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Reconsidering an ethnic label in Borneo; The Maloh of West Kalimantan, Indonesia


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Reconsidering an Ethnic Label in Borneo
The 'Maloh' of West Kalimantan, Indonesia

'Name is surely the simplest, most literal, and most obvious of all symbols of identity. But, like everything simple, it is complicated.' (Harold Isaacs, Idols of the tribe.)

Ethnicity in Borneo

Ethnic identity is, as Isaacs suggests, paradoxically simple and complex (Isaacs 1975:71). At its simplest, ethnic self-identification throughout Borneo (as elsewhere) is like an onion with multiple layers, but which 'layer' is important depends upon who the interlocutor is and how far from home the self-identification occurs (Sellato forthcoming; King 1982). Close to home and in speaking to people from other communities and other nearby rivers, people primarily identify themselves by community membership and river of origin. Among themselves, they might also resort to an autonym in distinguishing themselves from other groups. Further afield, an upstream-downstream distinction becomes important, with people identifying themselves

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2 This is similar to what Nagata (1974) calls 'situational' ethnicity.

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by a series of exonyms depending on how far down or up the major river they happen to be.

Take the roughly 14,000-strong Iban population of West Kalimantan as an example. Within their home area in the Kapuas Hulu regency along the border with Sarawak, Malaysia, they distinguish each other on the basis of community, river of origin, and dialect. Thus, people from the community of Libong call themselves Urang Libong in contrast to people from other communities, with dialect differences existing even between nearby communities. They further distinguish themselves as Urang Emperan (that is, those Iban living in the low-lying country north of the Kapuas lakes) in contrast to the Urang Merakai, who occupy the more mountainous area to the west, or the Urang Ulu Ai’ in the adjacent upriver areas of the Batang Lupar in nearby Sarawak. Away from this core area, they might also distinguish themselves as Urang Ulu Ai’ (referring to their origins in the upper Batang Lupar of Sarawak) in relation to other Iban groups such as those living in the Saribas or lower Rejang region in Sarawak. In contrast to other Dayak, they call themselves Iban or, more recently, refer to their home subdistrict or regency. Further downstream, such as in the provincial capital of Pontianak, and in the company of non-Dayaks, they call themselves Dayak or, as a more specific distinction; Dayak Iban. They might also refer to themselves by regency as Orang Kapuas Hulu. In Jakarta, they become Orang Dayak, Orang Kalimantan, or Orang Kalimantan Barat.

In the past, before the increased communication resulting from colonial control and subsequent efforts at national integration, it was common for people to have no name for themselves beyond their river or river system. Many non-riverine or supra-riverine labels were and are exonyms, given to a particular category of people by people in another river system (see Langub 1987). The upland inhabitants of South Kalimantan are a case in point: while they have been called 'Meratus' by Tsing (1984), they themselves do not agree on a common ethnic tradition, and even deny any ethnic distinctiveness.

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3 This division is actually based on the area of origin, as the Emperan Iban ultimately come from the upper Batang Lupar River in Sarawak and the Merakai Iban from tributaries of the lower Batang Lupar.

4 The label 'Iban' has been regarded by some scholars as an exonym derived from a Kayan word *hitan*, supposedly meaning 'son-in-law' or 'wanderer' (Richards 1988:111). This was presumably acquired by Iban men in the last century during their long journeys into the interior of Borneo in search of forest products (though one BKI reviewer notes that this origin of the term is highly improbable). The Iban themselves, however, regard the term in two ways: (1) as an autonym referring to their ethnicity, and (2) as a word meaning 'human'. A typical question when first approaching a house is, ‘*Bisi’ iban aba’ rumah?’ (Is there anyone / any human at home?). While the exact origin of the label is still unclear, this may be a case of an exonym becoming an autonym (see Amster 1998:26-32 for a similar case among the Kelabit of Sarawak).

5 See Sellato (forthcoming) for a similar situation in East Kalimantan.
They do, however, reject as pejorative the lowland Banjar term Bukit for them. Conversely, I have encountered young urbanized Dayak in Pontianak who could not come up with a local ethnic label for themselves (other than the name of their town of origin, such as Singkawang), saying only that they were Dayak, a term which until recently was regarded by some as pejorative (Djuweng 1992).

