theme.

- The view of challenges for Malaysia as a whole.

This was to see how the respondents related to the Malaysian state, and also to open up for larger issues that they perhaps felt were not relevant to bring up when discussing from a KD viewpoint.

The questions were thus quite broad in scope and the respondents were encouraged to talk freely, but I sometimes asked follow-up questions to have them elaborate further. For instance, when one respondent said that there were some universal values which should be preserved, I asked him what values, etc.

As far as the order of questions is concerned, the responses given on one of the themes normally connected with another theme - but not always in the same manner - which made the order in which the subjects were discussed somewhat self-evident during the course of the interview. Since people view things differently, this order tended to differ slightly.

Regarding the nature of the questions, I felt that the categories of questions I used were good because they mostly encouraged people to talk from their own experience. I did not ask directly about ethnic markers and economic development (using these terms). I did ask what separates the KD from the Malay and about changes and challenges for a KD community.

Three interviews differed from the others. In one I was only looking for some specific information that was most easily obtained through a talk with Mrs. Rita Lasimbang, Chief Executive Officer of the Kadazandusun Language Foundation (KLF). This interview thus served more as a part of the background review, and is not really comparable to the others. The two interviews conducted through an interpreter were shorter, and though they touched upon the same themes, I was not able to obtain the same loose structure and comprehensive

answers to the questions. They therefore did not contribute so much to the general analysis and I have not quoted from them, for instance. The questionnaire would probably have had to be reformulated further for these 'household interviews'. As far as I could tell, their views on the questions did not contrast radically with that of the English-speaking respondents, and they also gave me some valuable information about everyday life on the village level. However, there is definitely need for a study focussing on the larger population through a methodology different from the one I used.

The length of an interview was about one hour on average. Most were recorded on tape, and later transcribed by me. The fact that some time passed between recording and transcription carried the benefit that I during the latter process 'rediscovered' the responses, and was more alert to their content. On the other hand, I was unable to 'fill in' a few inaudible blanks which I might have remembered had the transcription been done straight away. I have not made efforts to correct the language of the interviews, thereby keeping the sense of spoken language. Longer pauses and hesitations have been made note of, as well as laughter etc.

On two occasions I did not use a tape recorder, and in one instance the recording is very noisy because of the fact that it was made in a house with several children. This poses a problem, but these were also the occasions where the "flow of speech" from the respondents was the slowest, because of the language. Thus, I was able to take rather precise notes, and in the latter case I could also use the recording as further reference. In these cases I did the write-up immediately.

6.2. The Analysis

When looking at the texts, then, there are a number of questions to ask:

(1) *How is the Kadazandusun identity portrayed in the texts (As an absolute? Are mainly positive aspects highlighted etc.)?*

This was an attempt to 'frame' the KD movement; to see what issues seemed to concern the respondents in relation to their identity as KD and to find how they looked upon themselves as members of a people.

(2) *How are development and its effects described?*

Since the study is trying to link the ethnic awareness amongst KD with development it seemed necessary to try and find how the KD described the process. What effects did they bring up? What did development mean to them as KD?

(3) *How do the KD situate themselves in relation to the larger society (Sabah, Malaysia, the World)?*

The KD do not live in isolation. How did the respondents look upon the larger structures (Local government and leaders, the nation, and perhaps even larger units.) that often control development to some degree? What did they seem to think was the role for the KD in all this?

When analysing qualitative data, one strives to identify themes and categories through which the respondents understand the world. After identifying the themes separately for the different interviews, one can look for both similarities and differences between the various respondents' way of thinking about an issue (McCracken *op cit.*: 44f). This can point to possible differences along the lines of gender, religion, etc.

Will I then be able to measure the influence of development (if any) on the ethnic awareness of the KD using these theoretical and methodological tools? No. What I hope is possible is to identify *possible* points of contact between the two. When looking for these points of contact, I am actually looking at how the KD describe and represent development - I am looking at discourses. This should not be surprising, since ethnicity itself is primarily a discursive practice, at least in my interpretation. This is basically a different way of saying that ethnic identity is a social construction and a process. It does not really have an objective basis (that is fixed), but is created through the discourse of ethnicity. This does not mean that you can opt out of your identity by refuting the discourse, but it does mean that this is nevertheless an existing possibility, if the dominant discourse was to change dramatically. I follow what might be termed a dialectical relationship between discursive and non-discursive practices, influenced by Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), in that I shall expect discourse (or discourses) to be shaped by, but also shape, the surrounding society - the world in which it is produced.²⁰For more on CDA, see eg. Fairclough, Norman (1992) *Discourse and Social Change*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

6.3. Some reservations

Have the respondents told me everything? No. In fact, some respondents openly declined answering certain follow-up questions. This is a sign of a lack of trust, but all the trust in the

²⁰Winther Jørgensen *et al* (2000: 67f) explains this in relation to Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), which is often used in the social sciences. However, Johnstone (2002: 29-62) provides a thorough and convincing discussion from a more standard linguist point of view.

world cannot make people tell you things they do not want you to know. In fact, openly declining to answer was to me a sign of greater trust than (seemingly) full compliance. At least the respondents did not try to trick me in these cases, saying one thing while thinking another - they just said nothing. In general the respondents were willing to talk about all subjects in an open manner. I owe them many thanks.

Most of the respondents had one thing in common: they wanted to bring forward the culture and interests of the Kadazandusun. This is also rather obvious with some literature. One respondent told me just after the interview was concluded:

I do believe that it is much easier for some of our leaders to listen to an outsider than for an insider to influence them. And this is where we hope for the global friendship to thrive...

— William

There was thus awareness of an opportunity to bring forward their view. But this is not so much of a problem, since it was precisely their view I was interested in. When this inside perspective is presented to a definite outsider like myself, an interpretation takes place. But it is precisely through this conflict in perspectives that knowledge can be discovered.

The interpretation is to some degree subjective, and so is the interview situation. It is an encounter between two people, and already in transcribing it, some of the original meaning is altered (Kvale 1996: 163). It could not even be exactly repeated by the same two people. The quotes that will be used are of course also open to interpretation by others, even though they are selectively chosen by me. It is of course in order to avoid making the whole thing into an entirely subjective exercise - a dialogue with my own self - that I have tried to present my method and reasoning as clearly as possible.

Is there a risk that patterns are invented by me in the process of interpreting the data? Yes. A neutral social science does probably not exist, and the interpreter of the data is hardly a *tabula rasa* (Strange 1988: 9-22; Ricœur 1981: 243-46). In fact, as Eriksen (*op cit*: 161) points out: “*If one goes out to look for ethnicity, one will ‘find’ it and thereby contribute to constructing it*”. As a student conducting a research project on ethnic awareness, then, I am myself to a degree confirming and strengthening this discourse. If I had entered the field with the aim to

look for class struggles, I would probably 'find' and contribute to constructing them. It does not hurt for the reader to be aware of this. Alternative approaches could have been adopted, highlighting other aspects of development and identity (one is of course never solely 'ethnic'). That does in my view not make this study less valid, however. One must just avoid the mistake of treating it as exhaustive. Having made these reservations, it is now time to enter the empirical phase.

7. Aspects of KD Identity

7.1. One People, or Two?

Before going in on the empirical material on KD identity, i.e. the interview responses, there needs to be a brief discussion on the people and what they actually call themselves. Articles have been written about the subject,²¹ and this is not a new one. To summarize, the battle lines lie between “Kadazan” and “Dusun”. Dusun means “orchard” in Malay, and was applied to what is today KD by colonisers and alike. Before this they do not seem to have had a common name for themselves. “Kadazan” was mainly used in the Penampang and Papar districts (See **Figure 1**), and were seen as a sub-group to Dusun. The origins of this label are unclear. Some claim it means “town” (Penampang being a relatively more urban environment) or refers to people of the coastal regions. Others claim it means simply “people” (Reid *op cit*: 126 f; Roff 1969: 327).²²

Dusun is thus an exonym, while Kadazan seems to be an indigenous term. When Donald Stephens in the 1960s somewhat united the people, he preferred to use the label Kadazan, since Dusun had connotations of ‘rural’ and ‘backwardness’ (Roff 1969: 330). Kadazan was then the most popular term for a long time, but the ‘Dusuns’ remained. In the 1980s, after the coming to power of the new hughuan siou, Pairin, there was a split in the community. This was between “Kadazans” and “Dusuns”. The Dusuns, normally of more interior areas, felt that Kadazan was a label that did not belong to them, and that it had given superior status to the peoples of Penampang and Papar. In the 1990 census the two denominations were separate categories (Malaysia 1995).

