Evading state authority

The status of borders has been contingent on varying historical circumstances, rather than being immutably rock-like. Borders shift; they leak; and they hold varying sorts of meaning for different people (Migdal 2004:5).

This chapter and the subsequent Chapter 4 are a critical reading of key moments in borderland history, ranging from the latter part of the Dutch colonial period (1850s) to the end of the New Order period of former President Soeharto (1998). An underlying objective is to show the historical development of the Kalimantan Iban as a border people, in particular, the way the borderland, and more specifically the strategies of border inhabitants, have been shaped in relationship to colonial and postcolonial states and their regulative border policies. I here demonstrate that states and their borders are not static or permanent structures, separating territories and excluding people as originally intended by colonial state planners, but are the result of dynamic historical processes. The chapters unravel the continuities between these periods, describe the long-term social and economic interactions across the border, and finally discuss the implications of these historic legacies of the past for the consolidation of authority among local border elites.

In order to locate the borderland in time, the historical account is divided into two chapters, each dealing with a specific period in borderland history (pre- and post-independence). Each period illuminates the ongoing ambivalent relationship between local communities and government authority (the Dutch colonial administration or the Indonesians state). The chapters argue that this ambiguity is an outcome of the particularities of life at the border, of being situated between two divergent nation states and of the continuously shifting character of the border. This first
chapter briefly introduces the pre-colonial setting in order to situate the Iban communities, as long-time residents, in the region. The focus then immediately moves to the Dutch colonial intervention in the borderland beginning in the mid-1800s, where the first Dutch effort to establish an officially recognized territorial border was initiated through a complicated negotiation with the British colonial administration. Here a special emphasis is placed on Dutch attempts to pacify the autonomous border Iban by interdicting their migration between the two colonial territories. I highlight how the Iban population gradually adjusted to the new colonial territorial divisions by using these arbitrary borderlines to their own advantage.

The second historical chapter (4) makes a short leap in time to the early decades after Indonesian independence and the period of modern state formation. Analyzing the post-colonial period of confrontation and militarization along the border in the 1960s and 1970s, I provide a detailed account of how the Indonesian state attempted to establish its authority over people and territory along its national borders through strict military control. I demonstrate how border communities were caught between the various conflicting parties and their ambivalent engagement with these, which led either to great rewards or to severe punishment. Importantly, the elite configurations that will be discussed in the following chapters were partly formed by the political transformations and border militarization during that period. The foundations of a border elite power base and its networks of influence were in many ways laid in the early 1960s, when the borderland was plunged into an armed conflict with the newly established federation of Malaysia. The third section of the chapter briefly deals with the period immediately after the border confrontation, which marked the onset of state-sanctioned resource extraction that continued until the fall of the Soeharto regime in the late 1990s. Here the focus is on both the conflicting relationship between a majority of border communities and logging companies and on border elite collusion with the same state-sponsored companies. Overall, these chapters provide a historical framework for situating the contemporary processes of negotiating local border autonomy.

The data presented in Chapter 3 draw on a combination of primary

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1 Data on West Kalimantan and the borderland in particular is very scarce for the period of the early twentieth century until Indonesian independence in the 1950s. Japanese bombing of the provincial capital during World War II destroyed various archives, and much information was lost.
and secondary sources such as Dutch colonial records, other scholarly literature and oral history collected during and after fieldwork. History plays an important role in local historical placement and ethnic consolidation in the border area, and past events are generally recalled with great pride. Iban historical narratives can be divided into two levels: the present and recent past (diato’) that is still within the memories of living individuals, and the ancestral past transmitted from generation to generation (kelia dulo’). Iban connections to the ancestral past are kept alive through an intricate system of tracing one’s ancestry (tusut). Most Iban in the border area are able to remember and trace their descent for as many as five generations back in time. Comparing such ‘family histories’ with colonial and other government accounts provided an interesting picture of past state-local relations and was especially important because the past is continuously employed locally to justify current affairs and reasoning.

**SELECTIONS ON THE PRE-COLONIAL FRONTIER**

Several Borneo scholars have pointed towards the middle Kapuas basin in West Kalimantan as the site of early Iban settlement. They say that ancestors of the Iban originated several centuries ago in this area, and

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the Iban themselves generally accept this statement. Evidence based on Iban oral history show that some time prior to the nineteenth century, the Iban migrated out of the Kapuas basin and spread across the border into what is known as the upper Batang Lupar river system (*Ulu ai’* in Iban) in Sarawak and, from there, further afield.\(^6\) Dating this migration more precisely is problematic, because the history of the settlement of the Iban in the borderland and wider Kapuas area is based entirely on local oral histories, and much specificity has been lost over generations.

Nonetheless, although early records on Iban settlement in the area are scarce, oral accounts paint a picture of Iban interaction with other inhabitants of the area that was characterised by a mixture of raiding and trading (Sandin 1967). Iban accounts of their prehistoric arrival in the area are largely contradictory. Some accounts describe how the hilly area along the border was uninhabited prior to their arrival, while others claim that the area was occupied by groups of forest gatherers known as the *orang bukit* (literally ‘hill people’), who supposedly fled from early Iban intrusions (or became incorporated within Iban communities). Still other Iban accounts tell of scattered Maloh settlements in the area prior to Iban arrival, assertions that largely are supported by Maloh oral accounts (King 1976b:96).\(^7\)

Oral accounts emphasize the shifting Iban relationship with the small (Muslim) Melayu kingdoms/states in the upper Kapuas. Although the Iban were never under the direct rule of these kingdoms, they frequently engaged in trade and alliances with the Melayu.\(^8\) The kingdoms allied with the Iban against other groups whom they wanted to suppress and bring under their authority (Bouman 1924:187; Kielstra 1890:1104). The Malayu rulers did not measure their power in terms of territorial possessions, but the by number of people who paid them tribute. By refusing to pay tribute, the Iban were known as the ‘free Dayaks’\(^9\) (*marda-heka dayaks*), or ‘those who were under nobody’s authority but their own’.

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\(^7\) In the climate of increased resource struggle and interethnic conflicts since the late 1990s, these oral accounts of prehistorical settlement have come to play an important role in legitimizing ethnic claims to land ownership.

\(^8\) Many other ethnic groups in the area, like the less numerous Maloh and Kantu, frequently paid tax and tribute to these rulers (Wadley 2000c).

\(^9\) The term ‘Dayak’ is an umbrella term referring to all non-Muslim populations living in the interior of Kalimantan, with the Iban being just one of many ethnic groups named Dayak (such as Iban Dayaks). The Dayaks living along the border were later referred to by the Dutch as ‘border Dayaks’ (*grens-Donakks*) (Kater 1883).
while the ‘serah dayaks’\textsuperscript{10} were the Dayak groups who paid tribute to the Melayu kingdoms (Enthoven 1903; King 1976b; Van Kessel 1850). This analysis fits well with Scott’s more general statement concerning how control of people was more important than control of land throughout pre-colonial Southeast Asia (Scott 1998:185).\textsuperscript{11} Although such ‘peaceful’ cooperation was common, what seems to be the most common state of affairs within this relationship was that of mutual exploitation, such as continuous Iban raiding of Melayu settlements and counterattacks by the Melayu rulers.\textsuperscript{12}

Generally, the significant Iban migrations were a result of several contemporary processes, prompted by need for new land, regional politics, disputes within longhouse communities, and not least a result of warfare and raiding with other ethnic groups and internally among themselves. These movements mostly consisted of individuals and sets of families (joining relatives or kin already settled in the specific areas) and, more seldom, whole longhouse communities searching for new land to farm or escaping headhunting raids (King 1976b:88; Wadley 1997:43). The early period of migration was one of intense instability and flux. There was a constant shifting of the population, not just for the Iban but for all the peoples of the interior of Borneo (Eghenter 1999). Since the onset of these early Iban migrations, several similar back and forth movements have taken place on the hilly watershed that later came to signify Dutch and British territories and today forms the international border between Indonesia and Malaysia. Although the nature of such movements has changed considerably since, due to modern state policies imposed at these borders, it were within this context of constant movement and warfare the Iban communities were first introduced to the European idea of fixed territorial borders and the wider politics of colonial boundary making.

