

“I Lost My Head in Borneo”: Tourism and the Refashioning of the Headhunting Narrative in Sabah, Malaysia

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Abstract

Although headhunting is generally believed to be no longer practiced in Sabah, Malaysia, it is a phenomenon of the past that still exists in the collective consciousness of indigenous groups, living through the telling and retelling of stories, not just by individuals, but also by the tourism industry. The headhunting image and theme are ubiquitous in the tourist literature and campaigns. They are featured on postcards, brochures, and T-shirts (a particular favorite shows an orangutan head with the caption “I lost my head in Borneo”). One popular tourist destination, Monsopiad Cultural Village, has even named itself after a legendary headhunting warrior.

While Sabah’s headhunting past has taken on a commercial value, I argue that it has also taken on a cultural and political one that seems to resonate with contemporary needs and sensibilities, especially among the state’s indigenous communities. I propose that the tongue-in-cheek invocation of headhunting by the tourism industry represents one way in which Sabah’s indigenous people counter the outside world’s designation of them as the Other; that is, by parodying their headhunting past, they demonstrate

their understanding of the joke and thus guard their indigenesness and their status as human beings. I also argue that their use of their headhunting heritage is a means of responding to the threats to their identities posed by the Malaysian state, which, in the process of globalization and nation building, has interpolated them into a Malaysian identity, an identity that they seem to resist in favor of their regional ones. This paper looks at what tourism’s refashioning of the headhunting narrative might suggest about how Sabah’s indigenous groups respond to their former colonization by the West and how they imagine and negotiate their identities within the constraints of membership within the state of Malaysia.¹

I spent a large part of my growing-up years in Tamparuli, a small town near the west coast of Sabah, a Malaysian state in northern Borneo.² A river divides the town proper and the compound on which my family and I lived, so sojourns to the other side—to *tamu* (weekly market), to the shops, and to the library required the use of one of two bridges. The first was a suspension bridge for pedestrians, and the other, only a few minutes away, a concrete structure for automobiles also used by those on foot. Of the two, my friends and I considered the cement bridge to have the more fascinating history. We were told that during its construction, humans were hunted and their severed heads were placed within its foundations. The reason: the builders, we were told, apparently believed that the spirits of the heads would fortify the bridge and would help to guard it from calamities.

As a child, I delighted in hearing and telling stories about *sagaii* (headhunters) and took special pride in knowing that our very own Tamparuli Bridge was part of headhunting lore. But as I became older, stories about headhunters and my headhunting past became less fantastic. Despite the occasional semi-serious warning that a headhunter was on the loose, I, and most others around me, generally believed that headhunting, a phenomenon of the past shared by many of the state's thirty indigenous groups, was no longer in practice.³

As I got older, I began to be aware of the economic and political struggles that indigenous people in my state face. Since becoming part of Malaysia in 1963, Sabah, a former British colony, had never had a chief minister who was both indigenous and non-Muslim. Consequently, when in 1984, Joseph Pairin Kitingan, a Dusun lawyer, became the first non-Muslim native to assume this position, being indigenous suddenly meant something to me.⁴ It was also around the same time that I remember feeling a new attraction to the macabre and exotic elements of my culture—one of them being headhunting. Without quite knowing it, I was invoking those aspects of my culture that were potentially embarrassing as a way of responding to the threat I felt towards my own Dusun-ness. For me, headhunting ceased being just a part of history and became, in the most personal way, a part of my heritage—an expression of my indigenusness.⁵

Of course I was not alone in my realization of the value of headhunting as a marker of indigenusness—I was in the

company of the tourism industry. Images of headhunting in the tourist literature in Sabah are plentiful. They are on postcards, in brochures, and on T-shirts, and one tourist destination, Monsopiad Cultural Village, which is especially popular among overseas visitors, has named itself after a legendary Kadazan warrior and headhunter, and has made explicit use of the headhunting narrative as a way of organizing its offerings.⁶

Fig.1



In my opinion, making headhunting such a visible icon of tourism in Sabah is an example of what Michael Herzfeld calls “cultural intimacy,” which he describes as “the recognition of those aspects of a cultural identity that are considered as a source of external embarrassment but that nevertheless provide insiders with the assurance of common sociality” (Herzfeld 1997, 3). Monsopiad Cultural Village is one site where I suggest cultural intimacy is performed. I believe that the Village’s strategic association with headhunting (and the unfa-

avorable connotations that it might carry) is an instance of how native people in Sabah have recognized that by assuming agency over their culture, and especially by embracing their Otherness, they find a common ground—in the present case, a headhunting past—with which to respond to outside attacks on their indigenoussness.⁷