The leaders of the “Kadazan” movement, among them Pairin, went to great lengths to again unite what they saw as one people, now under the new label of Kadazandusun.²³ The KCA held a large conference in 1989, in the end defining Kadazandusun as a label comprising 40

²¹ Reid (*op cit*) and Stephen (2000) are two recent ones.

²² Tunggol (1999) (on the KDCA homepage) relates the meaning “people” to indigenous groups such as the inuits of Greenland, in a quite obvious effort to bring forward the ancient origins and indigeneity of the KD (cf. p. 44f). Still, the theory cannot be written off.

²³ In conjunction with the name change, Pairin stated: “My name is Pairin. I come from Tambunan. My birth certificate says that I am a Dusun. I am also known as a Kadazan and as a Bumiputra, a Sabahan and a Malaysian. All are acceptable to me”. *Daily Express*, 19 May, 1989, quoted in Reid (*op cit*: 134).

different dialectal and tribal groups (Stephen *op cit.*: 7). The organisation also changed its name to KDCA. The other major organisation, United Sabah Dusun Association (USDA), has all but ceased to exist.²⁴ In the 2000 census, the spelling I have adopted was used as classifier for a single group (Malaysia 2001b).

Just joining together two names into one can seem like an uncomfortable compromise, but has nevertheless caught on quite well. Almost all respondents talked of themselves and the people as KD, implying a will to see it as one people (see also p. 34). However, one termed herself a Kadazan (Lisa, int.), and two termed themselves Dusun (Jainab, int.; Noni, int.). This has very much to do with the place of residence. For people from Penampang, Kadazan is the preferred label, and in the interior rural areas like Ranau, Dusun is normally used (Pugh-Kitingan, pers. comm.). But they both see themselves as subgroups of the KD.

In the other interviews there were also occasions where people used the word Kadazan, though they were obviously referring to the whole KD group. James also used Dusun in this regard at one stage. My feeling was that this occurred when the respondents concentrated heavily on formulating their responses, and often when they were excited about something. It seemed that they then didn't think about the name so much. The KD label has been decided in a conference quite recently, and as people grew up they used one of the old terms. Many have used both. For example, Tambunan lies in the 'Dusun area' of the interior, but people who became educated and moved to the urbanised west coast, often started to prefer Kadazan, because of the connotations explained above.

7.2. Ethnic Markers

Now it is time to see what it was that these people saw as uniting for the KD. This builds on the concept of ethnic markers. Fredrik Barth (1969b:14f) was among the first scholars pointing to the fact that cultures are typically not created and maintained in isolation from other groups. Moreover, the cultural differences within a group might be very large. When talking about ethnic groups and their history it is not the same as talking about bearers of a culture - in fact; far from all of the cultural raw-material of an ethnic group is important. A group has continued to perceive itself, and to be perceived by others, as significantly different from other groups. This is based not on the entire "objective" cultural material, but on a set of

²⁴ *Daily Express*, 18 Mar. 2001 (Internet archives).

specific, symbols of difference - what Barth called ethnic markers. Typically these are things such as dress, language and lifestyle, but they also encapsulate a basic value system - there are differences in what is acceptable behaviour for different ethnic groups.

There are no obvious rules as to what factors will be emphasized in the ethnic relations, and they may very well change over time. What does prevail, according to Barth, is a border between groups. This nonexistence of objective criteria makes it possible to switch ethnic identities under some circumstances, for example through intermarriage (*ibid.*: 24f). In line with this reasoning, it is interesting to see what the KD view as particular for them, and what differences they see in relation to other groups. This goes to show something of the circumstances for the group and the individuals included therein; in what ways and what situations is their identity as KD still important?

Religion

Religion is often equated with ethnicity because they both provide answers to questions of origin. To the overwhelming majority of the world, they give answers to questions like 'Where do I come from?' (cf. p. 15) and create basis for a greater community (be it Catalonia or the 'ummah'). As Enloe (in Hutchinson *et al, op cit*: 199) points out: "*Many individuals behave as if their ethnic affiliation and professed religion is one and the same*". However, there are ethnic groups comprising people of several religions, but such groups seem to have more problems acting as a united force (*ibid.*: 202). And as will be seen below there are also some differences among the KD over this subject. But even though religion has importance for the individual KD and to some extent their group identity, it can clearly not be considered as a clear ethnic marker. Three religions - the Momolian, Christianity and Islam - coexist in a complicated mix.

Christianity/Islam

In Sabah, a line has traditionally been drawn between Christian and Muslim indigenous peoples. As part of their malayisation campaign the Berjaya government, and Mustapha before that, sponsored mass conversions to Islam among the groups of the interior areas.²⁵ They also actually encouraged the inflow of illegal immigrants, giving them Identity Cards and the right to vote in order to "win the census". The immigrants are almost entirely Muslim,

²⁵ All in all, the governments under Mustapha and Salleh claimed to have converted 56,112 people to Islam between 1970 and 1985 (Means *op cit*: 155).

and with their incorporation in society, the Muslim groups of the state would be able to hold on to power (Means *op cit.*: 159; Luping *op cit.*: 448).²⁶

The KD movement has in various studies been associated with Christianity. But nevertheless, all the respondents made comments in style with “*There are lots of different churches but they [the KD] are also Muslim*” (Lisa, interview). Some respondents were of course Muslim themselves, and still referred to themselves as KD or Dusun. A lot of people thus consider themselves, and are considered by others, as KD even though they are Muslim. The census of 2000 actually lists 100,968 KD as Muslim - around 21 per cent of the total (Malaysia 2001b). The switch in identities that Muslim leaders have been betting on does not seem to have occurred to any great extent. At least it is not willingly admitted by any respondent:

How can you change your race, just by changing religion? Of course, there is some misconception or misunderstanding even among the KD who have converted to Islam, because people tell them that: ‘Because now you are a Muslim, and therefore you are no longer a Kadazan’. You are a Bajau, or a Malay - whatever race they want to name them. But this is for people who are easily... what do you say... who easily believe what people tell them.

— Gintin

This respondent strongly believed that the ethnic (she would say ‘racial’) identity was in the blood and could not be changed, merely forgotten. She did not think that ascription (‘what people tell them’) should be relevant to ethnic identity, although still admitting that this was sometimes the case. Of course, if this attitude is widespread, it would prevent a KD who converts to Islam from becoming part of another group precisely because of ascription - people do not tell them this, and they themselves do not think so. That quite a few of the respondents had a rather primordial view of culture could indicate that this is the case; one does not cease being a KD by converting to Islam - the identity is to some degree in one’s blood. But still there is a possibility of losing the culture, so the identity is not only biological. You also have to ‘act KD’ to some extent. Again, this is complicated. Contemplate this statement:

²⁶ The number of foreigners present in Sabah at the time of the census in 2000 was 614,824, or 23.6% out of a total population of 2,603,485. This is most likely an underestimation, since citizenship was not controlled for other than in survey questionnaires. Estimates of *illegal* immigrants vary from 300,000 to 500,000 (Malaysia 2001b; Kitingan *et al* 1989b: 453; Cleary *et al* 1995: 92; Mohammed 2000: 519). See also p. 39.