\textsuperscript{10} ‘Serah’ is a kind of forced trade where the exchange rate was to the advantage of the Malay ruler.
\textsuperscript{11} Control of land first became a major concern after the introduction of rigid mapping regimes of the later colonial powers.
\textsuperscript{12} See Bouman 1924, 1952; Enthoven 1903; Pringle 1970; Sandin 1967.
Map 4: Colonial Borneo, 1747
Map 6: Batang Lupar Country, 1895
DRAWING BORDERS: COLONIAL ENCOUNTERS ON THE FRONTIER

All boundaries are artificial. They are human impositions on the continuous tissue of nature (Strassoldo 1989:392).

National borders are political constructs, imagined projections of territorial power. Although they appear on maps in deceptively precise forms, they reflect, at least initially, merely the mental images of politicians, lawyers, and intellectuals (Baud and Van Schendel 1997:211).

As stated in the citations above, the idea of modern international borders, as we understand them today, is a historic product of European state building and of the subsequent rise of nationalism starting in the eighteenth century (Anderson 1991). The drawing and creation of territorial borders became essential for the creation of a national identity and nationhood. Baud and Van Schendel (1997:214-5) argue that borders became markers in two ways: First, as a demarcation of state territories in order to put an end to territorial disputes. Territorial borders helped the respective states to distinguish their own citizens from those of the neighbouring state, making it easier to exercise control and collect taxes. Second, borders became the ultimate markers of the reach of state power.

The demarcation of borders as a state function in Europe was a long process that took centuries. In Southeast Asia, as in other regions under former colonial rule, this process was accelerated because of European colonialism and the struggle over people, land, and natural resources (Tagliacozzo 1999).

In March 1824, an Anglo-Dutch treaty was signed that divided the Malay world down the Strait of Melaka and assigned the right of influence on each side to the Dutch or the British. This treaty arbitrarily divided the island of Borneo into two parts, although the actual borderline was officially negotiated much later (Trocki 2000). In the period between 1886 and 1895, the Dutch government sent out several surveying teams led by Captain J.J.K. Enthoven. 13 The main purpose of these ‘expeditions’ was to map the entire province of West Borneo. The

13 Captain J.J.K. Enthoven was the head of the Topographic Survey of the Dutch East Indies (Topografische Dienst [TD]) from 1897 to 1909. The TD became an independant military unit in 1907. See Ormeling 1996.
task was accomplished in nine years, and the results were published in a two-volume (900-page) book that meticulously described geographic and ethnographic features of the province (Ent-hoven 1903) (see Map 5, p. 81).

From a Dutch perspective, the border, through its dividing effect, had the function of preventing smuggling, migration and raiding, while it promoted colonial control and facilitated the collection of taxes. Although the Dutch from the very outset of their presence in the area had been determined to delimit the exact borderline between Dutch Western Borneo and British Sarawak, not until 20 June 1891 was a formal treaty signed in London between the two nations. And not until 1912 was the exact borderline fixed along the hilly and mountainous watershed, demarcating Dutch territories in the south and British territories in the north of the island. This treaty was later followed by treaties and conventions in 1915 and 1928.

On a map, these borderlines might have created clarity but, on the ground, local response to these new divisions of the landscape was seldom in line with colonial understanding. Referring to the West Kalimantan borderland under colonial rule, Wadley has noted that:

Like other European colonial powers, the Dutch were obsessed with exclusive borders, both external and internal, in their South East Asian possessions. Externally, ‘proper’ borders restricted undesirable elements (namely smuggling and migration) and defined citizenship for taxation and development (Wadley 2003:93).

The ordering of social and political space by creating borders was applied by European colonial administrations all over the globe. The co-

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14 See ‘Staatsblad van Nederlandsch-Indië, Batavia: Landsdrukkerij’, 1892, No.114, pp 1-7. See also ‘Kaart van een gedeelte van Borneo met aanwijzing van de grens tusschen het Nederlandsch gebied en dat van het Britsche protectoraat’, 1891, Ministerie van Koloniën: Kaarten en Tekeningen, No. 628, ARA.
17 Ishikawa (2010:78-80), for example, notes how the smuggling of commodities like rubber from Dutch West Borneo into Sarawak became endemic along the lower parts of the border (Sambas-Lundu border area) in the early part of the twentieth century. These cross-border smuggling networks were often headed by Chinese entrepreneurs (towkay/taukey) living on both sides of the border.


Evading state authority |

The colonial legacy of borders is largely similar worldwide, characterised by its tendency to divide ethnic groups and to ignore already existing ethnic boundaries. This tendency to divide ethnic groups when drawing borders and the consequences of such actions have been described in detail in an African context by A.I. Asiwaju (Asiwaju 1985). In colonial Africa, little attention was paid to kinship ties, existing economic relations, well-established lines of communication, or shared socio-political institutions when drawing borders. Similar ethnic separation took place in Borneo among the Iban when the Dutch and British colonial administrations divided the island between them. The colonial Borneo border cut through a rather homogenous area, and individuals suddenly found family members on the other side of the border and incorporated into a different colonial territory. In this way, the two Iban groups (Kalimantan and Sarawak Iban) were placed under different political regimes and consequently exposed to vastly different political, economic and social circumstances. Moreover, after independence, as was the case in many former colonial territories, the historic colonial borders of Borneo were used as borders demarcating the new post-colonial nation-states; the Iban subsequently became Indonesian or Malaysian citizens. Like the former colonial administration, the new nation-states officially embraced the same notions of borders as clear and exclusive lines of separation.

Although these arbitrary borders were drawn on maps and imagined in the minds of the colonial administrators as sharp lines and impenetrable barriers separating colonial territories, the actual picture on the ground was and is often that of continued interaction between the divided ethnic groups. As Asiwaju has pointed out in his work on colonial African borders, people divided by such artificial borders often continue their normal activities, ignoring the line of separation (Asiwaju 1985:3). Scott for example, emphasizes how the creation of strict borders became part of ‘seeing like a state’ and that such visions of the world often did not coincide with local perceptions. One can cite many examples of people separated by artificial colonial borders who find ways to manipulate, circumvent or simply ignore such borders.18 People seem to take ad-

18 Among many similar examples from Borneo of colonial borders cutting through an ethnically distinct population is the case of the ethnic Kelabit, who are divided by the border between Sarawak and East Kalimantan (Bala 2001; 2002). Also, the ethnic Kayan-Kenyah were divided by the East Kalimantan-Sarawak border (Eghenter 2007, 1999), and the ethnic Lun Dayeh were divided by the border between Sabah/Sarawak and East Kalimantan (Ardhana et al. 2004).
vantage of borders in ways that are not intended or anticipated by their
creators (Baud and Van Schendel 1997:211). The Iban in the borderland
discussed here are a vivid example of such a separated people who, ever
since their separation, have continued their socio-economic relations
with kin and family across the border. They have largely maintained a
social understanding of belonging that does not easily correspond with
the political borders of the nation-state.

