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Identity and Eastern Penan in Borneo[1]

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Abstract

This paper considers aspects of identity among the Eastern Penan of Borneo,[2] in the approximately half century since many have transitioned from full-time hunting and gathering to a partial or fully sedentary existence, in both Brunei Darussalam (henceforth, Brunei) and East Malaysia. Despite settlement, many Eastern Penan continue to project aspects of hunting and gathering behaviour (at both the individual and community level) through a number of traits such as: social organisation, lifestyle, and nostalgia for the past. Nonetheless, following their move to settlement, there has been more continuous and intense interaction with settled neighbours and state proxies. Through this, Eastern Penan have come to demonstrate identity features that align with neighbours, as well as the nation state in each country, in a number of ways. This paper is based on periods of field work (spanning several decades), in both Brunei and East Malaysia, during a time of considerable change, especially regarding how the physical environment has been exploited in Malaysia. This paper provides a snapshot of Eastern Penan identity which, rather than having fundamentally shifted, appears to have diversified over time as reflected through evolving social circumstances and ways these have impinged on lifestyle, language repertoire, and cultural affiliations among the Eastern Penan.

Keywords: Eastern Penan, identity, Borneo, hunter-gatherer, settlement

[1] This is a revised, updated and expanded paper, derived from Sercombe (2000).

[2] Penan in Sarawak are generally divided between those referred to as 'Eastern' or 'Western'. Needham (1953) provided useful distinctions between Eastern and Western Penan, as has Brosius (1992). Western Penan mostly inhabit areas to the west of the Baram River as far as the Rejang River in Sarawak, and the northern part of eastern Kalimantan; they have relatively little contact with Eastern Penan (Sellato & Sercombe, 2007). As hunter-gatherers, Eastern Penan comprised smaller groups, mostly locating their temporary settlements on ridgetops, with camps of shorter duration and smaller foraging areas, as well as tending to rely more on blowpipe hunting than hunting with dogs, besides having less formal or developed institutions of group leadership.

1. Introduction

Identity is about psychological (self-)conception of an individual. Identity is an abstract construct and necessarily complex (cf. Edwards, 1995), rather than being monolithic. Widely discussed facets of identity tend to be those seen as ethnic, social, cultural, religious, and language related. Yet it can be tempting to represent ways in which a person performs identity in ways that overlook the complexities of affiliation inherent in any individual or group. This may be either for convenience or because, for example, 'nationality' is seen as a person's central identity marker (e.g., Hofstede, 1980). For hunter-gatherers, a sense of identity is not necessarily likely to coalesce around nationality. Hunter-gatherers are by default minorities within the nations they inhabit, such that identification with the nation state may offer no particular advantage, and may even be opposed to the interests of hunter-gatherers (cf. Scott, 2009). However, the notion of ethnic 'boundaries' as, for instance, proposed by Barth (1969) has been influential in distinguishing between groups, but presents ethnicity in binary terms, as if groups in a space can be viewed as entirely distinct from each other. This is rarely the case, a point made by Khazanov (1984) about discrete pastoral nomadic communities, and the importance of links to other ethnic groups. Rather, people identify with the rest of society in diverse ways, and these can change according to circumstances. Relatively new nation states, such as Malaysia, may actually appear more "as culture areas hosting open networks of social formations" (Postill, 2006, p. 197) than imagined communities (ibid; see also Anderson, 1983). Furthermore, there are wider structural issues such that "negotiation of identities by linguistic minority speakers … are always subject to societal power relations, which include, inter alia, gender, class, race, ethnicity, and sexuality" (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001, p. 243). Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004, p. 3) have also argued that making sense of ways in which identities are negotiated can be fruitfully undertaken from a poststructuralist perspective, being "more nuanced and context-sensitive … than approaches offered in social psychology and interactional sociolinguistics". In relation to Penang (in Malaysia), for example, Nagata (1979, p. 59) suggested that "identity - ethnic or other - may be based on a number of criteria (origin, birthplace, religion, language, or culture) or even administrative convenience", a useful point of reference given the ethnically diverse setting to which she refers. Regarding Borneo, King (2013, p. 20) has suggested that "identity is … bound up with processes of cultural construction and transformation and the various forms and levels of identity can never be taken to be complete and firmly established". Rather, they are constantly

evolving, while being "invariably located in a world of competing and interacting identities made more intense by the impacts of globalisation and media technology, nation-building, and trans-national movements and encounters" (ibid). Yet, it has been proposed that "language is the most important identity marker" (Bayer, 1990, p. 103), and Fishman (1977, p. 25) considered that language is likely to be a more important symbol of ethnicity, as it is "the recorder of paternity, the expressor of patrimony, and the carrier of phenomenology". Links between language and identity are one concern here, although language cannot easily be separated from other identity features, and tends to both influence and reflect them (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985). It is also suggested that "it is the emergence of language which predicates all other forms of exchange ... the system of linguistic communication that constitutes the foundations upon which the others (*i.e. exchange types*) rest" (Wiseman and Groves, 1998, p. 29). The Eastern Penan considered here are part of, yet distinct from, an ethnolinguistically diverse collection of Dayak communities on Borneo Island, about whom the description, 'Bruneian' or 'Malaysian', would be insufficient by itself, given the variation among Dayak groups regarding language and social organisation, for example. The purpose here is to consider the idea of Eastern Penan identity, as well as other forms of identity they project, or lay claim to, largely from an etic perspective. Initially, some brief contextual information is provided, below, regarding Borneo, and hunter-gatherers, to provide background to this discussion of Eastern Penan in Brunei and Malaysia.