...people might not consider me a traditional Dusun, you know, because I've given up drinking. I don't drink. — James

The Muslims have of course all given up drinking, but the rice wine (and today also beer) still features prominently in many KD traditions. The Muslims have of course had to change these practices. It is more than likely that there are then nevertheless some that consider them not to be traditional KD.

Felix did make a distinction between Kadazan Dusun and Muslim (he himself followed the traditional religion), with regards to profession, claiming that the KD are farmers to a larger degree than the Muslim. The variations in importance of religious affiliation could also be related to where you live. There are some areas that are more Muslim and some that are more Christian. In some interior areas, like Ranau, Islam is quite common among the population, out of which KD is by far the largest group. In Kota Belud on the other hand, there is a large Bajau population, together with a predominantly Christian KD group (Malaysia 1995). It is not unlikely that a conversion to Islam under such circumstances will be conceived as something like 'switching sides'. But this does not explain why the Muslims of Ranau are still seen as KD by their Christian counterparts in other districts. There must be some other markers to look for.

Momolian

In terms of religion, the traditional, animistic *Momolian* is not forgotten. The practices and legends of it live on in the Kaamatan - the main KD event of the year, which celebrates the completion of the rice harvest. The festival is held throughout May in the different districts of Sabah and concluded with a large gathering at the KDCA headquarters in Penampang. It is the most important event of the year for the KD (regardless of their religion), and is now a national holiday. In May it completely dominates public life in Sabah. A Chinese friend viewed it, and described it to me as "*the Christmas of the KD*".

Before 1982, the festival was normally held only at district level, as a coming-together for the different villages after harvesting was finished, to celebrate a work well done. In addition to the ceremonies paying homage to the Spirit of rice, games were held, and large quantities of rice wine were consumed.

The Importance of the Kaamatan

Loh (*op cit*) claims that the Kaamatan has important symbolic value for the community, and that it has sometimes played an important political role in the state, as it did in 1982. Having been a statewide holiday since 1961, it was declared a festival for all Sabahans by the Berjaya government in 1981. The KCA had previously organised district-level Kaamatan celebrations, but this was the first statewide one. The *Yang diPertuan Agong* or King of Malaysia was invited to the event. But more importantly, the traditional ceremonies performed by the KD *bobohizan* (traditional priestesses), honouring the spirit of the rice, were omitted from the programme. The admission to the statewide event in Keningau (See **Figure 1**) was also restricted for security reasons, because of the participation of the king (*ibid.*: 245).

This was met with discontent by many KD, and the KCA decided to organise their own statewide celebration together with the USDA. However, the Deputy Chief Minister, James Ongkili, himself a KD and in charge of the government-sponsored event,²⁷ ordered government representatives to boycott it, and the media was not allowed to cover it. The KCA and USDA went ahead with the festival in Tambunan, which is the home village of Josef Pairin Kitingan and with a predominantly KD population. Here, the traditional ceremonies were performed, and the festival was a big success. It was described as a great moment of unity for the Kadazans [sic] (*ibid.*: 246ff).²⁸ It was also a factor in the exclusion of Pairin from the Berjaya party (see p. 16).

Since then, the KDCA always arranges a state-level Kaamatan. An originally religious event has thus taken on political proportions.²⁹ It has become an opportunity to express one's 'KD-ness' and to fully experience belonging to this (imagined) community; sharing the rituals with their ancestors and thereby creating a sense of an eternal identity (Anderson 1991). It is more visible than before, but this has also led to some changes. Far from all KD participating in

²⁷ In fact, Ongkili was also patron of the KCA at this time.

²⁸ The festival was also commemorated and glorified in KCA (n.d.).

²⁹ Actually, there are two conclusions held on two different days: May 30 and 31, both of which are public holidays. The first day the festival is at the KDCA building, and the second day it is held at the Sabah Cultural Centre, also in Penampang. This second day of festivities is organised by the State government. This came about when PBS (whose president, Pairin Kitingan is also KDCA president) was ousted from government in 1994. The different arrangers held separate beauty competitions and mutually ignored the other's event until the year 2001, when the Chief Minister *Datuk* Chong Kah Kiat and other leaders visited the KDCA celebration, followed by a visit by Pairin to the Cultural Centre the following day (*Daily Express*, 1 June, 2001). Still the KDCA event is more popular, and one KD lady told me in conversation the days before that "*the second day is not really... it's too much politics, we just stay home and drink*".

the festival are farmers these days, and the conclusion in Penampang has grown into a large spectacle, attracting many members from the other ethnic communities as well as tourists. A lot of modern features have been introduced - karaoke singing and a highly anticipated beauty contest, for example.³⁰ This is a step away from the original meaning of the festival. The focus becomes on the “*merrymaking*” (Lisa, int; Felix, int.) instead (see further p. 42). But the traditional ceremonies are also still performed by the remaining bobohizan. These do not seem to have changed, perhaps because these traditional priestesses and priests are still firm believers in the old religion, and not just ceremonial masters.

Nunuk Ragang

Another element of the Momolian that has important symbolic value is the story of ‘*Nunuk Ragang*’. The Nunuk Ragang is a giant (mythic) tree, located in Sabah’s Ranau region, from where the KD are thought to have originated. The story is told in such publications as *Our Cultural Heritage* (KCA *op cit.*), and there is a monument of it where the KDCA holds a gathering every year. The story is important, because it depicts the KD as one people with one common origin. Interestingly enough, before the birth of any stronger KD ‘nationalism’, the story was actually described as a crucial ethnic marker:

The Dusuns themselves, while they have no common name in their own language, do recognise all other groups of Dusun who came from the legendary village of Nunukaragan as their own people. Those who do not come from Nunukaragan are not Dusun. As far as I am able to ascertain, this criterion does effectively distinguish the group to whom the term Dusun is now commonly applied (Glyn-Jones 1953: 117, quoted in Reid (*op cit.*: 122)).

The issue of origin has thus been central in determining who is a KD. This corresponds well with Geertz’s thoughts of a ‘sociologically real kinship’. Meaning that even though you cannot show that you are related to the other members of the group, other than your nearest family, you ‘know’ that this is the case and act accordingly (Geertz in Hutchinson *et al, op cit.*: 43). It was naturally a suiting story to recount in order to unite the KD in the 80s, as Loh

³⁰ The beauty contest, or *Unduk Ngadau*, probably evolved from the costume competitions, where young girls exhibited the traditional costume of their village. In 1958, the Unduk Ngadau was introduced at district level by the KCA, to “help the girls overcome their shyness”. Now, the dresses have been standardised and the focus is clearly on the girls, not the costume (Pugh-Kitingan 1989: 371). Additional beauty pageants are also held every week in May, arranged by various shopping malls, etc. These have little to do with any KD traditions, and are open to all girls, except Muslim ones.

(*op cit*: 241f) has pointed out. But it was important also before then, as the above quote shows. The myth gives the KD a sense of having their own, unique history as the indigenous people of the state - that they belong to Sabah and Sabah to them. A theory that they should be descendants of early Chinese migrants has by contrast been rather vehemently opposed at times (Ongkili 2000).

The Difficulties of a Religious Mix

Since most KD today are Christian or Muslim, there are complications when it comes to uniting behind features of the old belief system. Two of my respondents talked in a very derogatory manner of people following the Momolian, referring to them as having “*no religion*” (Gintin, int.; Abdullah, int.). It would seem that they saw the acquiring of modern religion as a step in an process where the KD become ‘enlightened’, i.e. incorporated in more dominant ways of viewing the world.

One respondent who did have the traditional belief admitted that the interest people showed for it was often “*on the surface*” (Felix, int.). To him and also to Lisa, it was obvious that the continuity with the past had been somewhat broken with the introduction of Christianity and Islam.

Some people seem to regard the Momolian more as a symbol for KD identity and unity, whereas others express concern about the altering of it as damaging to this identity. But there is a spectre of opinion. It would be wrong to say that all meaning has been lost on the symbolists - it is more a question of what the respondents lift to the fore. This is of course somewhat dependent on their own religious belief.