Headhunting as a response to the social imagination of Borneo

I have already suggested that “headhunting tourism” in Sabah might be seen as one way in which indigenous people counter the outside world’s imagining of themselves as the Other. In this section, I argue that early travel accounts of Borneo have, in part, created this “Otherness”; that is, these accounts have contributed to how the island and its native groups are perceived. Thus, I will now turn to a brief discussion of how early literature about the region, written mainly by European travelers, has played a role in the “invention” of Borneo; an invention that has lived on in tourist literature, and, in my opinion, an invention to which the invocation of headhunting in the tourism industry in Sabah is responding. Of this notion, historian Graham Saunders makes the following observation:

Travellers to Borneo today arrive with certain expectations. They carry with them an idea or image of Borneo, an image which tourist brochures have conveyed, authorities have cultivated. What an image is [is] the culmination of a process that began when the first European traveller to

Borneo’s shore recorded his impressions of what he had seen (Saunders 1993, 271).

Saunders’ argument is clear: modern-day visitors to Borneo arrive with expectations that have been formed by early literature about the island and its people.

It was not until the late nineteenth century that the British gained control over Sabah, but the region as a whole had received European visitors before that time. They came in various capacities—as diplomats, business people, and explorers—and their contacts with, and reports about Borneo not only contributed to general knowledge about the island, but also helped to create an image of the place and its people in the European mind. Saunders suggests that, in fact, many of the images of headhunters, orangutans and long houses now associated with the island are products of these early accounts (Saunders 1993, 271).

The first Englishman to write about his travels in Borneo was Daniel Beeckman, who went on business to Banjarmasin, the present capital of South Kalimantan, in 1714. His accounts of life in Banjarmasin were often astute; nonetheless his characterization of the orangutan as being like a human—that, indeed, one originated from the other—has advanced the idea of a wild Borneo, to which current tourism campaigns still allude:

The monkeys, apes, and baboons are of many different sorts and shapes; but the most remarkable are those they call Orang-ootans, which in their

language signifies men of the woods: these grow up to be six foot high, they walk upright; have longer arms than men, tolerable good faces (handsomer I am sure than some Hottentots that I have seen), large teeth, no tails nor hair, but on those parts where it grows on humane bodies; they are very nimble footed and mighty strong; they throw great stones, sticks, and billets at those who offend them. The natives do really believe that these were formerly men, but metamorphosed into beasts for their blasphemy (Beeckman 1718, 37).

The notion of a Borneo that was primitive, where men were apparently routinely transformed into apes, as Beeckman's account above suggests, continued to be reinforced by works such as Elizabeth Mershon's book, *With the Wild Men of Borneo*, which was published in 1922. In general, Mershon, the wife of a Seventh-day Adventist missionary posted in North Borneo, is fairly sympathetic in her portrayal of Sabah's native people, but her designation of them as "the wild men of Borneo" is telling of the impact of a centuries-long depiction of the people of Borneo as—using her term—wild. The book begins as follows:

Borneo! What does the name suggest to your minds? The first thing probably is the "wild man from Borneo." From my childhood days until I arrived in Borneo, all I knew about the country was that was where the wild men lived, and I always imagined that they spent most of their time running around the island cutting off people's heads. Strange to say, even to this day, many people have the same idea. Before you finish reading

what I am going to tell you about Borneo and its people, I hope you will have learned that the "wild man from Borneo" is not such a bad fellow after all (Mershon 1922, 13).

Thus, we see that while Mershon's purpose for writing her book appears to be noble, her portrayal of the people of Borneo is nevertheless rather unflattering.

However, I do not think it is useful to analyze Mershon's and Beeckman's reports in terms of their language or even their veracity; rather, I believe they must be seen as those belonging to observers whose accounts were colored not just by their personal biases, but also by the intellectual climate within which they wrote. As Saunders states, "they interpreted what they saw and accommodated what they observed to their own prejudices, to their own cultural values, to their own intellectual world" (Saunders 1993, 285). In so doing, however, they created, developed, and reproduced an image of Borneo as a place that is undomesticated and mysterious; a place where wild men live as one with nature. Indeed, in a paper that anthropologist Victor King presented at the Borneo Research Council meetings in Kota Kinabalu in 1992, he argued that one reason why cultural tourism in Borneo is an important component in the marketing of the region as a tourist destination is the perception of its people as "exotic" and "unknown," notions that he says have purposely been encouraged among Western audiences and which he calls "obvious tourist assets" (King 1992, 3).