2. Borneo

The island of Borneo is divided politically among three nations: Brunei, Indonesia, and (East) Malaysia, the latter comprising the states of Sabah and Sarawak. Following WWII, across Southeast Asia ex-colonies gradually won and/or were granted independence. Malaya (now known as West Malaysia) became independent in 1957, while Sabah and Sarawak in Borneo later joined, leading to the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Malaysia comprises two geographically separate parts, the western portion being in mainland Southeast Asia (SEA), while the eastern states occupy much of North Borneo, in insular SEA. East Malaysia is ethnolinguistically diverse (more so than West Malaysia), comprising many Dayak (essentially, 'non-Muslim') communities with distinct languages and cultural practices. The term, Dayak, includes a number of groups considered to be *bumiputera* (i.e. 'sons of the soil') and, hence, indigenous to Malaysian Sarawak, including Penan (Eastern and Western, who occupy areas shown on Map 1, below). Regarding hunter-gatherers

specifically, "(T)here are, or used to be, dozens of small nomadic groups across Borneo, and their linguistic and cultural interrelationships are yet to be definitively established" (Sellato & Sercombe, 2007, p. 11). However, Sellato and Sercombe (ibid, pp. 11-12) go on to provide a preliminary and tentative classification which, they suggested, "must remain hypothetical as long as ethnohistorical data remain incomplete, and until a systematic linguistic survey of all nomadic or (known) formerly nomadic groups is undertaken" (ibid). Eastern Penan reside mostly in upriver interior areas of eastern Sarawak and tend to refer to themselves as *Penan Selungo*[3] (The Selungo River being a tributary of the upper Baram River), where a number of Eastern Penan villages are located. All but one settlement of Eastern Penan are situated to the east of the Baram River,[4] these areas being accessible only by boat, unpaved logging roads, or rural air travel. This is in contrast to Western Penan, who are likely to be described as *Penan Silat* (see Figure 1). Brunei is also situated on the north coast of Borneo, bordered by Sarawak to the west, south and east. As in Sarawak, Brunei's coastal areas are where the (main) towns are situated. The coastal strip (in Brunei and Sarawak) is well linked by an east-west highway, but relatively few roads run north-south to the sparsely inhabited interior. River travel has been the main means of transport for those few who reside in upriver parts of Brunei and Sarawak, unless they have off-road vehicles. These areas are inhabited largely by minority groups, including Eastern Penan. The local travel situation has been changing rapidly in Sarawak, as a result of intensive timber extraction and oil palm plantation expansion. In Sarawak, many people now travel to the interior on unpaved logging roads as it is cheaper and faster than travelling by river. Travel to Sukang, situated in the upper reaches of the Belait River, continues to be undertaken by river from the village of Pengkalan Mau (about fifty kilometres southeast by road from the coastal town of Kuala Belait). The journey takes around two hours by a motor-powered longboat, although there is a rough track from the coast, which is impractical for use by an ordinary car and unusable during the monsoon season.

[3] The orthography used here for Eastern Penan was devised by the Bible Society of Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei (1974) and follows Malay, except <e> consistently represents schwa and <é> represents a close-mid front vowel (see Sercombe (2006) for more on Penan phonology). Glottal stop is represented by an apostrophe <'> as in Kelabit (see Hemmings, this volume).

[4] See Chong, Mangku & Collins (2018) for details of the (Eastern) Penan Suai, who comprise Muslims and Catholics, religion also aligning with language affiliations. They reside on the coast to the west of Miri City, in Sarawak.

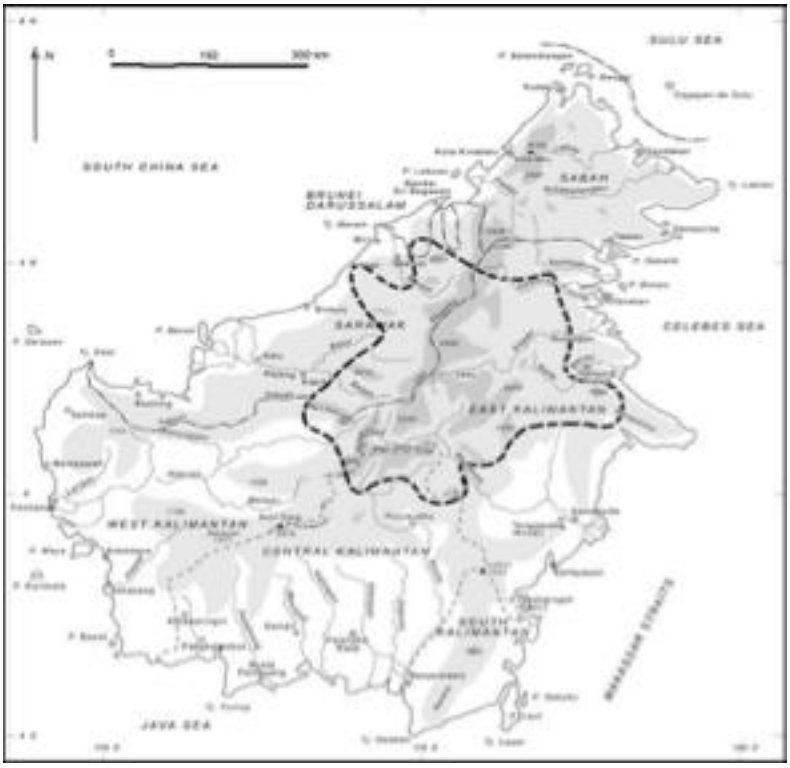

Figure 1: 'Area of Known Past and Present Hunting-Gathering Groups' in Borneo
(from Sellato & Sercombe, 2007, p. 4)