Language

According to theory, language is often an important ethnic marker, and researchers have often used language as a way of drawing borders around the KD community. The Dusunic³¹ language family is diverse, comprising 14 different dialects, the dominant of which is Kadazandusun (Pugh-Kitingan 1989: 359). This diversity complicates things; instead of a factor of unity the language can be a source of conflict and disintegration. It was a major factor in the Kadazan/Dusun debate when the standardisation of the common language (then

³¹ ‘Dusunic’ is the label which still applies to Kadazandusun and related languages. It is a remaining term from when ‘Dusun’ was the name used for the people today known as KD. Please refer back to p. 26.

called Kadazan) was based exclusively on the coastal dialects. There have been changes in spelling to accommodate this, though (Reid *op cit*: 133). My respondents explained that there were small differences between the different dialects, and that they could all understand each other. In their way of putting it, there was no question that the KD were one people with one language. Says Felix: *“There are some changes in dialect between districts... the culture is the same”*.

Today Kadazandusun is the name of the standardised language, and it is now taught in schools as “student’s own language”. This was the result of intense lobbying from KD organisations, fearing that the language was eroding away (William, int.; R. Lasimbang, int.). The fact is that even though the language is given room in the media (newspapers and radio) and in the school system, fewer and fewer parents seem to speak it to their children at home. Even in remote KD villages, a mixture of Malay and Kadazandusun, or just Malay, is used (R. Lasimbang, int.; Noni, int.; Jainab, int.). Many respondents were worried that the language was disappearing:

Sometimes they [the KD] don’t know their own culture. Especially the young generation nowadays - they don’t even speak their own mother tongue. — Lisa

Both the culture and the language are here seen not merely as changing, but are becoming lost. The KD’s ‘own’ culture is being replaced with another, and it seems that to this respondent, the disappearance of the language is the ultimate example of this. According to Stephen (*op cit*: 10) there have been cartoons in the local newspapers ridiculing KD that don’t speak the language. The intense battle to save it from extinction would suggest that it is very important for the group identity. To know the language clearly makes one ‘more’ KD. Today, when the language is taught in schools on all levels, it is also possible for those who do not know much to learn it as adults, thereby making a statement about wanting to retain a KD identity. One respondent thought that her own Children would do so - but she herself had always spoken to them in Malay (Noni, int.).

The Value System - ‘adat’

Cultural practices and values are by KD referred to as *adat* - a sort of customary rights system which applies to the KD, guiding every major aspect of their life. It was referred to in some

form by all the respondents. Many talked of the need to still follow the adat. It was mostly mentioned in conjunction with a discussion on modernity and responses to it, and will therefore be further discussed below, where I will try to lay out how the KD view and respond to development. Suffice it for now to say that the adat can function as an ethnic marker, in that at least parts of it are well-known and actively promoted. The question is again complicated by religion, since the practices of the adat are related to rituals of the Momolian (Tongkul 2002: 16f). Christian and Muslim respondents did however not see any major conflict between their religion and the basic values of the adat. What values they brought up will be further discussed below.

Agriculture and the Growing of Rice

Most KD are still living off of farming, and this was constantly brought up in the interviews. One respondent referred to himself as a “*farmer’s boy*” when asked about his place of birth (James, int.). All the respondents made some mention of agriculture, but in different contexts. For some, it was still the livelihood of the family. But also for the more urbanised people, it was treated as a fundamental part of the KD identity.

When asked about challenges for the community, all respondents made some mention of agriculture. Sometimes directly - they saw a great need for irrigation, for example (Felix., int.). However it was also mentioned as a safety cushion, something which did provide them with the “*basic necessities*” (James, int.), something they were “*very good at*” (Lisa, int.). Either way, in the respondents’ view the future of the KD was in some way related to the future of agriculture (see further **Chapter 8**). This coincides well with the classification of the KD as an indigenous group. Such a group is defined as having traditional forms of production, such as subsistence farming and hunting, and not with the capitalist logic of profit maximisation (Eriksen *op cit*: 125).

The Momolian is centred around the growing of rice, and the crop still has a special meaning to many KD. “*We have been taught from very small that rice is a sacred crop*”, says Gintin, and she went on to tell the legend of its creation through God’s³² sacrifice of His only daughter. A story also told by another Lisa, and remembered in the Kaamatan. Rice does not only have an economic meaning for the KD, they see it as part of their culture.

³² ‘God’ was here referring to ‘Kinarangan’ of the Momolian belief.

7.3. Struggle for Symbols

There seems to be a struggle to define the “cultural content” of a KD identity. The above discussion on the role of Momolian is one example, and the Kadazan/Dusun debate is another one. Such a struggle over symbols within a group can be an important part of ethnic group formation. The struggle between different groupings within one identity framework follows from the fact that ethnicity is not based on objective criteria, but is to some degree defined by the group members themselves. Alternative definitions and perspectives then necessarily exist.

The struggle normally takes place between elites, who are also the ones representing the community in dealings with the government, media, etc. These serve to vitalise ethnic identities, making them a basis for political mobilisation (Brass 1991: 276-93). Again this does not mean that the elite groups can act completely independently of ‘the people’, nor does it mean that their sole purpose is to gain power. To them as much as to other group members, it is a matter of identity issues that are highly emotional (see p. 15f). The main difference lies in the possibilities to define a culture, which is greater for elites due to higher education and so on, but also by support from a population which has often entrusted them with this capacity (cf the practice of electing the huguan siou, p. 13f).

The KD do constitute a diverse community, and the split into different religions makes the overarching identity even more complex. However, the interview responses seem to point out some factors that are important in the definition of KD identity: a lifestyle based related to agriculture, the Kadazandusun language, ancient religion and myths, combined with a value system: adat. Physical features were dismissed as an identifier. Says Abdullah: “...*a number of KD just look like Chinese. Some look like the Malays - all mix*”. Nor do the KD wear ‘ethnic clothing’ in everyday life. But if someone, for instance, stopped celebrating the Kaamatan, (s)he would probably no longer be considered a true KD. It is now time to look at how the KD relate to economic development.

8. Development and the KD

8.1. Sabah Losing Ground

In 1990, Sabah was in fact one of only four states with a Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita higher than the national average (Pang 1992: 72), but growth slowed considerably during the 1990s. With the Asian Currency Crisis, GDP shrank for two years, and a more normal growth rate of 3,6% was not attained again until the year 2000.³³ This was also well below the national growth rate of 8,3%. Sabah has consequentially slipped in per capita income to the Malaysian average.

Despite performing rather well on per capita GDP, Sabah has maintained a high rate of poverty, well over the Malaysian average (See Table 1). Poverty is most common in the rural areas, home to much of the indigenous population. Although these groups might live off subsistence farming and not really fit the profile conceived for poverty measurement (no monetary income, etc.) it nevertheless shows large disparities within the society.

Table 1.

Incidence of Poverty for Sabah and Malaysia (%), 1976-1999

	1976	1987	1999
Sabah	51.2	35.3	20.1
Malaysian average	37.7	20.8	7.5

Sources: Pang *op cit*; Malaysia 2001a

8.2. Changes in Land Use

As seen above, the KD associate themselves with the role of the farmer. Their main feast is governed by the crop cycle for rice. As time goes by, agriculture, and particularly the growing of rice for subsistence needs is clearly decreasing in importance.

You see, around here [in Penampang], this area supposed to be padi³⁴ field before, and it produced rice for them all... But now it's already - what do you call it - reclaimed area. They changed [...] into industrial, residential, so there's no more farmers.

— Lisa

³³ Institute for Development Studies (IDS) homepage.

³⁴ 'padi' = rice

There are, of course, still farmers. Palm oil has in fact been Sabah's major source of export revenues in the 1990's. And as mentioned above, farming is still the main means of livelihood for the KD. But the conditions for farmers have changed. Interventions by the government in this sector have mainly been aimed at commercial crops such as oil palm and cocoa. The degree of success has been varied, and efforts to increase productivity of rice cultivation by introducing new varieties have also encountered problems based on insufficient pre-knowledge (Pugh-Kitingan, 1989: 383). The goal of self-sufficiency for rice has been abandoned. As Kaur (1997: 186) notes, the government's policy of land settlement schemes has been criticised for requiring a "*drastic break with past practices*".