The current emphasis in Sabah on eco-tourism and the rhetoric used to promote its natural offerings also contribute to the notion of a wild Borneo. The Sabah Tourism Board’s most visible campaign is in fact titled “Eco-Treasures from Mountain High to Ocean Deep” and strongly features two of the state’s most well-known “eco-treasures,” Mount Kinabalu, the tallest peak in Southeast Asia, and Sipadan Island, widely recognized as one of the world’s top diving spots and best places to witness marine life.⁸ The campaign also highlights, among others, such attractions as Kinabalu Park (the park on which Mt. Kinabalu stands), the Danum Valley Conservation Area, and the Sepilok Orang-utan Sanctuary.

The extent to which “eco-treasures” have been identified as important tourist assets by the state seems to indicate that the state subscribes to the same notion of Borneo expressed in early accounts about the island—that it is an uncultivated and timeless place.⁹ At the same time, however, as Kevin Markwell notes in his essay “‘Borneo, Nature’s Paradise’: Constructions and Representations of Nature within Nature-based Tourism,” the campaign employs a rhetoric that suggests a wildness that is domesticated—in essence, a negotiable wildness. He says, “The use of a selective number of animal species to represent nature in a specific way (e.g. the orang-utan) and the relative ease with which the wild can be conquered indicate that in tourism, nature is represented as a ‘wild/tame’ dualism which appeals to most tourists” (Markwell 2001, 258).

I believe the dualism Markwell ob-

serves in literature promoting nature tourism may also be applied to “headhunting tourism” in Sabah. Tour sites such as Monsopiad Cultural Village help to mediate between tourists and Sabah’s headhunting past. Presented alongside displays of traditional food, drink, medicines, dance, music, and structures, the forty-two skulls exhibited at the Village are further divorced from their initial association with murder and violence—in essence, they lose some of their “savagery” quality, making an encounter with them perhaps more palatable.

But thinking about eco-tourism and “headhunting tourism” in terms of the wild/tame dualism that Markwell proposes allows us to come to what I believe to be a more important point: the self-conscious downplaying of an otherwise rather unsavory phenomenon of indigenous history demonstrates an understanding of the value of Otherness among those in the tourism industry and those in the indigenous population in general. In my opinion, what seems to be articulated in Sabah’s tourism industry is a response of its native groups to the social imagining of themselves as sub-human, with an existence overwhelmed by their geographies. It is through the headhunting narrative as it is told at Monsopiad Cultural Village and in tourism promotion that they understand their identities as they have been constructed through discourse. In response, they parody their headhunting histories, benefiting not just economically, but as the collective histories become a symbol of their prowess as an indigenous people, politically as well.

Thus their ostensible acquiescence to an “untamed” past should be seen as an act performed expressly to counter their designation as the Other, a designation that is, in large part, the result of colonial presence in the region.

In the following section, I look briefly at Sabah’s political history, in particular, the points of contention at play in its relationship with the Malaysian state. In addition, I will explore how local response to, and interpretations of, these points of contention are symbolically enacted in tourism.

A brief look at Sabah’s political history

In the preceding section, I have tried to demonstrate that the invocation of headhunting in tourism in Sabah can be seen as symbolic of an indigenous response to a hegemony that is more global in nature. In this portion of my paper, I argue that it is also representative of a rejection of powers closer to home—those belonging to the Malaysian state. The tendency for Sabahans, particularly indigenous ones, to align themselves culturally and politically with Sabah, rather than with Malaysia, is not a new phenomenon. Indeed, there has been a history of contention between Sabah and the federal government. Malaysia was, after all, created out of what Craig Lockard terms “a marriage of convenience” when the British suggested that Singapore, Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei join the Malayan Federation; the federation that had obtained independence from the British in 1957 and had unified the territories on its peninsula as a way of terminating colonial rule over those regions (Lockard 1998, 224).¹⁰

Prior to 1963, Sabah was the British Crown Colony of North Borneo, having first come under the control of a British firm in 1877. It became a protectorate in 1881, and finally a Crown Colony in 1946. But it was the sultan of Sulu from whom the British North Borneo (Chartered) Company, the trading syndicate that first managed the region, had to obtain concessions—a fact that makes a necessary and relevant point: historically and culturally, native Sabahans perhaps have more in common with those groups in their immediate geographical area than with those in West Malaysia.¹¹