What we might call ‘ethnic switching’ is also common. The most well-known cases of this are those of people who masuk Melayu, or become Malay, through the adoption of Islam and other features of local Malay culture (see, for example, King 1985:30-1). This is, of course, not as straightforward as it seems. First, Malay culture in Borneo is by no means monolithic, and even within the same river system, such as the Kapuas of West Kalimantan, there is a good deal of variation. Second, formal entry into Islam does not necessarily mean full entry into Malay culture and society. A case I know of from West Kalimantan serves to illustrate the point. In the past few decades, an Iban community of some 14 households moved from the border region near Sarawak to Sebilit, a tributary of the Bunut River on the south bank of the Kapuas. At the same time, they converted to Islam. Iban from their home area called their conversion masuk Melayu and said that they were now no longer Iban, even though they still lived in an Iban-style longhouse (Wadley and Kuyah forthcoming). Conversely, it is likely that the Malays living in the Sebilit area do not regard them as being fully Malay, or even Malay at all. This perception would probably change with time, as these Iban gradually changed their residential arrangements, intermarried with local Malays, and adopted the locally recognized trappings of Malay culture. On the other hand, they might remain Iban in some respects while still adhering to Islam, thus creating an entirely new identity, in the same way as the Muslim Melanau of Sarawak.

There are also many cases of people being absorbed into one ethnic group or another through marriage or conquest (King 1985:30; Rousseau 1990). The Iban provide another example of this from their population expansion in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In the process of moving into new areas, generally occupied by foraging groups, Iban made allies of some and enemies of others. Those allies, generally known as Bukitan, adopted longhouse residence and other features of Iban culture, as well as intermarrying with others...

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6 Enthoven (1903:107) reported similar developments along the same river in the 1890s. Back then, Malays on the upper reaches of the Bunut had not entirely given up old Dayak habits, such as living in longhouses and drinking arak (see also Bouman 1924:185).

7 I have also encountered the use of the name ‘Dayak’ in self-identification among Kapuas Malays. A government official in Pontianak who was a Malay from Tayan, in a conversation with me, referred to himself as Dayak, by which he meant someone indigenous to Kalimantan, as opposed to the many outsiders in the area.
their Iban neighbours and allies. In this way they were absorbed into Iban culture, although some now exist as very small but separate ethnic groups (Pringle 1970:39-40). Enemies, such as the Seru, were displaced. They were also, as individuals, captured and eventually incorporated into Iban families (see Sandin 1967).

Western notions of ethnicity, however, have shaped modern conceptions of ethnicity among the people of Borneo (see Rousseau 1990:75). For example, the Iban of Sarawak had no real notion of themselves as a large, fairly homogeneous ethnic category before the imposition of colonial rule in the nineteenth century; until then their primary identity was based on village and riverine distinctions. Because of colonial identification and administrative treatment of Iban in different river systems as the same, the concept of a wider Iban ethnicity grew (see Pringle 1970; see also Tsing 1984), but as a political force the Iban have remained fractionalized along largely riverine lines (Searle 1983). A similar situation can be seen in Sabah, where political leaders in the 1960s attempted to forge a political movement around the identity of Kadazan (or more recently, Kadazan-Dusun), which they proposed as a name to cover a large group of different native peoples. The movement ran into some difficulty because some people (such as the Rungus) who would have been classified Kadazan rejected the label (Lasimbang and Miller 1990; see Appell and Harrison 1969).

Another well-known case in southern Kalimantan is that of the Ngaju. This term has emerged as a common 'ethnonym' covering several distinct, river-based groups (such as the Katingan and Kahayan). Through the official, Ngaju-dominated Kaharingan religion, minor groups are being culturally absorbed by the Ngaju (B. Sellato, personal communication). In some cases, as in that of the Luangan, there is a core area in which most people accept a common ethnic identity and use a particular label as a primary autonym, but beyond this core area people may reject that label for themselves, though they see themselves as being related to the 'core' (Sillander 1995:74-5). In other cases, international borders may result in different official ethnic labels for the same people, as with the Lun Dayeh-Kerayan in East Kalimantan and the Lun Bawang in Sarawak (Amster 1998:26-32).