These past practices involve shifting cultivation, unpopular with the government, which claims it has a negative impact on the environment and possibilities for future cultivation. However, much is dependent on the population pressure and land availability, and the government's position probably has more to do with logging considerations (Cleary *et al*, *op cit.*: 108 ff; Kaur *op cit.*: 198). A change has clearly taken place in how the land is used. Not only have the rice fields been converted into an urban environment, but also into logging concessions and natural reserves, often without compensation to the indigenous people (Lasimbang 2000: 260f).

There thus exists a land conflict of the kind Eriksen (*op cit.*: 129) claims can trigger an ethnogenesis among indigenous peoples; the (nation) state seeks to control resources traditionally accruing to the indigenous population, particularly land. Besides from the above quote, however, the issue was not so much brought forward in the interviews. William (int.) claimed that illegal immigrants were appropriating the land, and Felix (int.) said that there wasn't enough land to support the population of the village without irrigation. Agriculture was typically not spoken of in its strict economic function, but more as a part of the culture and lifestyle (There were different views on in which way, though. See further p. 42f). That a land conflict did not feature too prominently in the responses might have been because the respondents were mostly urban-based and did not live off the land anymore.

8.3. Urbanisation

Another explanation offered to why people were being 'driven' off the land was instead the decreasing sustainability of agriculture, and the attractiveness of a modern, urban living

(James, int.; William, int.; Felix. int.). The annual urban population growth in Sabah has been significantly higher than that of Peninsular Malaysia, and also higher than the rest of Borneo (See Table 2). More than twenty per cent of the state's population now live in Kota Kinabalu (Cleary *et al, op cit*: 114). Urbanisation is a common feature of economic development. Cities have traditionally been associated with modern, capitalist production, and as population pressure rises in the country-side there will be a migration of labour to the cities (the dual economy model) (Ray *op cit*: 340-98). Many respondents had themselves chosen the urban life, but they saw many problems with it, claiming that there were no jobs for the youth coming into town.

Table 2.

Annual Urban Population Growth rates, 1981-2000

	1981-85 ¹	1995	2000
Sabah	7.3	7.7	4.9
Malaysia	-	4.8	3.8

¹: Averaged measure

Sources: Cleary *et al, op cit*; Malaysia 2001a

In Sabah, the question of immigrant labour features prominently in this equation. The shortage of labour and the relatively high wages in Sabah has lead to a large influx of immigrants from Indonesia and the Southern Philippines. These have been able to find work in plantations, the construction sector, and other low-paid, low-status jobs. The lack of border controls in the state makes it easy to enter for illegal immigrants, and in the past, authorities were also lax on immigration for political purposes. The illegal immigrants probably number around 300,000 or more.³⁵ This serves to keep the wage level down for uneducated labour, creating less incentive for subsistence farmers and rural dwellers (mostly indigenous) to seek work in the modern, manufacturing sector. After many years of large immigration, there also seems to be a feeling that some work is 'only for Filipinos'.³⁶ The alternatives for the KD and other groups then become fewer, with increasing insecurity as a consequence:

³⁵ See note # 26

³⁶ Personal communication with a number of Sabahans.

We know in the past that, at the end of harvesting season, we have a ready store for rice - enough for one year. But nowadays [...] sometimes when the rice is finished, we cannot... it's becoming a problem for quite a number of families... — William

8.4. Responses to modernity

The economic problems arising from a rapidly changing economic structure are one thing that certainly needs further study. But it is somewhat outside the scope of this text. What needs to be more commented on is that an agricultural lifestyle seemed to constitute an important part of KD identity, and how the KD I interviewed found it necessary to respond to this and other challenges.

Internal and external values

All respondents expressed concern that the changes meant new challenges. They feared that a lack of jobs drives the youth into vices such as drug use and other criminal activities. There have been and continue to be rather significant squatter areas in Kota Kinabalu. These are now being targeted by authorities. But poverty is even more significant in the rural areas (Cleary *et al*, *op cit*: 132), where there are also a lot of social problems, according to Lisa (int.). Still most respondents put the problems in relation to the city life. They felt that the *adat* needed to be revived among the youth:

For the city dwellers, the *adat* is still important. When they follow the *adat* they feel they belong to humankind - so that they don't poison themselves. — Felix

The vices were to the respondents a part of the modern society, which the youth had difficulty resisting without 'proper moral education' - be it in the rules of the *adat* or through Christianity (William, int.). Respondents talked of the *adat* as 'faded' or 'eroded away'. This was in conjunction with other aspects of the culture being lost. Economic changes, and the above-mentioned urbanisation were seen as contributing factors:

I think [...] after the old generation has gone and the new generation takes their place [...] then there will be even more individualistic attitudes. Which is characteristic of the more urban life, I think [...] People can be sticking to themselves, so it will be harder for community work to be carried out [...] Traditionally they all used to do things together as a community". — James

It is a challenge, because when you convert a lot of your value system into monetary things, into material things, then we get a break from the real values of what is... erm... again speak of human values they tend to be... underrated I'd say. — William

Here one can see how solidarity and other positive 'human values' are connected with the 'traditional' way of living. In the narratives, the community is then broken up by the urban, modern lifestyle. The talk of a break suggests that modernity does not have much to do with the tradition of the KD. The cash economy was not of the KD's making and might have had little to do with their perspectives on values. This view of a break is common in colonial societies (Arce *et al* 2000a: 5) and we saw the same notion in relation to the government's agricultural policy. It is also shown by the fact that many respondents talked of the KD as 'exposed':

So they [the British] give school [...] and then the KD start going to school, then they learn, and then comes the independence and then comes politics. All these changes [...] Then the KD start being educated - and exposed. And as a result they become more sophisticated. — Abdullah

This respondent saw the process of exposure as having generally positive effects - the sophistication of KD - though he recognised that it had brought with it complications in the political field. Another respondent also used exposure in a positive sense, saying that it had made him able to "distinguish what is important" in the KD culture, meaning he could now see positive values (solidarity, oneness with nature) that were lacking in society at large, but that were part of the KD value system (James, int.). Whether positive or negative, the use of the term exposed seems to imply that the changes were brought on from outside, and that the group had little control over it themselves. Being exposed also implies not being able to escape this process (cf. the expression 'exposed to the sun').

Integration, or rejection, or both?

The respondents largely agreed on the need to preserve the adat. But their views differed on what the changes and 'exposure' meant for the culture at large, and this was dependent on the way the respondents viewed the tradition/modernity issue.

... there is a certain element in the modern, digital life system where we simply have become... a little part of the object of it [...] if it is bad we become victim, if it is good we become part of the system.

— William

This respondent sees ‘being part of the system’ as a good thing, despite highlighting many negative aspects of it. Again, the respondent sees the KD as an object, implying also here a rule by external forces. But this is not a perpetual situation. In his view, the KD could become active subjects, improving their standard of living without losing their culture. But some were more negative towards modernity, claiming that these changes in livelihood threatened the grounds of KD culture:

... once you change your lifestyle - like for us before we are farmers. So when you do not have this kind of lifestyle also our identity, our culture will change. Because we cannot practice it anymore.

— Lisa

This respondent sees agriculture as something more than simply a method of subsistence like any other. She clearly sees it as the foundation of KD identity, and the threat of it disappearing then becomes a direct threat also to their culture. It implies that there is something of a material basis for culture, so it will inevitably change if/when the living conditions change. This respondent also saw the present-day Kaamatan as “*all commercialised*” and thought that “*the spirit of thanksgiving [towards the Spirit of rice] is lacking*”.