3. Hunter-Gatherers

For most of human history, people lived in small groups as hunters and gatherers; a number of such groups continue to exist today. A gradual human transition to settlement began around ten millennia ago and a full-time hunting and gathering existence is now rare throughout the world, partly due to being unsustainable in environments many of which have become degraded and are no longer able to support a nomadic way of life. Nomadism is also often viewed condescendingly by settled peoples, as well as being seen as a problem by national governments (cf. Scott, 2009), in terms of social provision, and because lands on which nomads reside and depend may well be rich in resources with commercial potential. Hunter-gatherers' main means of production has traditionally been centred on "hunting of wild animals, gathering of wild plant foods, and fishing, with no domestication of plants, and no domesticated animals except the dog" (Lee & Daly, 1999, p. 3). Eastern Penan in Brunei and Malaysia are considered to have originally migrated from Kalimantan throughout north-east Sarawak, during the 18th and 19th centuries (Needham, pers. comm.), and while they did not engage in cultivation of plots, they are incipient horticulturalists through excretion of plant, especially, fruit seeds (Sercombe 2007). In Borneo, the rainforest has

long satisfied basic requirements for hunter-gatherers, besides also having non-material value for those who inhabit it (Sercombe, in press a). However, Sarawak's rainforest has undergone considerable disturbance in recent decades, and this has impacted on the extent which a foraging existence can be sustained. There continue to be some full-time hunting and gathering groups in Borneo and these are located only in Sarawak (in East Malaysia), but numbered fewer than five overall, when reported by Malone (2014).

4. Eastern Penan

Eastern Penans are thought to total around 13,000 (Malone, 2014), although accurate numbers are difficult to determine. They constitute demographic and political minorities in both Brunei and Malaysia. Until the early part of the 20th century, they were mostly hunter-gatherers, living on sago starch processed from the forest, and hunting wild boar (among other fauna). Most have now settled, partly or fully, and have become swidden cultivators. Settlement has largely resulted from persuasion and incentives by rice-farming neighbours and/or government representatives, in both Brunei and Malaysia, in addition to changes in the primary rainforest, making foraging very difficult, as mentioned above. Thus, many Eastern Penan no longer live in small-scale acephalous bands comprising a cluster of nuclear families that hunt and gather in primary rainforest, and have experienced "cataclysmic dislocations, from the colonial to nationalistic then postcolonial state, to transnationally situated communities" (Joseph, 1999, p. 69). More specifically, by settling down, Eastern Penan's lives have altered in other significant ways, as they (and the environment they inhabit) have undergone major changes:

- From foraging in rainforest towards (mostly swidden) agriculture, as a means of production.
- Participation in a monetary economy to satisfy material needs and wants, including support of children at school (cf. Elgay, 2008; Tan, 2020).
- Conversion from animism to a mainstream religion, by missionaries and settled Dayak neighbours; this has been mainly to Evangelical Christianity among Eastern Penan in Sarawak (although some have become Catholic). In Brunei, conversion to Islam has been the pattern, influenced by financial incentives and proselytisation from the 'Ministry of Religious Affairs' in Brunei (cf. Sercombe, 2002).
- State-provided full-time formal education, from around five years. In Malaysia, education is in Malay medium (although Maths and Science are to be taught in English, from primary one,

commencing in January 2020). In Brunei, since 2009, most subjects including Mathematics, Science and Geography have been taught through English medium from year one of primary school (Ministry of Education Brunei, 2013).

Despite these substantial structural alterations, Eastern Penan communities remain largely acephalous (in terms of social organisation), materially poor (in comparison to other Bruneians and Malaysians), and maintain their language as a means of intra-ethnic communication in Brunei and Malaysia (with one exception, as mentioned below), albeit with some innovations. Like many nomadic or ex-nomadic peoples, Eastern Penan are also ascribed low social status by settled others in society (Rousseau, 1990). For many Penan a foraging existence is no longer viable. It is a way of life about which many still nostalgically reflect, a point made by Bending (2011, p. 15) with which I would concur: "The oldest members of the community seem to relish an opportunity to reminisce nostalgically with a Westerner". This is often with reference to material resources, the autonomy previously afforded to Penan by their way of life, and social cohesion for which the rainforest environment is a catalyst. This is underpinned by a perception that state politicians do not have Penan interests at heart, only appearing at election times (see Ibrahim, 2015). The forest, *tana'* is or was the whole world for Eastern Penan in a number of ways (see Sercombe, in press a) prior to settlement, as succinctly articulated below:

> *Urip amé lakau tong tana' pitah ka'an ngan uvut.*
> 'Our life is to travel in the forest in search of food and sago' (food implicitly referring to 'meat').
> (Sarawak Campaign Committee, 2004, p. 6)

While Eastern Penan, in both Brunei and Malaysia, have much in common regarding their social status, their circumstances differ in a number of significant ways. In Brunei, they are an ethnic isolate numbering around ninety people, living in Sukang on the Belait River approximately ninety-five kilometres south of the nearest coastal town, Kuala Belait. Nomadic until 1962, they then settled and gradually became swidden agriculturalists, mainly under the tutelage of neighbours. They live adjacent to two separate ethnolinguistic communities, namely Iban (scattered throughout the district), and Dusun (who occupy a single longhouse in Sukang Village). The Eastern Penan have paid work opportunities in Sukang, whether a government position or informal work for Dusun or Iban neighbours (who generally have more disposable income, many

receiving regular remittances from relatives working on the coast), planting or harvesting rice. Currently, six Eastern Penan adult males have permanent wage jobs, and school-age Penan children attend the village primary school just across river from their longhouse, but rarely continue to secondary level education downriver in Kuala Belait (if they actually complete primary school). Five of the nine Penan families in Sukang have converted to Islam (including the current acting headman, now officially known as Mohammed Azry Abdul Rahim Paran, previously Atik Paran), the national religion of Brunei, but have not altogether spurned animist beliefs. They continue to maintain, for example, that naturally occurring fauna and flora possess spirits, and they still refer to and address each other by Penan names, even among those who have Muslim appellations following religious conversion (Sercombe, in press b). Other features associated with maintenance of a nomadic lifestyle that can be observed in Sukang include:

- Owning relatively few permanent personal possessions, sometimes stored in a single bag.
- Sharing wild game with other Eastern Penan in Sukang, if and when it is caught.
- Viewing (Penan) group membership loosely in terms of consanguineal and affinal relationships, including those from other Dayak groups who have married into the Eastern Penan community in Sukang.
- An egalitarian form of social organisation. There is an official community head (paid a monthly stipend by the government), but this person has no real authority among fellow Eastern Penan.

As with the status of the Iban in Brunei,[5] Penan are also officially considered 'other indigenous', rather than 'full indigenous', and are not included in Brunei's *puak jati* (comprising seven groups, officially seen as native to Brunei; see Sercombe, 2014). In Brunei, coastal areas are dominated by the politically and numerically prevailing Brunei Malays and their language is the de facto national lingua franca among Bruneians who reside in coastal areas. However, in Sukang District, Iban is the lingua franca, spoken by neighbouring Dusun and Penan alike in interethnic interaction in Sukang, yet with no official role in Brunei (Sercombe, 2010). Among the broader Bruneian population, there is minimal awareness of the existence of Eastern Penan, or their language, in the country (ibid). Brunei has no national elections, and Eastern Penan are not greatly politicised. This is unlike in Sarawak where Eastern Penan have a history of interaction with the state and national governments, in relation to large-scale deforestation (which does not take place

[5] See Sercombe (1999) for further details of Iban in Brunei.

in Brunei in ways that impact directly on citizens), and they have been politically active, blockading areas they occupy that have been marked out for deforestation.

Malaysia is a far larger country (with a land area of 328,657 sq. km) than Brunei (5,265 sq. km [CIA World Factbook]), with Sarawak being the largest Malaysian state. In addition to different circumstances there is, as mentioned, a much larger population of Eastern Penan in Sarawak who are accepted as indigenous Malaysian citizens (*bumiputera* 'sons of the soil'), and whose language is recognised, if not actually supported, by the state (cf. Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977). In both Brunei and Malaysia, nearly all Eastern Penan live in upriver areas.[6] Eastern Penan in Sarawak are materially poorer than those in Brunei. They have relatively fewer alternative opportunities to subsistence farming, unless they move to an urban area, or join the logging or oil palm industries (Hong, 1987). Long-settled neighbours of **Eastern Penan in Sarawak include**: Berawan, Kelabit, Kayan, Kenyah and Sa'ban peoples, in the middle to upper Baram areas where most Eastern Penan live. Together, these Dayak peoples are collectively referred to as *orang ulu* 'interior people' (rather than 'coastal'), and Eastern Penan are generally viewed as occupying the lowest social rung.

A shared feature among many Eastern Penan in Sarawak is the extent of conversion to Christianity (most having become Evangelist or Catholic) in recent decades, a process which began with the arrival of the 'Borneo Evangelical Mission' (BEM).[7] Eastern Penan interactions with national institutions, especially state and federal governments, have increased since their settlement; much of this has been related to disputes over land and resources, especially primary rainforest.

The anti-logging movement arose in Sarawak around 1978 (Malone, 2014) and has remained significant until the present day. Eastern Penan have never really wanted compensation for logging, they just wished it to end. Relations with the state government declined in earnest in the 1980s with the increase in deforestation under government approval (cf. Brosius, 1997).[8] The

[6] This is apart from one coastal community to the west of Miri city on the coast of Sarawak in Malaysia (Needham, 1965; Yaman, 1979), comprising Pagan, Muslim and Catholic 'Penan in Suai Jambatan village … each with an allegiance to a different language and … religion …the Penan Muslim speak Bintulu', while the others continue to use Penan as their first language (Chong et al., 2018, p. 62).