The two bordering areas, today known as West Kalimantan
and Sarawak, were in the nineteenth century divided into Dutch
West Borneo, or the Residency of the Western Division of Borneo
(Westerafdeeling van Borneo),19 and the Brooke (British) Governance in
Sarawak. Subsequently, the Iban groups living in each area were divided
by a formally recognized border and administrated by the Dutch and
Brooke, respectively. The considerable variations of politics and prac-
tices between the two administrations have since had a profound effect
on the Iban population on each side and shaped their lives differently.

Despite its strategic position in the South China Sea and its wealth
of natural resources, the island of Borneo, compared to insular Southeast
Asia, captured the European colonial interest rather late in the course
of colonial conquest of the region (Irwin 1955). In the mid-nineteenth
century Dutch colonial interest in Western Borneo first wakened. Dutch
presence in this part of Borneo had previously been sporadic and concen-
trated along the coast. For the most part, colonial resources were directed
towards the more fertile volcanic island of Java. Dutch intervention and
growing interest in Western Borneo was, among other things, a counter
response to the increasing expansion of the British powerbase in the ad-

djacent region of Sarawak and reflected the Dutch desire to strengthen its
general sphere of influence in its sparsely populated outer regional pos-
sessions (Irwin 1955:151). The upriver interior in Western Borneo was es-
pecially little known and was represented by blank areas on colonial maps
(see Map 4, p. 80). However, it was widely known among the Dutch that
the interior was rich in natural resources, and that their access to these
resources was under immediate threat by the British expansion. From
1841 on, Sarawak was governed by an independent British colonialist
and adventurer named James Brooke, known as the ‘White Rajah’ (White
King). Brooke first arrived in the area in 1839 and helped the Sultan of

19 A large part of the archipelago today known as Indonesia was former known as the colonies of the
Netherlands East Indies. The Residency of the Western Division of Borneo was established in 1848.
Brunei to put down a local rebellion. For his assistance in ending this rebellion, Brooke was made the sovereign ruler of Sarawak. A few years later, in 1845, he was appointed British agent in Borneo (Irwin 1955: 103). The Brooke family administered the area for several generations until it was passed on to the British crown after World War II.20

The Brooke administration in Sarawak had, before Dutch consolidation of power in the area; begun initiating various trade contacts with local Melayu rulers in Dutch West Borneo. The Dutch feared that the communities living along the edge of their territory would eventually be swept into the Brooke sphere of influence.21 In the 1840s and 1850s, a series of concerned letters about James Brooke’s intrusion into the lower and upper borderlands was sent from the Resident of Dutch West Borneo to the Governor General of the Netherlands East Indies (GGNI) in Batavia (Jakarta) and from there to the minister of the Colonies. These letters requested additional officers to be posted near the border with Sarawak in order to check the influence exerted by James Brooke on the border-dwelling Dayaks.

Salt and firearms were among the illegal trade items of most concern to the Dutch. Trade in firearms was a military threat, while the salt trade was an economic threat as it reduced local Dutch tax revenue. These two trade items could be purchased considerably more cheaply in Sarawak than through Dutch trade channels.22 The Dutch were very uneasy about the Brooke government’s lax attitude towards its citizens, especially by the fact that Brooke officials often ignored Sarawak traders breaching the boundary line into what the Dutch claimed as part of the Netherlands East Indies territory. They were particularly concerned about Brooke’s moral influence and authority over the border population living in Dutch territory, with whom he traded, and whom he periodically fined and punished without involving Dutch authorities. Such meddling in the affairs of Dutch subjects was seen as a serious border offence that showed outright disregard of Dutch sovereignty. Border skirmishes further convinced Dutch officials of the importance of firm border control and establishment of the authority of the Netherlands

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21 See, for example, Geheime Verbalen. 1847 No. 49, 255, 335 and Openbare Verbalen. 1859 No. 30, Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
22 Extract van het Register der besluiten van den Nederlands-Indie Governor-General, 11-1-1855. Geheime Verbalen, 11-1-1856. No. 15, ARA.
At the edges of states

East Indies in West Borneo. As stated by the Dutch Resident[^23] Cornelis Kater in Pontianak: ‘In order to solve the disputes with our Sarawakian neighbours, it is necessary for strict government regulation along the border (grensregeling).’[^24]

### THE WILD FRONTIER: BATANG LUPAR COUNTRY

Already in the 1850s, several Dutch delegations were dispatched up the Kapuas River in order to make contact with local rulers and to establish a firm Dutch presence in its most northern district, the *Boven-Kapoeas* (Kapuas Hulu, Sintang and Melawi districts). Here the colonial administrators directed a particular focus on the hilly region inhabited by the Iban that bordered the British possessions in Sarawak (Kater 1883). Despite a common agreement that this hilly watershed represented the border, several attempts were made by the Dutch in subsequent years to officially delimit the border between the two colonial administrations. However, Dutch efforts in the area were not merely concerned with its territorial borders. In addition, the shifting and overlapping internal boundaries between the various ethnic groups were in need of clarification. In order to make the landscape more manageable, the Dutch put considerable effort into dividing natural resources and ethnic groups into what they defined as fixed and ordered boundaries. This vision of the landscape was based on the logic that one group or ruler had rights to a well-defined territory and its resources.[^25] This vision of the landscape was continually disputed, as it did not fit well with local Iban claims over resources. Among the Iban, resource claims generally were not based on land ownership per se but on rights to a particular natural resource, like a patch of fruit trees, or fishing rights in a lake or river.

A vivid example of this expanding Dutch territorialization in Western Borneo was the effort to pacify ‘rebellious’ Iban communities. Under the Dutch administration the Iban were referred to as ‘Batang Lupar Dayaks’, and the area they lived in as ‘Batang Lupar country’ (see Map 6, p. 82). When the Dutch first arrived in the upper Kapuas area, some Iban com-

[^23]: The Resident was the highest colonial authority on the provincial level.
[^24]: Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General from Resident Kater, 7-8-1868, Pontianak. Geheime Kabinetsverbalen, 30-9-1870 J13 No. 37, ARA.
[^25]: Van Kessel 1850; Van Lijnden and Groll 1851; Veth 1854.
munities from the Batang Lupar River in Sarawak had begun to migrate back into the upper Kapuas area and settle down along the main rivers, such as the Leboyan and Embaloh Rivers. These instances of Iban migration from Sarawak convinced the Dutch that the Iban were newcomers to their side of the border. The Dutch believed that the Iban originated in the Batang Lupar River system in Sarawak (Batang Ai). Consequently, the Iban were named the ‘Batang Lupar Dayaks’ or ‘Batang Lupars’ (de Batang Loepars) (Bouman 1924:174; Kater 1883:2). However, as mentioned previously, these migrations were only a later stage in a long and complex history of Iban movement in Western Borneo.