Aside from being part of a national construction in which the dominant culture—Malay and Muslim—has relatively little in common with their own, indigenous Sabahans’ reluctance to align themselves with their West Malaysian counterparts may have had economic promptings. Many Sabahans hold the federal government responsible for the state’s backwardness: they blame it for usurping their wealth (Sabah is rich in natural resources) and using it to develop the federal territories and the states on the peninsula. In a political profile of Malaysia, Damien Kingsbury posits that the opposition of Sabah and Sarawak to the notion of the Federation of Malaysia, in 1963 and presently, was and is based on the allocation of income (more will be said about the formation of the Federation later in this paper). Kingsbury says that both Sabah and Sarawak contribute more to the federal income than they receive and states that the words “‘fairness,’ ‘justice,’ and ‘equality’ were commonly used, often by the indigenous peoples, when talking

about their grievances against the federal government” (Kingsbury 2001, 276).

There is reason to believe that Sabahans see the Malaysian state as a threat not only to their fiscal well-being, but to their indigeneity—and the climate of recent and contemporary politics demonstrates their fear. In the early 1980s, Joseph Pairin Kitingan, a Dusun lawyer, formed Parti Bersatu Sabah (PBS) or the Sabah United Party, an opposition party largely made up of, and supported by, indigenous Sabahans. He led his party to ultimately win the Sabah general elections of 1984; a victory that was seen as enormous and important because since becoming part of Malaysia in 1963, the state had never had a non-Muslim KadazanDusun leader.¹²

Although indigenous people on the peninsula and on Borneo are designated not only as citizens of Malaysia but also as *bumiputera*, or children of the soil, indicating a special status that includes the Malays in both East and West Malaysia (though not other Malaysians who have come from non-Malayan lands such as China and India), many of the indigenous people in both Sabah and Sarawak view this designation with cynicism, feeling that the special rights and benefits that accompany this status apply specifically to the *Semenanjung* Malays (the Malays on the peninsula), rather than to themselves (Winzler 1997, 8).¹³

A ban in 2004 on KadazanDusun programming on television is another example of the sort of imposition that Sabah’s indigenous groups feel from the government. *Bumiputera* Sabahans’ reaction to this ban appears to be strong. Writing on Malaysiakini.com, an inde-

pendent news agency, Tanak Wagu (a pen name meaning “young man” in KadazanDusun) remarks:

Information Minister Abdul Kadir Sheik Fadzi’s decision not to allow KadazanDusun programmes on television is certainly against national integration and cultural development. It is also an insult to the KadazanDusuns when he said—as reported by Sabah’s *Daily Express* on August 7 [2004]—that such programmes would only promote racial segregation. (www.malaysiakini.com).

Tanak Wagu clearly feels that it is the KadazanDusun as a people—and not just their language—that has been slighted by the Information Minister’s move. His closing statement comments on what he sees as the bigger problem, i.e. the federal government’s general disregard for the culture and religion of the indigenous groups living in the East Malaysian region.¹⁴ He says:

I also remember a recent debate on the appointment of the prime minister. One side said that a *bumiputera* should hold the prime minister’s post. Well, what they actually meant was that a Malay Muslim should hold the post. This is because KadazanDusuns and Dayaks [the biggest indigenous groups in Sarawak] are *bumiputera*, too, but we don’t see much hope in someone from these two communities holding the post (Ibid).

Tanak Wagu’s distrust of the federal government as it relates to the protection of indigenous rights is, in my opinion, rep-

representative of local views on the matter, and it is perhaps a distrust that has motivated the aptness of many a *bumiputera* Sabahan to associate himself or herself with the state of Sabah, rather than the nation.

Local Sabahans' distrust of the Malaysian government has existed since before the inception of the Malaysian nation. When Prime Minister Tunku Abdul Rahman announced the idea of an expanded Malaya that would include Singapore, Brunei, Sarawak, and British North Borneo in 1961, his proposition was initially rejected by local leaders in British North Borneo, some of whom were hoping for separate independence. When an influential local leader, Donald Stephens, who later became Sabah's first chief minister, remarked that joining the Federation would inevitably lead to domination by peninsular Malays, he was, in fact, expressing a common view among indigenous Sabahans. However, because of the persuasive powers of the Malayan Prime Minister and Lee Kuan Yew, the Singapore Prime Minister, Sabah and Sarawak conceded, and when the Federation of Malaysia came into being in 1963, British North Borneo became a member state (Andaya and Andaya 2001, 282-287).