[7] Also referred to as *Sidang Injil Borneo* (*SIB* in Malay), first established in 1928.

[8] **Consequences of deforestation have prompted Eastern Penan to lobby the European parliament:** http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?type=WQ&reference=E-2007-5285&language=SL, and gain support from within Malaysia, e.g. *Sahabat Alam Malaysia* (SAM: 'Friends of the Earth Malaysia', https://www.foe-malaysia.org/), as well as the Bruno Manser Foundation https://www.bmf.ch/en/documentation/links/, and a BBC

Malaysian government has tended to view or portray, at least, Penan negative reactions as arising from outside influence, especially by the (now reportedly deceased [Elegant, 2001]) Swiss activist, Bruno Manser (Bending, 2011). However, Penan were blockading against logging before Manser arrived in Sarawak (e.g., Scott, 1988), while Brosius (1997) cautions against romanticising the Penan as sacred environmentalists, when attitudes towards logging are not uniform. Many other settled Dayak groups have also been affected by logging (see Yong, Saccess & Jkoasm, 2014, among other sources), finding common cause and a degree of unity with Eastern Penan in the face of state policy. M**ore recently, the increasing encroachment of oil palm plantations has resulted in further disagreements between Dayaks and the state.** Settled Dayaks, however, have a history of cultivation that can be evidenced in ways that are not available to Penan with a history of foraging, leaving Eastern Penan in a less secure position over land title claims, when disputes arise over newly proposed plantations.[9]

5. Penan Language and Situation

There are two broad varieties of Penan that are generally referred to as Western and Eastern Penan, a linguistic division that matches sociocultural distinctions made elsewhere (e.g., Needham, 1953). Eastern Penan speak mutually intelligible varieties of the same language, in Brunei and Sarawak, despite a claim to the converse by Hoffman (1986). In Eastern Penan, '[w]here dialectal differences occur they are at the level of pronunciation and in the use of certain vocabulary (depending on proximity to and likely influence from settled groups), with more marked differences between Eastern Penan in Sarawak and Eastern Penan in Brunei (Sercombe 2006: 6). Keso' (1985), himself an Eastern Penan, wrote that he is able to understand about half of what is spoken by Western Penan people.

Eastern Penan is a member of the Kenyah language sub-grouping within the western branch of the Austronesian family of languages, the world's largest language family (Sercombe, 2006). Eberhard et al. (2019) refer to Eastern Penan as a 'threatened' language (6b on the EGIDS scale

documentary: http://www.bbc.co.uk/tribe/tribes/penan/index.shtml#further2, among other forms of comment about deforestation and support for Eastern Penan.

[9] **A current example is that of Eastern Penan at Batu Bungan in Mulu** National Park, a UNESCO world heritage site, where Penan are in dispute with an oil-palm company, *Radiant Lagoon* (for which the Sarawak state government will not revoke a permit), to prevent forest-clearing that will affect the ecology of Mulu (see Colchester, Wee, Wong & Jalon, 2007). Tensions such as this with the state are not new and are not always just a case of Dayaks versus the state, as Brosius (1997) argues, although it can sometimes appear as if this is the case, e.g. Malone (2014).

of endangerment), described as "being used for face-to-face communication within all generations, but … losing users", according to the 'Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale' (ibid). Nonetheless, Eastern Penan is still used as a primary mode of spoken interaction in both Brunei and Sarawak, apart from among one coastal community of Eastern Penan (Chong, Mangku & Collins, 2018; see also Needham, 1965). It is rare, however, to see written Penan, despite there being an established orthography. The only available published Eastern Penan texts are versions of the Christian Bible (e.g., 1974), these being available in Sarawak (donated by the Borneo Evangelical Mission) but not in Brunei, which forbids Christian proselytisation. Levels of literacy are not high among Eastern Penan and Bibles appear more as symbolic artefacts than as texts to be read. In neither Brunei nor Sarawak is Eastern Penan used in formal education, and its ethoglossic function (i.e. the range of domains in which it is used [Sercombe, 2016]) has shrunk as a form of socialisation since the rise of compulsory education in Brunei and Malaysia and the concomitant absence of Eastern Penan in educational settings (in schools where Penan children are in a numerical minority), other than among Penan children. Penan in Sarawak do not code-switch as much those in Brunei, generally showing fewer signs of close contact with settled Dayaks. Domains of use for Eastern Penan have shrunk in Brunei, particularly; there are no contiguous Penan groups with whom the Penan Sukang can interact and no other groups in Brunei speak Penan. There is reduced use for Penan in the sphere of hunting and gathering, since this has become more of a recreational activity than a basic subsistence requirement.