The Dutch arrival in the interior areas of the island in the mid-1850s was mainly an attempt to make their presence felt and prevent any encroachment by the Brooke administration into what they regarded as their territory. However, they often portrayed their role as that of peacemakers who would put an end to centuries of warfare between the various ethnic groups. As mentioned by the Dutch Resident:

> Without the detestable headhunting we would now have in the Batang Lupars a peaceable (rustige) people of perhaps 5000-6000 souls, which could cover the costs of administration amply, while at present we spend thousands to protect our peaceful subjects (rustige onderdanen) against the headhunting of that tribe [Iban] (Kater 1883:3).

The Dutch first encountered the Iban in 1854 at a meeting with all the customary Iban leaders in the border area (Niclou 1887). During the meeting, the Iban leaders made a vow of allegiance to the Dutch in which they promised to stop what the Dutch saw as undesirable acts, such as warfare and smuggling:

> These leaders were presented with gifts and a sort of uniform, while various matters were arranged. They would stand outside any intermediate government of Malay sultans but would be immediately under the authority (gezag) of the Netherlands Indies Government, restrain themselves from hostilities and headhunting, pay no direct taxes to the government but perform some services such as chopping wood and supplying iron-wood shingles. By establishing these services, our principal aim was not to increase our fund with such scanty amounts but to have our authority acknowledged (ons gezag te doen erkennen) (Kater 1883:3).
Van Schendel, for example, notes that the very existence of smuggling along borders is of much state concern, as it undermines the unitary image of the state and its authority as the sole enforcer of law and order within its bounded territory, a concern that becomes most evident in the following chapters (Van Schendel 1993:189).

In an attempt to consolidate their power, the Dutch began bestowing traditional positions of authority to elected representatives of the Iban communities, who were designated temenggong (tribal leaders) with deputies named patih. These appointed tribal leaders were either chosen by the Dutch or by local communities themselves, but they were ultimately subject to Dutch authority. The official role of the temenggong and patih was to act as mediators between the Dutch and local communities, resolve various disputes and collect taxes. This system was part of a Dutch strategy of indirect rule applied throughout West Borneo and other possessions (Harwell 2000b:49; Kater 1883:8).

Despite Dutch efforts, the temenggong never became fully trusted and loyal intermediaries, as was the original purpose. The temenggong more often than not took the side of kin rather than that of the Dutch. For example, in the 1860s a local Iban named Rentap was appointed the position of temenggong but soon proved a troublesome subject. In 1876, Rentap’s son carried out headhunting raids in the upper Kapaus River. Refusing to hand over his son to Dutch officials, Rentap’s son was forced to escape across the border into Sarawak. He later resettled on the Dutch side and gave himself up to authorities. Not trusting Rentap, the Dutch attempted to replace him as temenggong, but the united Iban community informed the Dutch that they would not accept another candidate (Wadley 2001b:1844). Rentap’s brother, Simpe, was directly related to the leading family in the longhouse community of Rumah Manah (the main locale of fieldwork) and the first Iban given the title of temenggong in the district of Batang Lupar.

Although different from traditional Iban political organization that was based primarily on kinship networks and had no recognized leaders

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26 These were originally honorary titles likely bestowed by Malayu rulers on Iban allies long before Dutch arrival in the area. Not only Iban but also Dayak groups in general were given these titles (Wadley 2000c:47).
27 For similar Dutch arrangements among Dayak populations in Central Kalimantan, see Van Klinken 2004.
28 Like the appointed Iban leaders, the Melayu rulers were also given official titles such as ‘pangeran’, a term borrowed from the honorifics of Javanese nobility.
Evading state authority

besides those who demonstrated outstanding combativeness (tuai serang) during raids, the Dutch system of elected tribal leaders has endured until the present and has become the highest authority within Iban society. Despite bringing the traditional positions of temenggong and patih under their supreme authority, the Dutch generally kept their Iban subjects free of bureaucratic control, and they regained a considerable degree of autonomy. As stated by Francis McKeown, ‘In its dealings with the border Iban, the Dutch were concerned almost solely with their international relations with Sarawak and made no attempt to exploit the labour force or agricultural production of the Iban (McKeown 1984:510).’

The Sarawak administration likewise invented new titles of leadership among their Iban subjects, the highest being that of penghulu, a leader who acted as the extended arm of the government out in the districts (Pringle 1970:157). Frustration over the lack of reliable leadership institutions among the border Iban was, for example, expressed in a letter to the Dutch from Charles Brooke in 1905: ‘This Dayak community [Iban] seem almost to be without leaders or anyone who they obey or who has influence over them.’

In the decades to come, the Dutch extended their presence in the border area and experienced their first difficulties in handling the Iban, and the Dutch subsequently named the Iban ‘[… the terror of the Kapuas (de schrik der Kapoeas)’ (Kater 1883:4). As reflected by an anonymous Dutch military official:

Of all our Dayak tribes the Batang Loepars with their headhunting are the most troublesome. They come from the Batang Loepar River, live in perpetual struggle with the Kantoek tribe and the punitive expeditions of the NI Government and the Rajah of Sarawak. They are in truth a natural nation that loves liberty.”

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29 In contrast, Ishikawa (2010) in his fine-grained historical account of the lower parts of the border, for example, demonstrates the early attempts of the Colonial Sarawak government in moulding a sense of ‘Sarawakian’ identity into its border inhabitants by domesticating the frontier surroundings. This was done through heavy taxation, resource exploitation regimes, and the development of agricultural zones. In Sarawak, the focus was on the control of resources and people, while attempts at demarcating the territorial border were more relaxed.


31 Anonymous (1928) Militaire memorie van de afdeeling Sintang, 10-11-1928. Memorie van Overgave, Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen 994, ARA.
As indicated above, two aspects of Iban life in the colonial era that were especially often mentioned in the Dutch colonial archives – warfare and migration. The Dutch experienced much frustration as their territorial divisions with Brooke’s Sarawak were constantly defied and resisted by the Iban population’s cross-border activities. Before the colonial intrusion into Western Borneo, the Iban had a long history of migration and movement and a well-established network of trade, communication, and kinship ties. The creation of the colonial borders did not mean an end to the interaction between the closely related Iban communities on each side of the border; on the contrary, the border was at times ignored or in several ways used to their advantage when it suited their needs. I do not want to imply that the Iban had no understanding of the importance of this political boundary. The Iban were quite aware that the border was of great importance to the Europeans, and that the watershed defined this new borderline. For example, they referred to the Dutch side as *ai Belanda* (*ai* being the Iban name for watershed or river and *Belanda* the Bahasa Indonesian word for ‘Dutch’) and the other side as *ai Sarawak*. However, the fact that the terrain along the border was predominantly low hills meant that there were no physical barriers that prevented or made border crossings difficult.