In this paper, I examine one example of ethnic labelling, that of a people who have come to be known in English-language scholarship as the 'Maloh' of West Kalimantan, Indonesia. This case involves, on the one hand, Western

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8 A good example of this from outside the region is that of the Havasupai and Hualapai of northern Arizona. Until the imposition of different U.S. reservation systems, these tribes were the same people, but now they have separate ethnic identities (Martin 1985).

9 The same can be said of the various Malay groups throughout Borneo (Pringle 1970:xviii-xix).
ethnography about these people, and on the other hand, the recent reactions of some educated 'Maloh' to past ethnographic descriptions and ethnic labels. It also involves native aspirations for social, political, and intellectual authority within 'Maloh' and a wider Indonesian society. This brings up the problem that Western scholars face in dealing with such challenges to ethnographic authority and detail, as well as the problem of handling shifting ethnic labels.

The 'Maloh'

According to the best-known view, the 'Maloh' consist of three separate but related groups: the Embaloh, the Taman, and the Kalis (King 1985). According to this classification, the Embaloh occupy the Embaloh, Leboyan, Palin, and Lauh Rivers, with a splinter group on the upper Mandai River; the Taman occupy the Sibau and the Mendalam Rivers, and the Kapuas upstream from Putussibau; and the Kalis occupy the Kalis, Mandai, and Peniung Rivers. Recently Thambun Anyang (1996:1-2) has suggested that these three clusters should be referred to exclusively by riverine designations, as only the names Embaloh and Kalis refer to rivers, while Taman does not derive from the name of any nearby river. Thus, the clusters become (in Indonesian), Embaloh Sekitar, Kalis Sekitar, and Kapuas Sekitar respectively. These divisions largely coincide with the broadest geographical and linguistic distinctions within the 'Maloh' complex (see Figure 1).

Jacobs (1992) presents a more specific breakdown. His is an insider's view which, given my experience, seems to be fairly accurate as regards linguistic divisions (based for the most part on riverine divisions). According to him the Embaloh or Tamambaloh live in nine communities along the Embaloh River in the Embaloh Hulu district. Very closely related to them are the Labiyan or Labian in the Batang Lupar district, living in eight communities (two being mixed with Iban) along the Leboyan River. In the Embaloh Hilir district, the Alau and Apalin inhabit seven villages along the Lauh, Palin, and Nyabau Rivers. On the south bank of the Kapuas River are the Kalis in the Mandai district, living in ten communities on the Kalis and Mandai Rivers. The Paniung or Peniung in the same district live in four villages on the Peniung River. The Taman in the Putussibau district live in two

10 According to Thambun Anyang (1996:18), the label Taman may derive from an indigenous word meaning 'enter', which possibly refers to their location in the interior. If the name was originally based on that of a river, however, the closest rivers currently bearing this name are tributaries of the lower Bunut and the middle Mandai, which, though not very distant from the Taman area, are not likely to be accepted by Taman as their place of origin.
Figure 1. The distribution of the 'Maloh' in West Kalimantan (following Thambun Anyang 1996 and Jacobus 1992).
villages on the Sibau River, two villages on the Mendalam River, and nine villages on the Kapuas River.

Although there is significant variation across the different river systems (King 1985:9), the 'Maloh' share similar cultures and languages. The languages are largely mutually intelligible across river systems, despite many differences (King 1976). The linguistic name for them is 'Tamanic', following Hudson's (1978) classification. With respect to neighbouring languages, however, they are an isolate. Although they share many words through borrowing with other ethnic groups (such as the Iban and Kapuas Malay), their closest linguistic relations appear to be some languages in South Sulawesi: Von Kessel (1850:167) was the first to note the similarity to 'Makassar' or Bugis, and this has been variously repeated or verified by others (see Cense and Uhlenbeck 1958:38-9; Hudson 1978:20; Adelaar 1995:84-7).

Socioculturally the 'Maloh' have similar traditional laws, religious rituals, and ideologies concerning marriage, death, sickness, and agriculture (King 1978b:195). In the past they also shared ceremonial bead-work, elaborately carved and painted death houses, and methods of working silver and gold in common (King 1974, 1979). It was their silver and gold work that they were best known for among neighbouring societies (King 1985:35-6). The traditional social organization was based upon rank – a system they share with other, unrelated Central Borneo societies (King 1978a:27-32; see Rousseau 1990). Marriage between high-ranking families in different river systems was frequent, which perpetuated shared features within the ethnic complex (King 1985:34). This both facilitated and was reinforced by migration, such as by Kalis fleeing to their Leboyan kin during repeated Kayan raids in the early nineteenth century. Today the system of rank is largely inoperative, and the majority of people are Roman Catholic.