In his 1985 book *Nation-building in Malaysia, 1946-1974*, the late KadazanDusun historian and politician James P. Ongkili writes that the reluctance of Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei to join the Malaysian Federation—and their wish for separate independence—had been foreshadowed by the failure of a colonial attempt in the 1950s at unifying them under a Bornean federation.

Ongkili states, "The failure of the Bornean federation proposals of the 1950s was itself evidence that Sarawak, Brunei and Sabah were each inclined to hope and work for their own separate independence, even if the ideal of nationhood might take until the year 2000 or longer to achieve" (Ongkili 1985, 161). In other words, although people in Sabah and Sarawak eventually agreed to become part of Malaysia (Brunei opted to back out), their earlier feelings on the matter suggest a reluctance to relinquish identities that seemed more tied to their indigeness, and the region in general. It is an attitude that seems to have reappeared not just in contemporary politics, but in other arenas as well, such as tourism.¹⁵

The economic, cultural, and religious differences that *bumiputera* in Sabah feel between themselves and their counterparts on the peninsula have necessarily informed both local and national politics, and what has been dubbed "Kadazan nationalism" has, in fact, been a movement of sorts existing since Sabahan *bumiputera* entered Malaysian politics in 1963. Stephens, who was a Eurasian of partly indigenous descent, was one of the first to become an advocate for the Kadazan. According to anthropologist Shamsul A. B., however, the federal government saw Stephens' chief-ministership from 1963 to 1965 as "an attempt to seek an unacceptable level of autonomy," and he was replaced by Datuk Mustafa, a Muslim Sulu chief and a leader of the Muslim Dusun (Shamsul A. B. 1998, 31).¹⁶ The mid-1980s, with the formation of the Kadazan-dominated PBS and the party's subsequent ten-year

rule, saw Kadazan nationalism played out more emphatically (Shamsul A. B. 1998, 32).¹⁷

To be sure, some of the impositions that the federal government has made and continues to make may be a necessary part of the process of defining a national culture—a dilemma that formerly colonized places like Malaysia face in nation building. Tourism, being an industry inevitably implicated in such a process, can be a particularly useful site for analysis. In Malaysia, the creation of a ministry that combines both tourism and culture is not a move that merely seeks to find a niche in the international tourist market—it also has a national purpose. The Ministry’s website states its objectives as follows:

To develop the Malaysian National Culture in accordance with the National Culture Policy towards strengthening national unity, to preserve and control the national identity as well as enrich the life of humanity and spirituality that is balanced with socio-economic development; and

To develop the tourism industry to become a main industry in the country’s economy by spurring its growth based on the elements of National Culture (www.mocat.gov.my/ministry).

But the “Malaysian National Culture” promoted in a country in which ethnic diversity is a reality (hence the official ideology, *rukunegara*, or harmony of the state) must necessarily be a composite culture, what King describes as “an *ad*

hoc assemblage of beliefs and practices held by diverse populations” (King 1993, 109). However, within the context of tourism, a national culture can only exist in the abstract, for the most marketable forms of cultural distinctiveness, according to Robert Wood, are, ironically, “the lifestyles and artifacts of sub-national ethnic groups—which are often considered ‘backward’ by the dominant ethnic majority” (Wood 1997, 6).

But the alleged backwardness of Malaysia’s ethnic minorities is not simply a tourism marketing tool; rather, my study suggests that in Sabah, indigenous people consider their “backwardness” (as implied by the invocation of headhunting in tourism) as an important marker as well as an assertion of a *bumiputera*-ness distinct from, but equal to the dominant culture. A similar sentiment can be observed in Anne Schiller’s account of her experience among the Ngaju Dayak of Central Kalimantan during a National Geographic Television filming of a *tiwah* (death ritual) ceremony. She notes that religious activists hoped that the filming of a ritual that recalls violence and human sacrifice would attract international attention to the Ngaju Dayak culture, and as a result, further their quest for political autonomy (Schiller 2001, 33). What both the Kalimantan and Sabah cases suggest, then, is that the seeming willingness of indigenous groups to be exoticized in tourism and in media, both industries that are concerned with representation, is symbolic of their rejection of a national identity, signaling, in effect, a preference for a local, regional one.