Iban raids were often directed against other ethnic groups, but inter-Iban raiding was also normal. Iban raiding parties attacked communities in both Dutch and Brooke territories. These warriors were often referred to as ‘Urang Kampar’, which is an Iban term for men who wander, trade or fight outside their own territory (Pringle 1970:229). As an immediate result of these continuous raiding campaigns, the two colonial administrations began patrolling the border on a regular basis and initiated several military counter-attacks on rebellious Iban. As a tool of pacification, they burned down longhouses, cut down fruit trees, and destroyed rice fields (*kampong werd verbrand en de ladangs werden omgehakt*) (Niclou 1887:50). When Iban raiding parties sought refuge from their enemies or from Dutch and Brooke punitive expeditions, they exploited the division of authority on the two sides of the border. When Iban from Sarawak en-
tered Dutch territory for raiding, they could afterwards retreat over the border without the Dutch being able to follow them. The border was also used by the Sarawak Iban to escape taxes imposed by the Brooke administration. Today, as then, a network of old trails and routes cross the border and connect the two partitioned Iban groups (King 1976b:101; Pringle 1970:229). ‘Raiding was the order of the day (Sneltogten waren aan de orde van den dag)’ the Dutch Resident proclaimed in a December 1872 monthly report. Although Iban on the Dutch side were active in raiding, the main Dutch frustration was with the more frequent raids conducted by Sarawak Iban.

In the early years of Dutch presence in the border area, the Dutch used Iban mercenaries on several occasions to suppress Malay and Dayak rebellions elsewhere in their West Borneo territory (Bouman 1924:187). Iban mercenaries were also widely used by the Brookes in Sarawak. The Iban themselves seemed to welcome this opportunity to take part in officially sanctioned punitive expeditions because it gave them the chance to raid and take heads (King 1976b:101). The Dutch quickly abandoned the use of Iban mercenaries, however, because they believed that the practice encouraged more raiding. The Brookes on the other hand choose to continue the practice, as it was much cheaper to use the Iban mercenaries than regular soldiers (Pringle 1970:241). Charles Brooke justified his use of Iban mercenaries by asserting that only Dayaks can kill Dayaks, and that it was better to leave such matters in their hands:

It is my firm belief that if left to themselves there will be a prompt and lasting settlement brought about, but on the other hand if there is interference from our Governments, inexperienced as they must be concerning the real feelings of the people, there will be an imbroglio which may last for years.

Instead of using local mercenaries, the Dutch erected permanent military posts manned by officers and regular soldiers. One such post was

33 Kort verslag der Residentie Westerafdeling van Borneo over de maand December 1872. Mailrapport 1873, No. 50. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
established close to the border in Nanga Badau. According to an 1880 report to Commandant van het Leger from the Pontianak regional Military Commandant Tersteeg, the military force stationed at the Nanga Badau border post consisted of the following: one first lieutenant as commander, one second lieutenant or adjutant (onderofficier), one European Fourier, two European sergeants, two native sergeants (inlandsche), one European corporal, two native corporals, ten European fusiliers, 40 native fusiliers, and one European corpsman. The main aims of this border patrol were, according to the commandant, to provide protection to the Resident on his expeditions among the Batang Lupars, to force the submission of hostile Batang Lupars, and to retrieve severed heads. But as mentioned by Resident Kater, the Nanga Badau military post was not only to protect ‘our citizens (onze bevolking)’, but also to see that the border was respected and to keep ‘our Batang Lupars’ (onze Batang Loepars) from headhunting. The stationed soldiers consequently began patrolling the border on a regular basis, a strategy that turned out to be more effective than the former use of mercenaries (Niclou 1887:51).

Not particularly pleased with a large Dutch military presence on the border with Sarawak, Brooke wrote several letters to the Dutch Governor General complaining that he doubted the effectiveness of such a show of force (machtsvertoon) and was not entirely clear about its main purpose. As a subtle warning, Brooke stated that such a heavily armed border patrol: ‘might also be considered somewhat as a menace to the state of Sarawak’.

The different approaches in dealing with Iban cross-border raids resulted in several controversies between the two colonial administrations, and they usually ended up giving each other the blame for the continuing cross-border raiding (Pringle 1970:217-8). The Dutch were particularly agitated by the continuous violation of the border and acts of indiscriminate headhunting (koppensnellen), which they blamed on the Brooke administration’s alleged lack of control over its undisciplined

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55 The Dutch also established smaller native posts staffed by government-paid Malays. One such post was established in the Ulu Leboyan at Jejawe.
57 Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General s’Jacob from Resident Kater, 6-3-1880. Mailrapport 1880, No. 250. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
58 Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General s’Jacob from Charles Brooke, 25-9-1882, Mailrapport No. 1066, Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
Iban mercenaries and wider Iban citizenry (Kater 1883). Meanwhile, the Brookes blamed the Dutch for being too lenient in their handling of the Iban (Pringle 1970:218). In 1882, Charles Brooke, the second ruler of Sarawak, actually offered to take the Kalimantan Iban under his firm control and suggested that it would –

lead to a more settled state of affairs if the whole tribe of Batang Lupar Dyaks, some of whom are living in Kapuas waters, were put under the control and direction of the Sarawak Government – even if a certain portion of the land adjoining the frontier where these Dyaks are located were transferred to the Sarawak rule ... it is not my wish to seek for enlargement of territory, or gain of any kind.

The Brooke administration emphasized that, with the exception of this specific part of the border (inhabited by the border Iban), the rest of Sarawak was in a state of peace, advancement, and prosperity. The Dutch Governor General bluntly rejected Brooke’s suggestion, as he did not see the advantage of such a solution. He believed instead that the best means to solve the Batang Lupar question was cooperation between governments.

The cross-border raids peaked in the late nineteenth century. The Dutch attempted to pacify the rebel Iban by sending military expeditions up the Leboyan River, but without much success, as the Iban again used the strategy of escaping across the border where the Dutch could not follow them. These military expeditions were not only an attempt to stop cross-border raids; the inter-ethnic feuding between the Iban and their neighbours the Maloh and Kantu was also of great Dutch concern. Prevention of Iban raiding of the more peaceful Maloh communities was given especially high priority.41 The strategy of criss-crossing the border used by Iban settled on both sides later triggered what was to be known as the Kedang Expedition (Niclou 1887:60-7).42 A Dutch official in 1885 wrote:

39 In the period between 1870 and 1890 there was an intensive mail exchange between the Dutch and Brooke.
41 See, for example, Mailrapport 1882 No. 720. Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General from Resident van Zutphen, 25-6-1882. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
42 The Kedang Range runs along the part of the border inhabited by the Iban.
The Rajah of Sarawak, C. Brooke, suggested starting an extermination-war (*verdeelgings-oorlog*) against the rebellious Batang-Loepars as he does not regard it possible to find a peaceful solution (*vredelievenden ieweg*) to the conflict (*geschillen*) with the Batang-Loepars at the border along our area (*ons gebied*). The war should be started by us (Dutch), by Sarawak or together, though in the last case it should not be simultaneously, but at different periods (Niclou 1887:29).^

The Iban name for the expedition was *Serang Rata*, meaning ‘the attack that struck everywhere’ (Wadley 2004:609). Charles Brooke described the borderland situation leading up to the expedition as follows: ‘The Kedang Range is supposed and is practically the boundary line, as near as can be roughly estimated, and the Dayaks living on it drink both Sarawak and Kapuas waters’ (Pringle 1970:218).