'Maloh' ethnicity

Despite past intermarriage among members of the higher ranks, the 'Maloh' have never been politically united (King 1979:7) and still largely conceptualize themselves as separate though related peoples. Just as elsewhere in Borneo, the range of identification stretches from village to river to a larger, supra-river category, which is determined by who the interlocutor is (see King 1982:32). For example, someone from the village of Bakul on the Leboyan River would first conceive of herself as being a Bakul person in relation to people from other villages on the same river. In relation to people of other, nearby rivers, she would be a Labiyan or Labian; and finally, in relation to Taman, Kalis, or any other group outside the immediate region, she might accept the label Embaloh or Tamambaloh. Beyond the region, of
course, she would be more likely to use the name Dayak, or a regional administrative designation (such as Orang Kapuas Hulu).

Indeed, although the 'Maloh' do recognize common features, there is no commonly accepted indigenous term for the entire complex (King 1979:8). The people in each category will often apply their own supra-river label to the complex as a whole. Thus, the Embaloh classify other 'Maloh' groups as Tamambaloh, while the Taman classify the other 'Maloh' as Taman. Each justifies such labelling by reference to various origin myths, in which the other groups have split from its own group in the past (King 1982:32, 1985:34-5). Among the new economic and educational Indonesian élite (mainly Taman, Embaloh, and Labiyan) the ongoing attempt to define themselves vis-à-vis other groups includes a search for acceptable indigenous ethnic labels. We will return to this issue later.

The term 'Maloh' has come into play through the English-language anthropological literature on Borneo. It is presently used widely and is even seen in travel guides to Indonesia (Dalton 1989:816) and in popular books on life in Borneo (Sellato 1989:21-2). 'Maloh' appears to derive from the term the Iban applied to the itinerant gold- and silversmiths who travelled through West Central Borneo in the nineteenth century (King 1985:35, 1979:9). Given the proximity of Iban and Embaloh groups, the first 'Maloh' the Iban would have encountered were probably Embaloh; hence the derivation of 'Maloh' from 'Embaloh'. Indeed, had the Iban referred to the wandering Embaloh silversmiths using the Iban name for their river of origin, they would have been called 'Kanyau', since that is the Iban name for the Embaloh River. It seems likely, therefore, that it was the silversmiths themselves who told the Iban that they were Embaloh, rather than the Iban using a term from their own language. Then in subsequent encounters even Taman silversmiths probably used the pre-existing label (see King forthcoming).

This hypothesis is indirectly supported by the first English-language ethnographic account of the 'Maloh', that by Harrisson (1965). Harrisson actually acquired his information from three Taman men visiting Sarawak. It is likely that, being far from home; in an area influenced by a strong Iban presence, these men, in keeping with past practice, felt more comfortable calling themselves 'Maloh' rather than Taman. I have experienced a similar situation in West Kalimantan, where in 1993 an agricultural extension officer visiting the Iban community where I worked initially referred to himself in conversation with his hosts as being a Paniung. Thereupon he quickly clarified this by saying he was a 'Maloh'. It may be that in the company of Iban it was easier and more logical to use the 'Maloh' designation than a more personally meaningful one.

An important point that follows from this is that, because English-language scholarship and literature about Borneo began in British-controlled...
Sarawak, with special attention being given to the Iban, it is not surprising that the term 'Maloh' has persisted. Borneo anthropology has been greatly influenced by its early fascination with Iban society, and the Iban have become a primary point of reference to which other societies in Borneo have been related. For example, the set of languages in western Borneo that is most closely related to Iban (such as Kantu', Mualang, Bugau, and Sebaro') is called Ibanic. The precedence, and indeed dominance, of the Iban in the ethnographic literature probably accounts for the initial choice of the name 'Ibanic' rather than a more 'neutral' term.\(^{11}\) In the case in point the Iban label for one segment of an ethnic complex ('Maloh') has come to be applied to the complex as a whole, leading to the assumption of greater homogeneity than there actually is (King 1979:10; see, for example, Harrisson 1965).