Eastern Penan older children and adults in Brunei and Malaysia are generally bilingual or multilingual (as can be the case among political minorities in national settings in which there is considerable language diversity). They are mostly primary, additive bilinguals in that acquisition of neighbours' language(s) has been informal and each language in their repertoire has functional salience. They are often coordinate ambilinguals, with native-like proficiency in a neighbouring language or languages. This is often contingent on the quality of Eastern Penan relations with settled neighbours, the closer these are the more likely there is knowledge of and an inclination to use a neighbouring language. This pattern is always that of the lower status group (i.e. Eastern Penan) being more likely to know the language of their Dayak neighbours than vice versa. As a result of attending school, many Eastern Penan know a form of Malay (the national language of Brunei and Malaysia), in which they tend to be 'secondary bilinguals', having learned it formally, although some degree of acquisition is inevitable as a result of wider exposure. Eastern Penan who

have become literate, tend to be monoliterate in Malay (Sercombe, 2003). Even so, Malay spoken by most Penan and other Dayaks in Brunei and Sarawak, tends towards a localised variety, certain features having been identified by Needham (1958; see also Ray, 1913) over half a century ago, referred to as 'Baram Malay'. Needham (1958)[10] suggested this variety would disappear with the increase in formal education and school attendance, however despite increased availability of primary education in rural areas, features of Baram Malay can still be observed as Table 1 shows.

Table 1: Lexical examples of Baram Malay that are still commonly heard

Baram Malay[11]	**Standard Malay**	**English**
aying	*air*	water
pikin	*fikir*	think
gaban	*gambar*	photograph
saya orang	*kami*	we (exclusive)
kita	*engkau*	you (formal)

These features are not confined to the Baram, but can be observed in other parts of Sarawak, and connect people though a variety that is seen as distinct from the standard.[12]

During the time Eastern Penan have settled, there has been erosion of certain cultural and language features, both in Brunei and Sarawak. For example:

- Certain forms of nomenclature are no longer used: 'teknonym', a kinship name used to signify relations between parents (*tamen* 'father', or *tinen* 'mother') and an eldest child, distinguishing people generationally; *ngaran lumo'* a 'necronym' (i.e. death name) designating one's relationship to a deceased kin member; and *ngaran ai*, a 'friendship name', given to a close friend in remembrance of a shared experience (Sercombe, in press b; Needham, 1971). While moribund, these are remembered by older people (in Brunei and Sarawak).
- *suket* oral narratives in the form of myths have evanesced. Functions of these include entertainment, a form of socialisation, as well as providing a moral framework with reference to Penan relationships with others and the environment. A significant aspect of many *suket* is

[10] Rousseau (1990) gives an example, where Kayan and Lepo' Tau Kenyah meet, to illustrate how central Borneo people may be unwilling to speak Malay because they do not see themselves as part of a social milieu where this would be an appropriate lingua franca. My own experience has been a little different, in both the interior of Brunei and in the Baram river region of Sarawak, where a localised variety of Malay can still be heard as a lingua franca.

[11] See also Chong (2009).

[12] The item *sadin* derives from use by Malaysians recruited as soldiers to assist the British army during WWII and during the Confrontation in the early 1960s. The term was adopted as a means of referring to tinned food. Another item of similar origin is *risin* ('rations').

the presence of powerful *balei'* (spirits). It is the responsibility of Eastern Penan to ensure that *balei'* are not offended. Few Eastern Penan are now familiar with *suket*, especially younger generations (see also Langub, 1996), and their moral functions are no longer explicitly valued. With reference to stories, Malay appears to be impinging on this semantic field, e.g., the following commences in Malay (underlined):

> <u>Boleh cerita</u> *lem urip irah;lem urip tong akeu siteu pu'un babui,pu'unsavit, pu'unkinan Siteu éh jian néh.*
>
> 'There would be stories about their lives; in my life here there were wild boar here, sago palms, food, which was good'.

- Eastern Penan also shows other innovations from Malay (in Brunei and Sarawak), and from neighbours' languages, as mentioned above. In Sarawak the situation can be complex, depending on where Penan are located. In Brunei, influence is from Iban and/or Malay, and the extent of this can be striking (as shown below), whether to fill cultural gaps, or to replace Eastern Penan features.
- The Eastern Penan infix, *-en-*, signifying passive voice, e.g., *suai* 'to make' > *senuai* 'to be made', and present in Proto-Austronesian as *–in-* (cf. Blevins, 2014), is no longer extant in other Dayak languages, and seems to be in the process of disappearing from Eastern Penan in Brunei, while occasionally being heard in the interior of Sarawak. Decline in awareness and/or use of this form suggests there is a tendency towards syntactic levelling (Sercombe 2006).

Eastern Penan in Brunei shows greater effects of contact with other groups in their language variety than those in Sarawak. This appears to be related to their physical proximity to Dusun and Iban neighbours in Sukang, the intensity and frequency of contact among the three groups, and the closeness of their relations with Iban. In Brunei, Eastern Penan do not see their language as changing substantially, although they recognise that they have changed culturally. This does not concern them unduly. The extent of influence from Iban people, and their language, can be seen in Eastern Penan messages intended for relatives in Sarawak, e.g., a male adult in Sukang stating, in Iban:

> *Semua kita ninga ka jako kami tu, sapa ia nemu jako Iban.*
> All of you listen to what we say, whoever knows Iban.
> *Walaupun kami tu bangsa Penan sapa ia jelas nemu pandai jako Iban ia ka bejako itu.*
> Although we are Penan whoever knows Iban speaks it.

A woman in Sukang also said:

> *Nemu aku tu Penan 'mé, bang aku enda nemu jako, enda entu nemu jako Penan, laban aku teleba jako Iban.*
> I know I am Penan but I don't know how to speak, don't know how to speak Penan, because I am used to speaking Iban.