Although the Dutch did not agree on the approaches used by the Brookes, in 1886 they allowed a Brooke military expedition to cross the border in the Kedang hills to punish rebellious Iban in certain specified areas.^

With a force of 10,000 to 12,000 men consisting of Iban loyal to the Brooke administration, the expedition burned down around 80 longhouses on both sides of the border, 41 of which were located in Dutch territory. The Dutch were very unsatisfied with the manner in which the expedition was carried out, especially the rampant raiding and looting conducted by the Iban mercenaries and their attacks on several Iban longhouses that the Dutch regarded as friendly. Based on oral accounts from contemporary Iban, Wadley, for example, describes how longhouses were systematically plundered and destroyed. The period up to and after the expedition made such a large impact on people’s lives that it was referred to as the ‘time of war’ (*musim kayau*) (Wadley 2004:622-8).

In the period after the expedition, in an attempt to handle the Iban problem, the Dutch created a new district (*Onderafdeeling Batang-Loeparlanden*) in the borderland, where they permanently stationed a Dutch district officer (*controleur*). They further increased the number of soldiers at the border post in Nanga Badau. Iban leaders on both sides

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43 See also Mailrappport 1885, No. 664. Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General from C&M Authority Haga, 5-10-1885. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
44 Mailrapport 1886, No. 293. Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General from Resident Gijsbers, 18-4-1886, Pontianak. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
of the border subsequently tendered their submission to the Dutch and the Brookes respectively. The Dutch gave the Iban on their side two conditions for submission. First, they had to pay a fine as a promise to stop raiding and second, all longhouses upriver affected by the expedition had to move away from the border into specific territories further down-river (Wadley 2001c:634-5).

**REBELLION AND PACIFICATION**

Where two countries like Sarawak and Netherlands Indian Borneo territory meet, with a thickly afforested and sparsely populated borderline, the difficulty of arresting criminals [referring to border inhabitants] before they have had time to pass into the neighbouring territory is very great, especially in cases where, as in Sarawak proper, the distance to be covered is not very great.... Persons who find it politic to hurriedly shift from one side of the border to the other can hardly be considered as valuable citizens of either State. In the interests of the security of both life and property we shall always be glad to know that mutual accommodation of these matters is practiced to the benefit of peaceable inhabitants and to the discomfort of the criminal classes.45

This *Sarawak Gazette* quote from 1895 clearly elucidates the border dilemma as experienced by the two colonial powers concerning their ‘unruly’ Iban. Along with raiding and migration, the collection of taxes was one of the most frequent reasons for conflict between the Iban and their colonial administrators, the Dutch and the Brooke. The Brooke administration introduced a regular ‘door tax’ or tax on each Iban family (Pringle 1970:160-4). When the Dutch first arrived in the Iban area, they also imposed taxes, although they did not appear to collect them on a regular basis. Under the Dutch, taxes were raised several times in the effort to pacify the raiding Iban. The Dutch purpose for taxing the Iban is made clear in the following statement by the Dutch Resident Cornelius Kater: ‘The Dayak recognizes no authority than that to which he brings taxes ([*de Dajaks erkent geen gezag dan dat waaraan hij belasting opbrengt*])’ (Kater

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45 Quote from *Sarawak Gazette* (1-10-1895) in Report from Assistant Resident A.A. Burgdorffer, 2-12-1914, Verbaal 20-8-1915 No. 41, Politieke Verslagen en Berichten uit de Buitengewesten van Nederlands-Indië (1898-1940). Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA [TransRW].
1883:3). As both Pringle and Wadley point out, the taxation of the Iban was not just carried out in order to increase government revenue, but to a considerable extent as an attempt to demonstrate authority over the Iban, who were considered especially recalcitrant by the Dutch and British. Furthermore, when the Iban refused to pay taxes they at the same time denied colonial authority and signalled rebellion (Pringle 1970:164; Wadley 2004:615).

In the time after the Kedang Expedition and the following (forced) peace agreement, the raiding seemed to cease, and a short period of stability began, but trouble broke out again a few years later. Bantin, a renowned Iban war-leader from the Delok River, got into a conflict with the Brooke administration by refusing to pay taxes and resettle away from the border.46 In an 1897 letter to the Dutch resident, Brooke requested that the Dutch prevent their Iban from aiding Bantin, who in preceding years had moved back and forth across the border. In a reply to Brooke’s letter the Dutch resident agreed to talk with his Iban citizens about the matter, but also explicitly stated that no Sarawak punitive expedition would be allowed to cross the border:

However Sir, in the event of your directing a bala [large raiding party] to punish the rebels, Your Highness will highly oblige me by strictly forbidding Your Dyaks to pass the frontier, as this would be unnecessary and dangerous. Unnecessary because I dispose of sufficient means to prevent criminals from hiding within our territory, dangerous because of the possible consequences of some misunderstanding easily to be conceived.47

Bantin was generally on good terms with the Dutch, and the Dutch ignored Brooke’s requests to treat Bantin as an outlaw. The Brooke frustration concerning the Dutch attitude towards Bantin and his followers is clearly outlined in the following statement by a Sarawak official:

As long as Bantin and his people know that they are not treated as enemies by the Dutch authorities I am convinced they will continue to give trouble to Sarawak Dayaks (Quote in Pringle 1970:230).

46 Bantin was at the time one of the most feared Iban warriors in Sarawak (Pringle 1970:220).
47 Letter to Resident Tromp from Raja Brooke, 14-8-1897, Kuching Openbaar Verbaal, 11-8-1898, No. 43. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA [TransRW].
Additionally, Brooke stated in a letter dated 12 April 1903 to the Dutch Resident de Neve in West Borneo:

Bantin seems to have no power, if indeed, he has the wish to do so, to prevent his people from making marauding expeditions, and these people rely upon their vicinity to the frontier for protection and for the necessities of life. They are careful to keep on good terms with the NI government officials, police, and Chinese traders across the border. It is known that Dutch Batang Lupars are involved in Bantin’s raids […]. Pronounce Bantin and his follower’s enemies and forbid any Dutch subjects from having any relations with them. They should be declared outlaws and be dealt with severely and any measures taken against them, even to their being attacked, will not call any official notice from me, so long as they continue in the lawless state.48

The Dutch Resident de Neve replied to Brooke in a letter dated 29 April 1905:

Owing to the fact however that Bantin and his followers have never made marauding expeditions nor committed any hostile act on Dutch territory and are even, as Your Highness states, anxious to be on friendly terms with the Netherlands officials, I do not feel justified to declare them outlaws and to attack them by force of arms.

In the same letter, the Resident further asked whether Brooke had any objections ‘to Bantin and his own people establishing themselves after submission on Dutch territory under the special control of the Dutch officials’.49

In the period 1902 to 1908, the ‘criminal acts’ of Bantin and his troubled relationship with the Brooke colonial administration was repeatedly mentioned in the Simanggang Monthly Reports of the Sarawak Gazette.50

49 Letter to Raja Brooke from Resident de Neve, 29-4-1905, Pontianak. Behoort in Verb. 17-4-1906 No. 33; Mailrapporten 1904 Nos. 861 and 865; 1905 No. 888. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA [Trans-RW].
50 See Simanggang Monthly reports, 1902-09, Sarawak Gazette, Sarawak Museum Library (SML).
For example, it reported, ‘The N. I. Dyaks were fined for disturbing the border and fines were also imposed upon the Ulu Ai and Engkari [Iban]. The Sarawak Dayak refused to pay and in March Bantin attacked Ulu Sremat (below Lubok Antu) killing three Dyaks and wounding two.’