If Borneo anthropology had been influenced by early Dutch colonial writings, our system of ethnic classifications would be very different. In the case of the 'Maloh', there was little agreement among Dutch writers about appropriate labels (see King 1972, 1985 and Thambun Anyang 1996 for extensive reviews). For example, in the earliest published Dutch reference, Von Kessel (1850:185) refers to them as 'Pari' (Parische stammen), including all currently recognized subgroups. Few others followed in his footsteps, and the 'Pari' label did not persist.\(^{12}\) Only Hudson (1978:20) refers to 'Pari' as a separate 'Maloh' subgroup. Most other writers use other, localized terms while acknowledging the overall interrelationships within the complex (for example, Enthoven 1903). Thus, Bouman (1924:174, 178-81) refers to 'the Taman and related groups' (de groep der Tamans en verwanten). Given this situation, it is unlikely that any common label would have emerged from Dutch ethnography had it continued uninterrupted.

The most extensive work to use the term 'Maloh' is that of Victor King (see, for example, King 1972, 1974, 1976, 1978b, 1979, 1982, 1985). Indeed, it is King's work that is largely responsible for the wide use of 'Maloh' in English-language scholarship. His writings are based on research conducted in the early 1970s, primarily among the people of the Palin and Embaloh Rivers, with some work among the Taman of the Sibau River and interviews with some Kalis. Although his ethnographic work is based largely on Embaloh

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11 Although cumbersome, a name like 'Ketungauic' would better reflect the origins of the groups concerned, according to Ibanic myth (and linguistic data), in the Ketungau River area of West Kalimantan, and be more acceptable to non-Iban. The name 'Ibanic', apart from being used as a linguistic classification, has also come to be applied to a complex of culturally closely related societies (see, for example, Sutlive forthcoming).

12 Veth (1854:167) claimed that 'Pari' derived from the name of a tributary of the Mahakam in East Kalimantan (see King 1985:215 n. 10), while Bernard Sellato (personal communication) says that Pari were really Kayan from the Mahakam living among Taman groups along the Kapuas. King (1985:210) notes that Von Kessel's Pari word list appears to be from Embaloh.
and Palin material, therefore, he argues that the same 'general cultural themes' obtain for the complex as a whole (King 1974:207, 1985:11). With regard to the label 'Maloh' he writes:

I accept that the people themselves rarely use this term, and that they cannot agree on an internally derived name. On the other hand, they accept the label 'Maloh' from outsiders since they recognize it is a valid designation, indicative of a socio-cultural unity which distinguishes them from other Borneo people. (King 1979:10; see also King 1978b:195, 1982:34.)

While this acceptance of the label from outsiders may have held true twenty years ago, this is no longer so, possibly because of the decline in the phenomenon of itinerant silversmiths (that sustained the use of the term) from the 1960s on (King forthcoming). Today educated 'Maloh' are making efforts to find a common indigenous ethnic label and at the same time to challenge Western ethnography about their group. Thambun Anyang's doctoral thesis (1996) is the first published challenge in this respect. This author rejects the name 'Maloh' as an appropriate label for the ethnic complex, arguing that it is an externally imposed term derived from Iban (Thambun Anyang 1996:18-23). Thus, despite King's search for a suitable 'objective' label, some of the people designated by this label have come to regard it as being biased and subjective.

Thambun Anyang's alternative derives from his own native Taman classification. He notes that the Taman call all 'Maloh' groups 'Taman', citing both Taman myth and the writer Tjilik Riwut (1979:233) in support of this position (Thambun Anyang 1996:18, 19). He then claims that all 'Maloh' groups recognize that they are from the same stock, namely 'Taman', with only the Embaloh currently rejecting that label (Thambun Anyang 1996:22). In order to further distinguish the Taman (that is, Kapuas Sekitar) from the other 'Maloh' groups, he uses the term 'Rumpun Taman', or 'Taman Family', for the entire ethnic complex (Thambun Anyang 1996:23). However, this does not appear to have solved the matter to everyone's satisfaction. As was the case at the time of King's research, most groups, despite Thambun Anyang's contention, still hold to their own labels as the proper ones in classifying the ethnic complex. Where some Embaloh do not like the term 'Maloh', many maintain that all the groups are ultimately Embaloh or Tamambaloh. To Taman (like Thambun Anyang), everyone is ultimately Taman (see Bernstein 1997). The Kalis, in contrast, while acknowledging relatedness with the other groups, refer to themselves as Kalis and to the others by their river names.