Headhunting narratives

Although early historical accounts vary in their observations of the meanings associated with headhunting as it was practiced in Borneo, it seems clear that at least among some indigenous groups it held a significant place in their social, cultural, religious, and economic systems, perhaps explaining, in part, its continued manifestations in local, everyday discourse. Historian James Warren (1981), for instance, tells us that the slave trade in the Sulu Zone during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which involved the trade of persons from all over Southeast Asia, fulfilled the demand among certain interior groups in Borneo by providing captives—and heads—to be used in sacrifices. His study suggests that the taking of heads for religious reasons was an important practice among some Bornean groups; so important, it appears, that they procured humans through the slave trade. Such a demand, in essence, made head-taking not just a cultural phenomenon, but an economic one as well.

Early ethnographies by scholar-administrators during the British rule also give us another look at headhunting as it was practiced or conceived among the island's native groups. One of these scholar administrators was Ivor H. N. Evans whose 1922 book, *Among the Primitive Peoples of Borneo*, covers his brief stay in North Borneo as a cadet in 1910.¹⁸ While he observed that headhunting among the Dusun carried with it some “undercurrent of meaning,” that is, they believed human heads had the power to endow their daily lives with blessings, Evans also noted that heads were col-

lected mainly as a sign of one's prowess (Evans 1922, 160). Such a function of headhunting is reflected in Owen Rutter's account of headhunting among the Murut in *The Pagans of North Borneo* (1929). According to Rutter, a district officer in North Borneo for five years, heads were at one time taken in order to appease the spirits so as to bring luck to or avert disaster from a community's crops. That function had, however, given way to the sort that Evans observed—the taking of heads in the context of war or feuds. In other words, although headhunting had formerly been carried out in order to ensure a village's spiritual and agricultural well-being, it was now observed as a way of attaining social power.

People in my family have also apparently had near encounters with *sagaii* (headhunters). Recently, my father told me about the time his mother and older brother came into close contact with one. In 1941 or 1942, in their village of Tungaa, my uncle and my grandmother, who was pregnant with my father at the time, were on their way to draw water from a well located in an area fairly removed from the village center. On the way there, they had to walk past a *sulap*, or a small bamboo hut without walls where rice farmers could guard their paddy crop. Harvest season had come and gone, however, and the sleeping man in dark clothes my grandmother and uncle saw in the *sulap* did not appear to be a paddy farmer. In fact, he did not even look like a local person. That he looked foreign, that he had a sword tied to his waist, and that it was, in my father's words, “headhunting season,” led my grand-

mother to surmise that the man was a headhunter, and that, based on past accounts, he was most likely from nearby Sarawak and was there to collect heads to prove his bravery to his future wife and her family.

As my grandmother and uncle were about to leave the well, my grandmother noticed that the man they had seen in the hut was walking towards them. My father told me that this confirmed her suspicions that the man was, indeed, a headhunter, as headhunters were known to search out their victims near wells due to their usually isolated locations. Perceiving the danger they were in, my grandmother and uncle walked away as quickly as they could, cutting through the paddy fields. They reached their home without incident.

While headhunting is generally assumed to no longer be in practice today, rumors about headhunters still do circulate, for example, as I have discussed earlier, when the construction of a new bridge is underway. A few years ago, for instance, local people blamed the mysterious disappearance of several village boys in Sabah on a new bridge construction in neighboring Brunei—it was said that people involved in that project were in search of heads, which they believed would guard and strengthen the bridge’s foundations.

From the accounts above, we see that there seems to be some degree of reluctance to be associated with headhunting; my grandmother, for instance, felt that the man she thought to be a headhunter was not local, that he was from neighboring Sarawak. And those discussing the missing boys in Sabah surmised that

their alleged captors were from Brunei. But in my observation, the “embarrassment” presently associated with headhunting appears to be rather more abstract in nature. In other words, it seems that people in Sabah do not necessarily feel personally embarrassed by the idea that their forefathers hunted heads; rather, within tourism and other contexts, they capitalize on the notion that because a headhunting past might be viewed as a potential source of embarrassment, it can provide them with a provocative means of asserting their uniqueness as a people.

One tourist site in Sabah which has seemed to draw on Sabah’s headhunting histories is Monsopiad Cultural Village. Although it is by no means the first to use the state’s headhunting histories within the context of tourism, I believe the Village is the only tourist site that has developed an entire park around the headhunting theme. Located in the village of Kuai, which is just outside Sabah’s capital city of Kota Kinabalu, the park was opened in 1996 and is owned and managed by direct descendants of Monsopiad, a warrior and headhunter who is said to have roamed the land on which the Village now stands over 250 years ago.