In October 1902 Brooke launched a large force (approximately 12,000 men) of government-friendly Iban against Bantin on his side of the border. Unfortunately, this expedition was severely diminished by disease (cholera) and was repulsed. Several other major expeditions were carried out in 1903, but it was not until 1908 that the Brooke administration managed to subdue the rebels and put a stop to Bantin’s raiding in Sarawak territory. Resident D.J.S. Bailey of the Batang Lupar District (Sarawak) notes how he burnt down the house of Bantin and that of several other rebel leaders in a successful September 1908 government expedition against the rebels in the Ulu Ai. A total of 22 longhouses was destroyed. In a statement on the Bantin problem made in July 2008, a few months before the expedition, Resident Bailey asserted,

I am certain that until these people are dealt with there will be no peace in the Ulu of this river. All the other people are insignificant compared with these notorious head takers – Bantin, Ngumbang, Alam, Rangga [Bantin’s son] and others, whose houses are near the border in Ulu Dekok, on Bukit Katupong.

Not welcome in Sarawak territories, Bantin fled back and forth across the border, and in 1909 he eventually took refuge and permanently settled in the Ulu Leboyan area with his followers, who numbered approximately eighty families (King 1976b:103; Pringle 1970:220-33).

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51 Quote from Simanggang Monthly Report, 3-3-1903, p 51, Sarawak Gazette, SML.
52 Simanggang Monthly report, 3-3-1903, pp 50-1, Sarawak Gazette, SML.
54 ‘Expedition against Dayak rebels in the Batang Lupar’, 1-10-1908, pp 244-6, Sarawak Gazette, SML. See also Kort verslag over September 1908, Resident van Driessche, 30-10-1908, Pontianak. Behoort in Verb. 7-5-1909 No. 44; Mailrapporten 1908 Nos. 512, 649, 799, 1057, 1319, 1532, 1701, 1849. Ministerie van Kolonien, ARA.
55 Simanggang Monthly Report, 1-9-1908, p 223, Sarawak Gazette, SML.
BORDER OUTLAWS: PERPETUATING SEMI-AUTONOMY

As an informative case of the troubled relationship between the Iban and their colonial masters I will briefly describe the oral accounts of one particular longhouse community, Rumah Manah in the Ulu Leboyan. The leading families of this contemporary Iban community trace their origins back to the warrior Bantin and his followers, just as do many other Iban communities in this part of the border area. The older generation of Rumah Manah still tells stories with great pride about how Bantin and his warriors used the borderland as a starting point and refuge for conducting raids into Sarawak and areas down-river in Dutch territories (Burgemeestre 1934).

Despite the fact that he was on good terms with the Dutch, Bantin’s continuing violation of the Dutch prohibition against raiding and the threat of more punitive expeditions by the Brookes caused the Dutch to send troops into the Ulu Leboyan in early 1917 to pacify Bantin. The outcome of this largely peaceful Dutch show of force was the relocation of as many as 300 Iban households down-river away from the border (Bouman 1952:83-4). This movement was carried out under the threat of force, and although no fighting took place, several Iban men were jailed for resistance, weapons and severed heads were confiscated, and longhouses and fields were burned. The Iban were warned that if they did not comply with Dutch authority they would be expelled across the border to Sarawak. After some resistance, Bantin and his followers took an oath of allegiance to the Dutch and settled permanently along a small stream in the Ulu Leboyan. Bantin died in 1932 and was buried on a hilltop close to of the Rumah Manah longhouse, as was the custom for war heroes (urang herani) (King 1976b:104-5).

Old longhouse settlements (tembawai) have since been abandoned in favour of locations closer to the Leboyan River, the main artery of transport at the time. The families of these old longhouse settlements have since erected several ‘new’ longhouses in the Ulu Leboyan area, Rumah Manah being one. Although partly covered by secondary forest and old growth fruit gardens, old settlements close to the border still play a crucial role in the local imagination of a glorious past with brave warriors and fierce battles. The people in the Ulu Leboyan still remember the names of many brave men such as Ngumbang, Asan, Ajun, Emba, Enjak, Simpai and Belaiung, to mention a few. Every bilik member in
Rumah Manah, young or old, is very conscious of his or her roots of origin. During an interview, one of the junior members of the longhouse, Ningkan aged 14, proudly told me about his famous descendant: ‘My family descends from brave people (Keluarga saya adalah keturunan orang berani)’.

The cultural landscape is very rich with stories about Iban and Dutch confrontations. When I accompanied locals on trips around the area, they constantly pointed out to me locations of fierce battles and strongholds against the Dutch and the Brookes. The landscape of the Ulu Leboyan is spattered with locations of confrontation from Iban rebellions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. These locations have become symbols of how the Iban courageously fought the Dutch and Brooke colonial regimes. An example of such a location is a large flat rock where many of the former Iban settlements were located. The people of Rumah Manah call this rock Batu Bangkai (literally the stone of corpses), referring to the fierce fighting that took place in the 1870s and 1880s between the Iban and the Dutch on that location (Niclou 1887:50). Nearly all Dutch reports on ‘the Batang Lupar issue’ from that period mention the Iban communities at Batu Bangkai as especially resistant towards colonial authority. The Dutch Resident Kater mentioned how the isolated and almost inaccessible Batu Bangkai ‘gradually became a hide-out for all with whom we had a score to settle (rekening hadden te vereffenen)’ (Kater 1883:10).

In 1879, patrol Commandant Lieutenant Schultze reported on a military expedition up the Leboyan River accompanied by an attachment of 55 men. Arriving at Batu Bankai, an Iban stronghold, he sent emissaries to the Iban in order to seek their surrender and arrange for their resettlement away from the border. Not receiving any response from the Iban, Schultze decided to burn down two longhouses and destroy fruit gardens and swiddens. Nothing was spared (Van dezen werd overigens niets bespaard). In a letter dated 7 June 1880 to the Dutch Resident Kater, Brooke stated the importance of ruthlessly subduing rebellious Iban along the border. This was specifically directed towards those rebel Iban at Batu Bangkai, who were particularly hostile outside the control of colonial power. He further claimed that these Iban were

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so savage and inaccessible that peace, even among themselves, was hopeless.57

Bantin and his group of followers were not the only Iban rebels from Sarawak to seek refuge in Dutch territories over the border; there are several similar examples (Pringle 1970:216-8). Ever since Bantin and his followers settled down in the Ulu Leboyan in the early twentieth century, when the international border was created, there has been an ongoing movement of people back and forth across the border. According to Dutch figures, the total number of Iban or ‘Batang Loepars’ living in Dutch Western Borneo territory was approximately 6780 individuals in 1921 (Bouman 1924:192). The inhabitants of the present Rumah Manah are a mixture of the families of the original founders and kin from Sarawak who, over time, have joined the community.

For example, one of the founding fathers of the present Rumah Manah has since immigrated across the border to Sarawak, joining family there. Although resident in Sarawak and now a Malaysian citizen, he still enjoys the inactive rights to large tracts of land around the longhouse of Rumah Manah. According to Iban adat, moving away means giving up one’s rights to fallow lands, but one still retains rights to fruit and honey trees on such land. However, as noted by Wadley, such relinquished rights are easy to regain by moving back (Wadley 1997b:101). A daughter of this former inhabitant of Rumah Manah has since moved back to the longhouse and claimed the rights of her father’s land. Thus, over time, there has been an ongoing shift in and renewal of the Rumah Manah inhabitants, which shows that the community has always been in a stage of flux and taken advantage of cross-border strategies. For the inhabitants of Rumah Manah and other Iban communities in the borderland, this long history of raiding and migration has in several ways affected their outlook on life when dealing with contemporary social, political, and economical processes – an issue I will discuss in more detail later on.