Features from Malay noted in Eastern Penan discourse tend to be lexical or phrasal, although Eastern Penan so far remains the matrix language in spoken discourse.[13] Example items shown in Table 2 are taken from naturally occurring speech. This is illustrated via admixture of non-Penan lexical features where Penan equivalents exist (see Sercombe, 1996). As tends to be the case, generally, nouns are the word class most commonly code-switched or borrowed, across languages. This has been argued to be more a matter of culture than grammar (Poplack, Sankoff & Miller, 1988; Haarman, 1986), even if some noun types (e.g., kin terms) are less subject to borrowing or code-switching.

Table 2: Examples of non-Penan in Eastern Penan utterances

code-switched item	**Source language**	**Penan equivalent**	**English gloss**
bulan duabelas	M	*laséh jah poloo' dua*	December
laséh duabelas	EP + M	*laséh jah poloo' dua*	December
jako'	I	*tebara'/ha'*	talk
orang	I/M	*irah*	person
bala	I	*lebo'*	(human) group
tuai rumah	I	*pengeja'au*	elder/community leader
laut	I/M	*banget*	sea

Key: I = Iban; M = Malay; EP = Eastern Penan

Non-Penan function words also arise in (Eastern Penan) discourse,[14] many occurring utterance initially in collected data as cues to introduce a topic. Malay *tapi* ('but') and *jadi*

[13] Within codeswitching (i.e. inclusion of forms from more than one language in a single utterance), Myers-Scotton (1993) proposes the terms 'matrix language' and 'embedded' language, whereby elements of one language or more are embedded in the morphosyntactic structure of the other 'matrix' language.
[14] There is a tendency for discourse markers to occur more often than other functional forms in utterances that show codeswitching (see Haarman, 1986, for further details).

(adverbial ‘then’, conjunction ‘so’, and modal-type verb ‘able’) are non-Penan items observed in Eastern Penan speech. Needham (pers. comm) says: ‘In my days they were made as tokens of boasting and sophistication by Western Penan and in meek emulation by Eastern Penan’. The Penan equivalent of Malay *walaupun* (‘although’), given as *walaupé* in Sukang, seems to have replaced an earlier Eastern Penan form, *apa péh*, still used in Sarawak. It would seem that *walaupé* may be a relatively recent borrowing into Sukang Penan from Malay that has been morphologically blended, but which is now itself undergoing lexical replacement by standard Malay, *walaupun*.

> *Walaupun irah ja’au yeng keh tepun mukun…*
> However there aren’t any older people, such as grandparents …

The Malay form, *tapi* (‘but’, Eastern Penan *bang*) is a frequently occurring non-Penan form, as I have rarely heard the Penan equivalent used in free discourse, in either Brunei or Sarawak, although it has been elicited as the Penan equivalent term (to *tapi*) in both countries.

> *Tapi akeu mena’ terima kasih mena’ jian mena’ peta’an awah.*
> But I just give thanks, good wishes and sympathy.

Code-switching and borrowing appear to be dynamic processes among Eastern Penan (in Brunei and Sarawak), although it is not always straightforward to distinguish between them (cf. Romaine, 1995). A criterion may be whether or not (Eastern Penan) speakers identify non-Penan features as deriving from another language, or otherwise; many are unable to do this when asked, thus invalidating this as a criterion.

6. Penan and Identity

From the description above, it can be observed that the Eastern Penan and their circumstances have altered considerably since becoming sedentary, in Brunei and Malaysia. Change in terms of practices is not unusual but appears to be more dramatic in relation to hunter-gatherers’ major shift away from nomadism. In the early 1960s, ‘Eastern Penanness’ was described, by Needham (1965, pp. 58-76), as comprising a set of characteristics, loss of which would mean these people are no longer Eastern Penan. Table 3 shows the extent to which these are maintained. This is not absolute

but suggests tendencies as observed following visits to Eastern Penan communities in Malaysia, as well as the one in Brunei, since the 1980s.

Table 3: Core characteristics of Eastern Penan (based on Needham, 1958): Retention ✔, partial retention (✔), and loss Ø

Characteristic	**Brunei**	**Sarawak**	**Notes**
Integrity of the Penan language	✔	✔	As briefly outlined here, and referred to elsewhere (e.g., Sercombe, 1996), showing innovation and attrition
No sense of shame being Penan	✔	Ø	In Sarawak, Eastern Penan are ambivalent about their ethnicity
Hunt regularly	Ø	(✔)	In Brunei, hunting has become recreational; in Sarawak, deforestation has made hunting less advantageous
Wild game is shared as a matter of course among a group	✔	(✔)	Sharing of perishable resources (especially wild pig) has all but disappeared among Eastern Penan in the middle Baram region in Sarawak
Small gifts of food are continually exchanged between families	✔	✔	This is a widespread practice, not exclusive to Eastern Penan
Men wear loincloths	Ø	Ø	No longer, other than for show in Sarawak's 'Cultural Village' (https://scv.com.my/) near Kuching
Men have distended earlobes	Ø	Ø	No longer
Penan-style mats are produced	Ø	✔	Mostly these are for sale in areas where there is tourism
Death names are used	Ø	Ø	No longer
Long hair is the norm for men	Ø	Ø	No longer
Penan are isolated from other groups in their habitation	Ø	Ø	In very few cases, in the upper Baram among those very few who remain nomadic, near Mulu National Park
Group members have plucked eyelashes and brows	Ø	Ø	No longer
Alcohol is not consumed	✔	✔	This is still the case, with few exceptions
Traditional Penan jewellery is worn	(✔)	(✔)	a matter of personal choice, evident more among the elderly if at all
The penis-pin is used (cf. Harrisson 1964)	Ø	Ø	The author has not met anyone who uses or has used this