According to the Village’s website, the story of Monsopiad is roughly as follows: as a young man, Monsopiad vowed he would protect his village of Kuai by finding every robber and beheading him. As the years passed, he continued with his self-imposed mission and in time, no robber dared to approach his village. But Monsopiad became obsessed and would incite fights with other men, which then

gave him an excuse to kill and behead them. The villagers became afraid of him and decided that he had to be eliminated, and he died at their hands. But grateful for all Monsopiad had done for their well-being, the villagers forgave him and erected a monument in his honor (www.monsopiad.org).

exoticizing” is clear as well. “Learn everything you always wanted to know about headhunting!” its website promises (Ibid). And of the House of Skulls, a Village brochure (also posted on its official website) says the following: “Visit the legendary house that displays the forty-two skulls of Monsopiad’s victims

Fig. 2.



That the Village capitalizes on the provocativeness of headhunting is apparent, first and foremost, in its very use of the story of Monsopiad as a basis for the narrative it wants to tell about the KadazanDusun people. That it does so in a manner that is rather “self-

and a thigh bone of the giant Gantang and gain an insight into the past pagan era of the Kadazan people” (Ibid). Indeed, the House of Skulls or the *siou di mohoing* is the highlight of a tour of the Village. Constructed out of bamboo in the traditional Kadazan style, it is the

dwelling place of forty-two human skulls, which are hung in a row on a long pole among the rafters. These skulls, visitors are told, were heads belonging to powerful warriors before they became Monsopiad’s conquests, hence the term that is assigned to them now, “Monsopiad’s headhunting trophies” (ibid).¹⁹

ties, the practice of headhunting itself is portrayed as an aspect of the “past pagan era of the Kadazan people” (www.monsopiad.org). In other words, as the story is told at the Village, Sabah’s headhunting past is something that the Kadazan people share, something that can potentially connect them as one of Sabah’s ethnic groups. At the Village,

Fig. 3.



But while the Village is ostensibly putting Monsopiad’s former notoriety to ample and strategic use, I think it is important to note the framework within which Monsopiad’s story is told, for although the narrative clearly centers on the warrior and his headhunting activi-

ties, one sees the enactment of the notion of “cultural intimacy” proposed by Herzfeld (1997). For while Monsopiad Cultural Village, and the tourism industry in Sabah in general, make use of—and at times exaggerate—aspects of the state’s cultures that are deemed potentially embarrassing externally (e.g.

headhunting), what they also seem interested in communicating is that it is these very aspects which provide a common ground for, and legitimacy to, Sabah's indigenous groups. Observed in cadence with past and present political milieus, the "refashioning" of the headhunting narrative within tourism in Sabah hence seems to reflect a general consensus among certain of Sabah's native groups: that Otherness, strategically invoked and appropriated, provides them with an instrument for addressing external threats to their identities.

Conclusion

In the introduction of *Headhunting and the Social Imagination in Southeast Asia* (1996), Janet Hoskins asserts that in order to expand the notion of headhunting as a symbolic medium, one should consider the distinction between the *practice* of headhunting and the *trope* of headhunting. Hoskins distinguishes each as follows: the *practice* of headhunting is a phenomenon of history, "a form of ritual violence once widespread"; and the *trope* of taking heads is a phenomenon of the present, a metaphor used "to imagine new historical conditions in which heads might be taken" (Hoskins 1996a, 37). In a chapter in the same volume, in which Hoskins writes more specifically about her own work on the eastern Indonesian island of Sumba, she expands on this point and proposes that conceived as a trope, headhunting enters the realm of heritage, a realm where the literal taking of heads might no longer exist, but where its original meanings remain somewhat intact (Hoskins 1996b, 218).

The model that Hoskins offers is a useful way of thinking about how aspects of a culture's history gain currency within the context of tourism, and recalls a similar argument that Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett makes in her piece "Theorizing Heritage" (1995), in which she proposes that heritage is "a new mode of cultural production in the present that has recourse to the past" (Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1995, 369). The functions that the headhunting narrative has appeared to assume in tourism in contemporary Sabah (i.e. as a response by indigenous people to outside imaginations of themselves, as well as an expression of their inclination towards a regional, rather than a national, identity) can thus be seen as a demonstration of Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's theory of heritage; that is, as tourism campaigns and tour destinations such as Monsopiad Cultural Village endow headhunting with a metaphorical quality through the process of exhibition, they transform it from a thing of the past into heritage.