13 Thambun Anyang is a Taman from the community of Sayut (Siut) on the upper Kapuas River. He is a professor of law at Universitas Tanjungpura in Pontianak and received his PhD from the Katholieke Universiteit Nijmegen, The Netherlands.
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A second alternative has been offered by Jacobus (1992), a mixed Iban-Labiyan government official and politician in West Kalimantan. He favours the term 'Banuaka' as the proper alternative for 'Maloh', arguing that this is a truly 'insider' label, meaning 'our people' or 'people of our place', and is a common indigenous name used for distinguishing 'Maloh' from other groups. The term also avoids the problem of assigning the name of one subgroup to the entire ethnic complex. Not surprisingly, however, not all 'Banuaka' accept the term. Thambun Anyang (1996:4) argues that in Taman the term means 'us together' and could thus refer to any group of people who share something in common (for example, all Dayaks). He further points out that the proponents of the term (such as Anna 1991) are all Embaloh (which in this case includes Labiyan) and that the use of the word as an ethnic label is entirely new (Thambun Anyang 1996:22; see also Bernstein 1997).

Ethnographic authority and challenges

There are three themes running through this debate, if one can call it that. The first involves native people challenging the ethnographies written about them by mainly Western scholars. The second involves competition for social, political, and intellectual authority within the societies in question. And the third concerns the problem faced by Western scholars in dealing with such challenges and with shifting labels.

As regards the first theme, the reaction of educated 'Maloh' such as Thambun Anyang and Jacobus to the Western ethnography (mainly by King) is similar to the reaction of other people to anthropological writings about them or their ancestors. One of the best examples of this is to be found in Derek Freeman's extensive work on the Margaret Mead-Samoan controversy. He cites a case of a Samoan student at the University of Hawaii standing up in class to protest against the use of Mead's Samoan material in teaching (Freeman 1999).

14 This is similar to the Kelabit use of 'Lun Tauh', or 'our people', in colloquial speech (Amsten 1998).
15 Indeed, I have even heard Iban speaking to Labiyan in the Labiyan language referring to the latter as 'Banuaka'.
16 It may be significant to Jacobus's promotion of the name 'Banuaka' that he was born in Sarawak and that his father was an Iban from Sarawak. Could the strong association with a regionally dominant ethnic group possessing a common overarching ethnic label have influenced his desire to promote an equally encompassing identity and label for his mother's people?
17 As far as I know, there has not been any indigenous response to the linguistic classification 'Tamanic'.

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Another recent example is provided by the Maoritanga movement in New Zealand, in which Maori currently hold European scholars of Maori society and culture in low esteem (Hanson 1989; see also Clifton 1989; Jackson 1989; Driessen 1993). It is likely that, if King had not written extensively about his research on the 'Maloh', educated Taman and Embaloh (including Labiyan) would have shown little interest in the matter. Their rejection of the label 'Maloh' thus probably represents an assertion of intellectual authority over outside, Western scholarship.

Thambun Anyang, in his thesis (1996), rejects the ethnography with respect to 'Maloh' stratification. He argues that the 'Maloh' were (and are) essentially egalitarian and that the system of ranking described by Dutch colonial administrators and Western ethnographers is the product of a perception biased by prior exposure to Malay ranking. In other words, ethnographers and other outsiders saw the 'Maloh' through Malay-coloured lenses, and thus detected ranking in native 'Maloh' social classifications. Thambun Anyang also thinks it likely that what inequalities previously existed in 'Maloh' society were the result of influence of Malay ranking. He further argues that the social categories mistaken by others as rank categories (sama-gat, pabiring, banua, and pangkam, corresponding to the so-called aristocratic, intermediate, commoner, and slave ranks respectively, see King 1985: 84-101) are actually descent categories. However, this argument has its own problems. On the one hand, it attempts to replace established ethnography with conjecture, assuming that all Westerners who have studied 'Maloh' social structure have been equally misled. On the other hand, and as Sellato (1998) points out in a recent review, Thambun Anyang himself presents enough evidence of status differences between the various social categories (for instance, the special privileges of the samagat) to contradict his own argument. Another approach would have been to treat the subject in a less 'black-and-white' fashion, as others have done in their consideration of the so-called 'stratification/egalitarian' issue in Borneo (Alexander 1992; Armstrong 1992; Helliwell 1994, 1995; Sather 1996).