Cultural and language borrowing are not unusual for Eastern Penan (cf. Needham, 1972; Whittier, 1973). In Brunei, there has been convergence towards Iban among Eastern Penan; both Iban and Penan tend towards egalitarianism, and have marginal status in Brunei. Penan use of the Iban language, and their overt statements of association strongly indicate they identify closely with

these neighbours. However, due to material poverty, the efforts of the Brunei government, and personal motivation, Penan are also gravitating towards Malayness as exemplified through religious conversion. The new religious status of converts brings obligations, in that they no longer openly eat pork, have adopted new Malay names, and use Malay for prayer purposes, when staff from the Brunei religious propagation centre are present. This display of elements of Malayness remains a pragmatic choice and is not fully integrated, in the sense that they continue to consume pork and call each other by Penan names. Formal education (in Malay and English) has supplanted informal education in Penan, and the Malay (and English) literacy of schools has taken over some of the oral education role of Penan. Penan remains, nonetheless, a marker of group identity, by outsiders, and is a reflection of group continuity and cohesion. Baram Malay used by Eastern Penan, and many other central Borneans, contributes towards a sense of pan-Bornean Dayak identity through its widespread distribution throughout southern Brunei and the Baram River areas of Sarawak. Use of Baram Malay implies an expanded (self-)conception of who Eastern Penan are, without necessarily being linked to nationality. If language is a key identity marker (cf. Bayer, 1990; Fishman, 1977), then continued use of Eastern Penan suggests it remains significant for most Penan.

Nonetheless, language is not necessarily separable from other aspects of identity, as mentioned earlier (cf. Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985]], and links to other forms of internal differences among Eastern Penan that have developed. Thus, wild game is still shared among Eastern Penan in Brunei, but they hunt recreationally, rather than regularly. In Malaysia, sharing of perishable resources has all but disappeared, as echoed by Tan (2020, p. 11): "Electricity has to be paid for, and so do schoolbooks and supplies … they all need money. Extra game meat means cash, so sharing is not expected". Eastern Penan were previously "bound by their custom to use the natural resources sustainably based on a set of ethical principles of land resource use signified here as the land ethic" (Choi, 2014, p. 422), but this is no longer always practical, and makes it almost impossible to maintain a 'strategy of sustainable development of their forest resources through the practice of *molong*' (Ibrahim 2015, p. 6). One can see a gradual loss of unity within Eastern Penan groups in Sarawak, with relationships no longer being based on a shared morality, but being replaced "by new contractual relationships" (Needham, 1965, p. 71).

7. Conclusions

This paper concludes that the Eastern Penan in Borneo have undergone some degree of realignment but retain certain features that differentiate them from other Dayaks (e.g., their language). At the same time, they have adopted features that suggest they are converging with settled Dayaks and becoming more Malaysian (e.g., through settlement, engagement in full-time education, and wage employment). The article provides a broad overview, especially regarding Malaysia, and there will necessarily be variation and exceptions to the examples presented here. The situation for Eastern Penan in Sarawak is varied. There are squatters in the Pujut area of Miri at the mouth of the Baram River (whose lives involve labouring, or street selling). Some have a fairly strong sense of community, e.g., Long Lamai in the upper Baram, the single largest Eastern Penan settlement, and some have good quality relations with settled neighbours, as in those between residents of Long Lamai and the Sa'ban settlement of Long Peluan while others have long been in tension with neighbours (e.g., Eastern Penan in Batu Bungan and their Berawan neighbours, in and around Mulu National Park). Nonetheless, all Eastern Penan I have encountered see themselves as citizens of Malaysia, but marginalised and discriminated against due to their prior nomadic lifestyle, low levels of material wealth, and their inability to have land claims upheld due to lack of land disturbance in areas where they have lived. It has been proposed (Needham, 1972) that Penan identity might disappear through gradual assimilation with other groups, becoming part of a larger heterogeneous '*orang ulu*' (upriver people). I argue that the Penan have embraced other identity features and that, consequently, their own identities have become more composite. At the same time, the Penan continue to remain distinctive through, for example, the continued existence of discrete Penan communities (which rarely contain members from other ethnolinguistic groups), the continuing use of their language, and their often very poor economic circumstances. They identify with neighbours in that Dayaks identify with other Dayaks in common cause against logging (in Sarawak), leading to a form of 'pan-Central Bornean' identity. This situation is not unique to Eastern Penan, who, as ex-nomads, are one of the lowest status minorities in Malaysia and Brunei. This can be seen elsewhere in SEA (see Sercombe & Tupas, 2014), as shown by Fortier (2014), who described how hunter-gatherers have suffered ethnocide, been absorbed into other ethnic groups, or come together to form larger collectives through a process of ethenogenesis, as a means of self-preservation. Scott (2009) goes further in suggesting that indigenous peoples in

upland parts of mainland SEA have long avoided attempts at subjugation by governments in order to defend their autonomy and ways of life.

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