Two of the others can be said to have adhered to the above, ‘essentialist’, view, meaning that in order to maintain some positive aspects of KD identity, they should still be able to farm the land. These two were not as critical of the Kaamatan, which Felix thought was “*good because it displays unity*”.³⁷ The other respondents saw culture in more symbolic terms. This quote can be said to represent their view:

Part of the reason why we [the KDCA] want to maintain as it is [the culture], is because of identification. We want to be known as KD, and whatever we do [...] it must be original. Because we believe that that’s the only way to identify us.

— Abdullah

³⁷ The third respondent with a more essentialist view was James.

To this respondent, the culture was primarily symbolic and a way of expressing particularity (cf. *Difficulties of a religious mix*, p. 33). The practices should ‘be original’ to ensure this, but he did not see the original meaning of them as too important. This maintaining of cultural symbols need not contrast with a changing lifestyle. To tie back to the first quote of this section, the KD could become parts of the system without losing their culture, if they only made efforts to preserve it. In contrast, to the first-mentioned group, the whole of the traditional lifestyle was seen as having some positive qualities, such as solidarity and respect for nature and other humans. These would be difficult to maintain if their way of life changed too much. Says James (int.): *‘In a way, the community way of living will probably lessen the impact of individualism’* (cf quote p. 40). One of the respondents (Felix) had himself chosen to live off of farming, even though he had had access to education.

From Modernity to modernities

It is not surprising that the KD criticise aspects of modernisation. The influential work by Castells (1997) presents “identity politics” as a reply to the increasing uncertainties and disappearing safety nets created by the spread of volatile global capitalism.³⁸ But the element of ‘anti-modernism’ in the way the respondents talk about urbanisation and changes in the economic structure does not mean that they are against modernisation and development. Such a simplified statement would make the mistake of assuming that the KD are passive absorbers of (Western) modernity. Their efforts to reconnect with a past are a way of reshaping modernity - a way of connecting modernity and development to their own ‘roots’ (Arce *et al*, *op cit*: 10) - through maintenance of the adat or through a more solidarity-based lifestyle for example. It is an interesting twist that these roots are also reshaped when confronted with modernity. Firstly, some aspects are highlighted (e.g. positive values) while others are less talked about. Secondly, the past is described using modern concepts. The concept of solidarity, for instance, is used in light of the present situation and might not have been relevant in the old days.

³⁸ Castells does in fact not see ethnicity as the ideal bearer of such resistance, but claims that some unifying force like religion is needed. He builds this on a rather cloudy analysis of ethnicity, following largely a primordial perspective in making the claim that ethnic groups need to have a continuity with the past. This is not

There is not a uniform 'KD way' of seeing these issues, but several. Both when it comes to representing the past and the present, there are differences among the respondents. One might identify two separate discourses in viewing the changes:

- Those who saw agriculture as fundamental to the culture can be said to have a more clear view of KD as an indigenous people, who should retain their way of life, somewhat in opposition to the dominant modernism and developmentalism.

- The others saw it more necessary that the KD take part on equal conditions in modernisation, so as to benefit from the good bits, at the same time retaining their group identity through cultural symbols and the adat.

The second perspective closely follows the notion that the KD are the 'definitive' people of Sabah, promoted by some leaders in the 1980s (Reid *op cit.*: 122). They are the largest indigenous group of Sabah, just as the Malays are on the peninsula,³⁹ and they should therefore be the governing people of the state. 'Indigenous' in a Malaysian context means that the group was settled in the region before colonialism, and it is closely connected to the bumiputera label. This differs from the academic notion of an indigenous people as non-dominant group, living in a somewhat alternative structure. This is followed more closely by the essentialists. For all respondents, it is natural to refer to KD as indigenous, but the meanings they give this are somewhat different, it seems. There are clear parallels with the differing views of traditions as symbolic or more fundamental (see p. 43).

8.5. A cautious note: The 'image' of Indigenous Peoples

The indigenous label matters, and therefore the above distinction is important. Much attention has been focussed on indigenous groups (in the academic sense), with the United Nations proclaiming 1993 the year of the indigenous populations of the world.⁴⁰ In the West, there is a tendency of seeing these populations as victims of the modernisation process, subsequently

possible in what he calls the network society.

³⁹ It is important to point out that there has never been a large group of Malays in Sabah. The Malays normally lived on the Peninsula. However, according to the Malaysian constitution, a Muslim who speaks the Malay language can be classified as Malay, and many Muslim indigenous groups choose to refer to themselves as such (cf *Christianity/Islam*, p. 28ff).

⁴⁰ We are also still living in the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (1994-2003). See UN (1994).

imposed on them by colonisers, the central government, and transnational corporations (Wilmer, 1993: 52-55; 128-131). It is also asserted that indigenous groups are bearers of positive values that should become norms for a global society not based on profit-seeking and depletion of resources (*ibid*: 198ff). On these grounds they have often been able to ally with environmentalist groups and the global solidarity movement around issues involving development and modernisation.

Whether the indigenous image is true or not, the KD definitely seem to appeal to it, describing past as one of harmony with nature and solidarity with each other.⁴¹ To be fair, the respondents did acknowledge the existence of negative values, such as the retaliatory practices inherent in the head hunting rituals of before, and the excessive use of alcohol (James, int.; William, int.; Felix, int.; Abdullah, int.). Still, it cannot be excluded that the KD are to some extent appealing for international support, no matter which view of indigeniety they have themselves (cf. quote p. 24). Even more so because there have been and continue to be clear conflicts with the central government. This is not surprising, especially in light of the fact that there are KD considering themselves to be the definitive people of Sabah. These conflicts will now be touched upon. The Malaysian state (the central government) has been the promoter of a certain kind of development, and ethnicity has been very much part of this.

9. The KD and Malaysia

9.1. The Malaysian Nation and Development

As Anderson (1991: 3) writes “*nation-ness is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time*”. The international system has the nation state as its fundamental unit. The leaders of Sabah chose to be part of Malaysia at the time of its formation much because it was seen as a stable alternative - more desirable after the Philippines laid claim to then North Borneo in 1962 (Andaya *et al*, *op cit*: 286).

Nationalism can be seen as a particular kind of ethnic mobilisation, making a direct link between an ethnic group and a political unit. In parallel with ethnicity, the nation state is not a natural unit but is constructed and often revolves around a set of symbols. Still it is perceived as having deep roots in history (cf p. 16).

⁴¹ Publications exhibiting this tendency are Tongkul (*op cit*), Lasimbang (*op cit*) and KCA (*op cit*). All notably entirely or to a large part in English.

Formerly colonized areas, such as Malaysia, are normally far from fulfilling the image of the state as a territory for one ethnic group. One can therefore talk of a multiethnic nationalism, promoting the idea that despite ethnic differences, there should and does exist a nation-ness also there (Eriksen *op cit.*: 117). This is a civic idea of nationalism, emphasizing citizenship rights more than a cultural community. The main instrument to integrate Malaysia has then quite naturally been economic growth coupled with redistribution, aiming to ensure a growing prosperity for the majority of citizens. The special privileges to bumiputeras under the NEP were in this perspective tools for achieving this redistribution, and it is an explanation to why the government has been so insistent on a high degree of development planning; it is a national integration policy at the same time.

There have nevertheless also been attempts made at building a 'national culture' in Malaysia. With the Malays dominating the country, their language (Bahasa Malaysia) and religion (Islam) have been given preponderance, even though Malaysia presents itself as a multiethnic state.⁴² And although the NEP was quite successful in that most groups were able to benefit from the high rate of growth, the policy has also created two different categories of citizens: bumiputera/non-bumiputera. The Malaysian nationalism has thus become a curious mix between civic and cultural (Brown in Hutchinson *et al, op cit.*: 307f).

9.2. Sabah in the Malaysian economy⁴³

Even though the NEP can be said to have had success in Malaysia as a whole, in Sabah the poverty rate has remained high and the state has slipped behind other parts of Malaysia. It can still be seen as a resource frontier region for Malaysia (Ti 1992), just as it used to be one for the British Empire. There is a risk that such a region will see its resources extracted by more developed regions, to "feed" manufacturing and service industries.