In half a century, from July 1868 to August 1917, Dutch and Brooke forces carried out approximately seventeen documented punitive expeditions against Iban inhabiting the Dutch side of the border. Six of these were directed against communities in the Ulu Leboyan. During this

57 Letter to Resident Kater from Rajah C. Brooke, 7-6-1880, Mailrapport 1880 No. 1030. Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General from Resident Kater, 15-10-1880, Pontianak. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
period, 115 longhouses were destroyed (Wadley 2007:117-9). Dutch efforts to pacify the Iban seemed to have had an effect and but a Dutch colonial officer mentions how the Iban on their side of the border were still restless after the pacification (de Batang Loepars aan onze kant der grenz roerig geweest.... (Bouman 1924:187).

Even after pacification of the Iban border communities, the colonial governments treated the Iban with caution in order not to antagonize them. For example, Iban on both sides of the border paid fewer taxes than other native peoples – in Sarawak because they were obligated to serve on government expeditions, and in Dutch West Borneo probably to keep things on a par with Sarawak’s practice. Dutch government commissioner A. Prins stated that the Iban should not pay any considerable taxes in order to make it increasingly in the Iban interest to side with the Dutch.59

From the 1930s until the Japanese occupation in the 1940s, only sporadic raiding took place in the borderland. Because of World War II, the Dutch left the area in 1942. In addition, the system of Dutch-appointed leaders, temenggong and patih, became increasingly autonomous over time, particularly during the political transition of the 1940s and 1950s, when the borderland and its population was largely left alone. The short period of Japanese occupation did not greatly affect the lives of the West Kalimantan Iban compared to the devastating effect it had on the coastal population in the province (Heidhues 2003:197-210). In the borderland, the Japanese occupation (musim Jepun) was generally associated with a lack of all necessities such as salt and cooking oil and depicted as indeed a difficult time (masa pemerintahan Jepun susah sekali).60 One finds only a few accounts of Kalimantan Iban involvement in fighting against the Japanese, although a large group of local Iban took part in an attack on a Japanese military camp across the border at Engkilili, Sarawak, where they suffered great losses because of Japanese superior weaponry (Lumenta 2005:13-4; Wadley 1997:48). After World War II and the sur-

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58 Also back home in the Nederlands, reports of the ‘vicious’ Batang Lupars in the West Borneo possessions reached local newspapers. For example in March 1912 Utrechts Nieuwsblad, a Dutch daily, published an article with the heading ‘Headhunters’ that depicted how a band of Batang Lupars in November 1911 had beheaded several friendly Dayaks in the Lanjak area and how the culprits had escaped the Dutch military patrol by crossing the border to Sarawak.


60 Personal interviews, Lanjak, 3-3-2007.
render of the Japanese, the Dutch once more tried to regain control of the Indonesian islands. The last mention of the Iban border communities in the colonial archives appeared in a small note in 1947 mentioning how a military patrol was sent out to the Batang Leepar-landen in response to a rumour about an Iban headhunting trip planned along the border. Confronted with widespread Indonesian nationalism, the Dutch formally withdrew from the province in 1949. The Indonesian struggle for independence subsequently resulted in the creation of an Indonesian State. In 1953, the Indonesians took control of West Kalimantan and created their own government administration, and in January 1957, the region received provincial status (Layang 2006).

Many scholars have portrayed borderlands as being outside state influence and as zones of anarchy where identities are flexible, loyalties ephemeral, and state authority largely evaded. Depicted by state administrators as outlaws and rebels roaming the border hills, the populations inhabiting these peripheral areas of states further seem especially resistant towards officialdom because of their involvement in practices of questionable legality and their apparently heightened sense of autonomy. As ‘non-state spaces’, the stretch of the Dutch West Borneo-Sarawak border inhabited by the Iban in many ways resembles what Scott has termed ‘the last enclosure’. Zones of refuge in which state authorities are relatively weak and populations openly resistant to state political and administrative pacification and standardization (Scott 2008, 2009).

For many border people, these borders were and still are as much a basis of opportunity as they are a barrier. By contrasting local narratives with colonial records in the border regency of Boven-Kapoeas in Dutch West Borneo in the mid-nineteenth century, I have shown how regionally renowned rebel leaders did their best to take advantage of the differing terms and conditions that colonial rule offered on either side of the border and as a result openly challenged colonial authority. The border-dwelling Iban became increasingly accustomed to considerable autonomy in dealing with local matters and have not hesitated to challenge attempts to reduce that autonomy. A late nineteenth-century Dutch official referred to them as ‘een levendig en strijdlustig volk’ (a lively and

pugnacious people). Although one should be cautious about drawing overly simplified conclusions like this one, it does account for a certain cultural vitality and confidence that has been fostered, in no small part, by the unique relationship the Iban on both sides of the border have crafted with changing governments over the past century and a half. Not coincidentally the Iban-inhabited stretch of the border between Dutch West Borneo and British Sarawak produced the most continuous border tensions between those colonial powers in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The Iban were demonstrably difficult to contain and pacify.

Rebel defiance of colonial power and accompanying border tension convinced colonial administrators that they needed to impose strict control among the Iban-inhabited stretch of the Dutch West Borneo-Sarawak border. One could argue that the numerous Iban rebellions and consequent Dutch attempts to establish law and order largely contributed to the territorial demarcation of the colonial state and later Indonesian state. Accompanying punitive military expeditions and administrative pacification of the rebel Iban thus significantly contributed to the strengthening of the border and larger processes of state formation. Hence, the struggle with the Iban rebels simultaneously became a struggle over territorial borders. As Gallant concluded, ‘Boundaries took on concrete form in space through the interactions between border guards and bandits who seized upon the jurisdictional ambiguity of these liminal zones as cover for their depredations’ (Gallant 1999:40).

Despite the determined efforts of the colonial state, the Iban were not easily subdued; they remained largely autonomous in dealing with local affairs and continued their ambivalent relationship with state authorities in post-colonial Indonesia.

62 Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General from Resident Tromp, 10-6-1891, Openbaar Verbaal, 12-6-1894 No. 13. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
63 Letter to Nederlands-Indie Governor-General from Resident Tromp, 4-4-1894, Openbaar Verbaal, 6-6-1895 No. 12. Ministerie van Koloniën, ARA.
Fig 20: Military certificate issued to an Iban volunteer signed by General Soeharto, 1967 (Photograph by author)
Fig 21: Military certificate from Battalion Infantry 327 Braddjawidjaja thanking Iban leader for his help during the anti-insurgency, 1974 (Photograph by author)
Fig 22: Military certificate to Iban WANRA ‘volunteer’, 1988 (Photograph by author)
Fig 23: Monthly honorarium to Iban member of civil defence unit, 1976 (Photograph by author)
Fig 24: Letter of honour to Iban leader for his help in apprehending two PARAKU rebels, 1970 (Photograph by author)
Fig 25: Letter of loyalty to the Indonesian government signed by Iban leader, Lanjak 1972 (Photograph by author)