Thambun Anyang thus must counter the weight of historical and ethnographic evidence with his sweeping rejection. Actually, it may be due to the success of nearly a century of Dutch Roman Catholic education, aimed at undermining certain features of traditional society, that the past system of

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18 Using this same argument, we might have come to regard Kalimantan Iban society as ranked because of: (1) past influence by Malay ranking through the appointment of Iban temeng-gong (most likely as part of a strategy of alliance-making with Malay kingdoms), and (2) occasional colonial references to these temenggong as 'raja' (for example, in Kielstra 1890:153). Although important status differences do occur among the Iban (see Sather 1996; Rousseau 1980), neither colonial officials nor ethnographers have classified their society as ranked or stratified.
stratification has declined in importance. Equally important in this respect may have been the influence of the Indonesian national ideology, promoting egalitarian ideals and rejecting 'backward' practices and institutions such as slavery (the victims of which formed the lowest level in the 'Maloh' ranking system; see Sellato 1998:510; King forthcoming). The extent to which this egalitarian ideal has been embraced by educated 'Maloh' and other Dayak groups, which dominant Indonesian groups have generally looked down upon, may determine how they conceive of their identity today. Indeed, as Sellato (1998:510) notes, 'Maloh' ethnic identity 'is now being constructed, through expression of both pride and denial, by the native anthropologist'.

In another vein, Thambun Anyang (1996:13) states that in Taman society new information is considered true when it is accepted by many people as true ('Pada masyarakat Taman, suatu informasi baru dianggap benar apabila oleh orang banyak diterima sebagai benar'). It is thus perhaps to be expected that 'Maloh' stratification should be a subject of dispute, particularly given that Thambun Anyang drew his information from interviews with and surveys (1996:12-5) among people who may have known, and possibly agreed with, his views on King's work. Did this perhaps influence them in their responses regarding past ranking? It may also be significant that Thambun Anyang's 'rivals' (mainly Jacobus) do not deny the importance of traditional ranking in the past, or even at present. Indeed, Jacobus, who is a samagat, has told me that in rituals involving any 'Maloh' subgroups (or mixed groups) he sits elevated above people of lower ranks, regardless of their education or economic status. To what extent this actually occurs routinely is, however, subject to question. Nevertheless, the important point is that not all 'Maloh' – even those who are well integrated into official Indonesian society, like Jacobus – accept Thambun Anyang's argument about stratification.

The second theme, competition for authority within 'Maloh' society, takes off from this. It is generally the educated elite of any group who become leaders in modern nations and who try to mobilize ethnic identity and ideology for political purposes. As Barth (1969:33) puts it, new elites use ethnic identity for building constituencies 'to develop new positions and patterns and to organize activities in those sectors formerly not found in their society or inadequately developed for the new purposes' (see also Cohen 1978; Wu and Foster 1982; Keyes 1981). The use and promotion of the name 'Banuaka" since the early 1990s by educated Embaloh and Labiyan living in Pontianak takes place in this context. It was spread throughout this elite community through a social organization created by Jacobus, among others. This organization, ostensibly designed for all border peoples (that is, the various groups living in the Kapuas Hulu districts bordering Sarawak, such as the Iban, Kantu,'
Melayu, and 'Maloh'), was dominated by Embaloh, Labiyan, and Taman.\textsuperscript{19} Jacobus was appointed bupati of the Kapuas Hulu regency in 1994. His position as such may be helpful to him in persuading other 'Maloh' (particularly Taman who live close to the regency capital, Putussibau) to use the name 'Banuaka', as he had among Embaloh and Labiyan prior to his appointment. If not, it will at least provide a wider base for the debate, as his headquarters are squarely in Thambun Anyang's area of research. Jacobus has also influenced the local media. For instance, in a Harian Akcaya news article about the inauguration of the current provincial governor, Aspar Aswin, young Embaloh who performed a traditional dance dressed in traditional costume at the ceremony were referred to as 'Banuaka' Embaloh'. He is not unopposed, however. It is not clear to what extent educated Taman in the border people's organization accept the name 'Banuaka'. Thambun Anyang, though a member, rejects the term, as noted above. This certainly means that the internal debate about 'Maloh' ethnic identity will not soon, if ever, be resolved.