Economic issues were often at the heart of controversies between the PBS state government and federal authorities. Most prominent were control of the island of Labuan off Sabah's

⁴² Indeed, as the federation was formed, the Malay nationalists of the peninsula feared that a unification with Singapore would tilt the ethnic balance in favour of the Chinese, who dominated the island. They somewhat disregarded the multiplicity of ethnic groups in Sabah and Sarawak, and saw their populations as being close to the Malay. Therefore they were prepared to accept the Borneo states in the federation (Andaya *et al, op cit.*: 283).

⁴³ See also 8.1.

coast, and the split of oil revenues between the state and the national Petronas company. Labuan is an offshore centre, which was conceded to federal control under the Harris government. PBS argued that it should be returned to Sabah. And as far as oil revenues go, only five per cent accrues to the state government, while Pairin and his followers wanted at least 30 per cent (Luping *op cit*: 431). During the years that PBS were in opposition nationally, the federal development funds to Sabah were reduced, most likely to put pressure on the deviant state (Mohd Yusof 1992: 63). These and other issues lead Chong (1995, cited in Chin *op cit*:107f) to conclude that Sabah was in fact being drained of its resources without proper compensation.

The NEP was replaced by the New Development Policy (NDP) in 1990. The goals remain similar, with more emphasis being put on the private sector in order to establish an entrepreneurial class amongst the bumiputera. It seems that, with the NDP, government intervention in providing infrastructure and other incentives to invest in Sabah is considered less important. The allocation of industries is to be decided by market forces, which may lead to higher concentration in urban regions in the centre (Peninsula) (Mohd. Yusof *op cit*: 60; 62). This means that Sabah will probably be producing goods according to its factor endowments, i.e. an abundance of land and (with immigration still not under control, even though there are signs in that direction) a large reserve of unskilled labour. This means that primary production should persist for quite some time, making Sabah a victim of volatile commodity prices and great variations in income.

9.3. Vision 2020 and Bangsa Malaysia

Closely entangled with the NDP is Vision 2020. This states that Malaysia should be a developed country by the year 2020, and was first laid out in a speech by Dr. Mahatir Mohammad in 1991.

From an ethnic perspective, Vision 2020 holds the interesting aim that a Malaysian race or people (*bangsa Malaysia*) should form. That the Malaysian nation should be truly united. Again there is thus a connection made between development and ethnicity. Ethnicity (or race, as it is mostly referred to) remains a very sensitive issue in Malaysia, and the *relations* between different groups are not very often openly discussed. Few writers have tried to theorize on how this would happen, and the results have been dubious (See Table 3). It is

therefore rather unclear how the bangsa Malaysia should look and be formed.⁴⁴ The respondents were worried, though. Several talked of the government's efforts to create a national culture:

Here in Malaysia, they're promoting like one nation, one language, one religion. That's wrong [...] They're [the KD] starting to learn Malay, and they will leave their own language. Then only they say that you are developed [...] One religion: that's why people convert to the other religion, modern religion. They think that their religion is not recognised, or they feel ashamed of it. — Lisa

Note that the respondent is making a link between Bahasa Malaysia and development, stating that people consider as developed only those proficient in Bahasa Malaysia. Development has then come to mean not only some kind of economic/social renewal, but cultural and identity changes as well - that it would be impossible to be developed and at the same time not speak Malay or practice the Momolian. A developed Malaysia would then in a sense come to mean a Malay Malaysia, and then it is not surprising should the KD come to regard development as a threat to their culture.

Table 3.
Bangsa Malaysia in three steps.

Stage	Process	Actors
1: <i>Infrastructure Development</i>	Provisions of political, economic and social infrastructure	Government with political prescriptions, economic formula [<i>sic</i>] and social strategies
2: <i>Physical Interaction</i>	Actual physical interaction brought about by adequate infrastructure	Peoples of various ethnic origins
3: <i>Bangsa Malaysia</i>	Creation of characteristics of bangsa Malaysia jointly by ethnic groups	Peoples of various ethnic origins

n.b. This table is an adaptation from Jayum (2000: 468) and is an illustration of the low degree of theorizing and discussion about bangsa Malaysia. Its 'suggestions' will probably not calm many fears among non-Malay peoples.

⁴⁴ Dr. Mahatir himself seems to mean that an increase in living standards, achieved by all groups in Malaysia, should make everybody proud to be Malaysian, and in itself foster national unity (Abdul 1993: 13 f).

9.4. Education and the School System

Education is a way of building ‘human capital’, something which is often important in newer theories on development. Through educated citizens, a state becomes more competitive, and the chances of sustained growth are higher. At the same time, the school system is one of the most important tools to attain fewer differences among the citizens of a country. Through standardised education, a common frame of reference is formed, comprising images of a country’s past and a national culture (Eriksen *op cit.*: 91). This was something the respondents were aware of. One respondent stated that the government school system put the KD students down because of their being different (Lisa, int.). Another respondent was not as critical, but said that the system had adverse side-effects:

What they [the kids] need to learn in the kampong⁴⁵ they don’t really absorb. They are more [...] involved in the studies [...] and they are not really required to participate in the traditional things, you know. I see a lot of the cultural practices are slowly dying out.

— James

He felt that the school system forced children to abstain from activities such as harvesting, which used to work as a strengthener for group solidarity, and were associated with many cultural traditions. When these disappear, they are replaced by the things learnt through formal education - something which the federal government controls. The ‘national culture’ then gains leverage over the ‘community cultures’ and assimilation takes place.

Despite or perhaps because of these problems, all respondents talked about the need for the KD to get education, if they were not to slip further behind in society. Everybody made a connection between development and education, even those who were critical of how the school system worked and how it affected the KD community. Those respondents talked about influencing education more - in the way that they had done with the language issue (see p. 34). Through education, they could then go on and influence other aspects of their lives:

... education, I think, is the obstacle to develop. Most of these rural communities, they are not educated. They cannot afford to go for study. [...] They are very far from the town, and the problem is getting the information.

— Lisa

⁴⁵ ‘Kampong’ means village in Bahasa Malaysia.

The whole world says education is important, so we need to educate [ourselves].

— Felix

As can be seen in these quotes, education is perceived as a way of keeping up with the outside world. Like Lisa, other respondents also linked education with access to information, and possibilities to process this information. It was a way of “exposure” (used in the positive sense leading to sophistication), and also a way of avoiding having to rely too much on political leaders generally not held in very high regard (see below). Education then becomes a means for the KD to participate more in society. It was not so much referred to as a way of improving production skills as it was a way of influencing decisions and defending the rights of the community, a possibility to retake the control over their lives that had been lost with the new lifestyle and rapid changes.

9.5. KD and Malaysian

Despite the reservations, it would seem that the national integration policy has been rather successful seen from the point of view of the federal government. Even in the most tense period in the early 1990s, there was very little talk of breaking free from Malaysia. Dr. Mahatir has dealt with the issue through a carefully balanced mix of authoritarianism and accommodation. Most of the respondents said that the challenges for Malaysia were often the same or related to those of the KD community. They thus identified with the Malaysian nation, with the reservation that the government needed to continue working to preserve the ethnic pluralism

At present, relations with the centre are much more peaceful than ten years ago, and not much mention was made in the interviews of marginalisation of Sabah or the KD. But still one of the respondents least critical of the federal government said that the bumiputeras in Sabah had not received as much help by the government as those of West Malaysia (Gintin, int.). One respondent talked of some discrimination in favour of Malays from the Peninsula when it came to public sector appointments, and he also said that the KD needed to unite to “*discuss the economy with the federal government*” (Felix, int.).

9.6. Political Unity of the KD

The need for the KD to be united was something everyone talked about. Though the split between Kadazan and Dusun does not seem so deep anymore, the KD are divided into several political parties, something which many see as a problem. When asked of the challenges for the KD, Abdullah replied: “...*politically, they must find a solution to be really united*”. This was a view reflected in several other responses.

The issue of party-hopping was often referred to. In the 1994 state elections, PBS won a narrow victory over UMNO. But the victory became defeat when, one after another, all but five of the PBS assemblymen defected to form new parties within the BN fold. The buying of assemblymen by means of according positions of power and pure cash gifts is a rather common practice in Sabah. The defectors also cited difficulties in cooperating with Pairin, who did not have much choice but to resign as chief minister (Mohammad *op cit.*: 536f). A new host of defections came after the 1999 elections, which PBS also lost from the start (*Far Eastern Economic Review*, 25 Mar. 1999). The voters, especially the KD community, were angered by the defections. To the respondents, the disunity was because of the self-interests pursued by the leaders:

They don't have anymore value to become a leader. They're just changing politics and then political party as they please. They never think about their own people or what kind of value that they're [laughing] trying to practise now. — Lisa

There is thus a lack of confidence in politicians, who are generally seen more as obstacles than bearers of KD unity.⁴⁶ A common denominator was also that the political system as such was flawed and was standing in the way of KD unity. From a Western perspective, the Malaysian democracy has some serious shortcomings, although this is not a place to elaborate further on them.⁴⁷ What is perhaps most interesting from this perspective is a view that this system like so much else has been imposed from outside (cf. p. 41) and that the KD would be able to create a fairer and more unifying one themselves. But as should be obvious from the previous text, there are disagreements on what to unite behind.

⁴⁶ Pairin is perhaps the greatest exception. The huguan siou seems to have a high status in many parts of the KD community, at least compared with the party-hopping assemblymen. But he has also been accused of being too authoritarian and of favouring his own family.

⁴⁷ For internal critiques, see Aliran (1987); Luping (*op cit.*).

10. Concluding Comments

The aim of this study has been to find factors in the development of Sabah that can be seen as contributing to a greater ethnic awareness among the KD. I firstly tried to outline the main ethnic markers - what things were connected with a KD identity - in order to see how this identity still mattered. Language seems to be an important factor, and so does the value system - adat, and the traditional rice-farming. Religion and some rituals/legends are important to the KD, but the mix of Christianity, Islam and the Momolian makes these issues complicated. While the cultural practices promoted by many are rooted in the animistic Momolian, most KD have today embraced modern religions. This seems to create a situation where there are conflicting perspectives on what the promotion of KD traditions should really mean. Whereas all respondents regarded the traditions as important, for some they seemed to primarily fill a role as symbols of the people. Others felt that the importance lay more in the original meaning of these practices as part of a typically KD lifestyle. This division between 'symbolists' and 'essentialists' could be seen also in other contexts, not least in how the respondents viewed development and modernity.

Also the other aspects of identity can be seen as important in relation to development, as I tried to show in the following sections. The identification with the role of the farmer (usually in a non-commercial sense) obviously becomes problematic when the economic structure of society changes, into more manufacturing and growing of cash crops. When this traditional means of livelihood becomes less attractive because of government policies favouring more modern economic activities, and also a wish to participate in a more urban lifestyle, the situation of the KD becomes more insecure in the view of the respondents. Furthermore, this breakup of the more traditional lifestyle was seen as a threat to a value system guaranteeing the well-being of the people. The KD were described as 'exposed' to the modern life by several respondents.

There was no uniform view on how the respondents thought the KD should cope with this process. Some thought that the people should try to somewhat independently retain a lifestyle perceived as traditional to them, others saw a great need of integrating into the modern economy, while still preserving traditional symbols and values. This is where the distinction between essentialists and symbolists again becomes important; it seems that they differ in views on the desired status of the KD. Should villages and other smaller communities provide

the main bases for more independently defined modernities, or should the KD be primarily concerned with the power in the state as a whole to achieve a development more on their terms? Naturally, most KD would probably argue that both these levels of power are important, but there nevertheless seems to be differences over where the emphasis should be.

It is a fact that the process of development is and has been controlled to a large degree by the federal government of Malaysia. Development policies have also been closely integrated with a strive towards national consolidation. While the KD have been included in the bumiputera privileges, Sabah as a state has slipped behind many peninsular ones, creating grounds for accusations of inequalities. What seemed to concern the respondents more, though, was the tendency by the central government to tie together development and ethnicity. The most obvious example of this is the concept of *bangsa Malaysia*, which was seen by many as a promotion of Malay-ness and therefore as a threat to the KD culture. Here the question of language comes in, and the statement by Lisa that you are not considered as developed unless you speak Bahasa Malaysia is illustrative. In a sense, development then becomes an indirect threat to the Kadazandusun language - a cornerstone to the KD identity. Also religion can become an issue for those KD (around 80 %) that are not Muslim like the Malays.

Both perspectives on how the KD should take more control over the process of development also add to a conflict in that they ultimately demand greater power - power that the central government today holds. The great desire for unity among the KD should be seen in the light of this conflict. Like other groups in Malaysia, the KD have been forced into an 'ethnic logic'. Within such a context, the ability to guard the perceived interests of the group is limited if they are not united. However, there seems to be great mistrust of leaders, and perhaps this is why all respondents put so much emphasis on the need for education as a means of empowering the KD. It could also be seen as a way of becoming better equipped to deal with the challenges and 'exposure' to modernity.

This study is but a snapshot of some of the ways the KD have of thinking about development, and many other perspectives could no doubt be found. However, the aspects of development perceived as threatening to their identity can be part of the explanation to why the KD have become more ethnically aware. But there cannot be any definite conclusions drawn from this study. Further research should be done to discover to what degree the different perspectives outlined here apply to the KD population as a whole.

Furthermore, the process of development is unlikely to be the only explanation for the importance of KD identity, and there is a need for further discussion on why they seem to try and deal with the challenges as KD and not as, for example, farmers. Thinking on gender issues in relation to development and the KD identity did not emerge in the interviews and they should also be more explored.

There are many ethnic groups in Sabah which have practically disappeared as social categories, and in fact the KD 'community' is a mishmash of a large number of previously more distinct groups. More research needs to be done on how the diverse KD group has been able to successfully present itself as 'a people' - both to others and to themselves. Their diversity is often downplayed, for example through the tendency to identify them with Christianity. I am convinced that this brief study suffers from many similar simplifications, which makes it an additional example of the KD's success in being perceived as a community, and also enforces this perception - although probably not in a very significant way, one should humbly point out.

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Appendix: The respondents

After long consideration, I decided to give all the respondents anonymity. At first my intention was to assure this only to the people not openly working in NGOs. But all the respondents also entered the interview situation as individuals. They were asked for their personal views, and these views did not necessarily correspond to those promoted by the organisation. The interviews touched upon topics that can be sensitive both internally and externally, and it is the duty of the interviewer to assure that the respondents are not harmed in any way by the process.

I have nevertheless noted which respondents actively worked in NGOs. These NGOs are KDCA and Partners of Community Organisations, Sabah (PACOS). The latter is an organisation working to raise the quality of life of indigenous communities (not only KD) through organisation-building, research, etc. Quite a few of the other respondents were also involved in some way or another with the KDCA, which is a large organisation working in many different areas. There is also cooperation between PACOS, KDCA and other smaller, KD/indigenous-based organisations.

Table 4.

Some data on the respondents.

Alias	Religion	Profession	NGO-representative?	Education
Abdullah	Muslim	retired	KDCA	university
Felix	Momolian	farmer, etc.	no	secondary
Gintin (F)	Muslim	retired	no	university
Jainab (F)	Muslim	housekeeper	no	primary
James	Christian	businessman	no	university
Lisa	? ¹	Work in PACOS	PACOS	secondary
Noni (F)	Muslim	housewife	no	primary
William	Christian	work in KDCA	KDCA	university

¹ This respondent was interviewed the first, before I had fully developed the biographical questions I used for the other interviews. I therefore do not know her religion. I apologise for this blunder.