This leads us to the third theme, namely what Western or other scholars are to do about all this. While we might prefer things to be neat and tidy, with ethnic labels and the like being unambiguously applied, this is simply wishful thinking, as King (1989) notes in a review of ethnicity studies. Although the study of the inherent messiness of ethnic identity will keep anthropologists and their social science colleagues busy for generations to come, it will not solve the problem of the use of ethnic labels and the reaction of the people designated by these labels. Indeed, where 'folk' and so-called 'objective' (read 'anthropological') labels may not be the same (King 1989:243), we must face the fact, as in the case under discussion, that people may regard outside labels, even those coming from well-meaning social scientists, as being less than objective. As people who are the subject of anthropological study come to receive better education and to occupy better socio-economic positions, they become more likely, as this case shows, to challenge both ethnography and ethnic labelling.

One consequence of the native challenge to outside ethnographic authority is a delicate balancing act between our commitment to ethnography and history and our ethical duty to respect the views and aspirations of the people we study. Where in any given case the one ends and the other begins cannot be known \textit{a priori}. As in the case presented here, often the two cannot be easily reconciled. There is, however, a partial alternative to hand-wring-

\textsuperscript{19} It was so dominated by these groups that the Iban in 1994 quit in protest and formed their own organization. They were tired of being governed by 'Maloh' (\textit{puas diperintah Maloh}), it was said.
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Sellato (1998:510) writes, for instance, that, 'Although many will regard as politically incorrect any Western anthropologist who takes native anthropologists as objects of study, I submit that the processes by which new cultural images emerge through the writings of the local elite offer a fascinating field of inquiry' (for a good example of this see Sellato 1993; see also Briggs 1996). What is happening among the 'Maloh' today is that new elites are seeking to define their ethnic identity within the modern Indonesian nation, questioning the ethnography of the past regarding social ranking while at the same time embracing anthropological study as a way of shaping their identity. Opposition is ever an element in focusing ethnic identity (see Nagata 1981), and Western ethnography is increasingly shaping the opposition today. Nevertheless, we should accept Sellato's suggestion and incorporate the study of native anthropology into our own, for as Hastrup (1993) reminds us, anthropology must aim at a wider comparative understanding that both embraces and transcends the native point of view (see also Sharrock and Anderson 1982; Ryang 1997).

Finally, what do we call the people concerned? Are we to use perpetual quotation marks around disputed labels? Admittedly I myself have referred to the Labiyan, who live closest to the Iban with whom I primarily work, as Banuaka 'Labiyan or Labian Banuaka' in several of my writings. Thus, although I know both Jacobus and Thambun Anyang personally, the former was initially more convincing. This was because, in my mind, 'Banuaka' avoided both riverine distinctions and placing the name of one subgroup over the others, as was Jacobus's stated intention. The realization of its disputed nature, however, throws my previous confidence in using the term out the window, so to speak. I can see no other solution in this case than to continually qualify whatever term is used, as I have done throughout this article.

Some recent reflections by King (forthcoming) have a direct bearing on this issue. King notes that traditional anthropological modes of enquiry appear to be inadequate to the challenge posed by the 'Maloh'. This has led to a considerable degree of uncertainty among outside scholars such as Bernstein (1997:19), who uses the term 'Maloh/Banuaka' complex', and King (forthcoming) himself, who now refers to the 'Embaloh/Taman collectivity'. But King reiterates, in defence of a general label, that there are important social, cultural, and linguistic similarities between the various groups that make up this complex. The problem is that 'we are dealing with a chameleon-like entity, which in many important respects comprises a hybrid culture' (King forthcoming:3). This should not be surprising, given the geographical dispersion of the 'Maloh' and their varying interactions with other peoples like the Iban, Kantu', Kayan, Malay, Bukitan, and Dutch over the centuries. Thus the search for a common ethnic label that is agreeable to both anthro-
pologists and native politicians may actually be in vain. In the end, this may not be such a bad thing, as it will serve to keep us alert to the inherent ambiguities of and changes in ethnic identity and ethnic labels.

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