But it is perhaps what "thing" of the past that is transformed into heritage that is of more salience in the case at hand. Why headhunting? Historical records suggest that while headhunting was indeed practiced in Sabah, it appears that it was only prevalent among certain groups, and even then, headhunting seemed to have been a relatively rare occurrence, not an everyday-everyman one. And it is hardly unique to Sabah's indigenous groups. The volume Hoskins has edited, which looks at the practice in Brunei, the Philippines, and various parts of Indonesia, is only one of many that can testify to that. Yet,

headhunting—if one assumes that tourism is a quite accurate gauge of the political aspirations of a people—seems to provide, at least for some of Sabah’s indigenous members, a sort of distinctiveness, a measure of difference from others, or perhaps more accurately, from the Other (that is, the West) and other groups in the region whose histories and cultures they perceive to be incongruent with their own. However, to desire difference necessarily implies an alliance with a community with similar interests, and in my thinking, indigenous people in Sabah have used headhunting as a means of creating and maintaining a kind of imagined cohesiveness with others in the state and region as a whole for whom headhunting is significant, literally or metaphorically. In short, the trope of headhunting functions for some of Sabah’s native communities as at once a marker of unlikeness and likeness, a representation of how they view themselves in relation to those around them in complex ways.

What seems to be happening in Sabah brings to mind Richard Handler’s discussion of the nationalist movement in Quebec and his observation of an “invention of tradition” that is selective. In an article Handler co-wrote with Jocelyn Linnekin, “Tradition, Genuine or Spurious” (1984), they say the following about public folkloric presentations of Quebecois everyday life: “Only certain items (most often, those that can be associated with a ‘natural,’ pre-industrial village life) are chosen to represent traditional national culture, and other aspects of the past are ignored or forgotten” (1984, 280). The notion that cultural symbols are

what they are by design, as demonstrated by the Quebec case, reminds one of the concept of “selective tradition,” which Raymond Williams addresses in *Marxism and Literature* (1977). People look to the past, Williams argues, to “ratify the present and to indicate directions for the future” (Williams 1977, 116). In other words, the transformation of history into heritage, of practice into trope, is informed by how a group perceives of its present realities.

The self-conscious selection of an element of a culture’s history to articulate a political stance recalls an assertion Pertti J. Anttonen makes about how people construct their identities through symbolic means. In *Tradition through Modernity* (2005), Anttonen states:

Whenever people make public presentations of their identity and show allegiance through cultural representations, they foreground some particular aspects and background others, which makes the presentation of self always argumentative in nature. Having a cultural identity ... means the production of images and representations through actions that have argumentative goals in the transformation of relations. As such argumentative production of relations, cultural identity is fundamentally political in nature, an issue of establishing, controlling and fighting over the meaning of symbols, exercising power, creating hierarchies and contesting them (Anttonen 2005, 108).

In short, according to Anttonen, to choose a symbol with which to identify one’s personal or group identity is to also acknowledge and defend one’s political

convictions and associations. Viewed as such, headhunting tourism in Sabah is thus argumentative because it articulates how certain of the state's communities define their indigenesness. It is argumentative because it contests existing notions of their cultural and political identities. And it is argumentative because it is a response to the Malaysian state, to the project of nationhood—in essence, it is a response to modernity.

When I asked a friend of mine, herself an indigenous Sabahan, what she thought of the use of the headhunting imagery and narrative in tourism promotion in our home state, her reply was quick and to the point: “Embarrassing but cool.” In a subsequent email, she explicated her response, saying, “It's beyond comprehension that I have ancestors that might have been headhunters. At the same time freakish ancestors totally distinguish you from the rest of the global population, so it's secretly thrilling as well. I love seeing the slightly raised eyebrows reaction I get when I tell someone new I'm from Borneo.”²⁰ My friend's response to my question is, I think, characteristic of the ambivalence that many *bumiputera* Sabahans have about the matter; that is, while they appreciate the risk of assuming a “headhunting identity,” they also recognize its worth as a symbol of their “coolness.”

As a phenomenon of history, headhunting is still invoked and valued in complex ways among many indigenous Sabahans, as in the form of stories that I heard as a child and that children continue to hear today, or in the narrative that is the underlying unifying

theme at Monsopiad Cultural Village. But it is the trope of headhunting that has, in my mind, appeared to be more useful both culturally and politically. Marginalized groups in Sabah, many of whom share a headhunting past, have re-written the headhunting narrative in their favor, becoming co-authors of a cause that seeks, in Hoskins' words, “to seize an emblem of power, to terrify one's opponents, and to transfer life from one group to another” (Hoskins 1996a, 38). Thus re-imagined, the headhunting narrative emerges as a tool useful in working towards change and equality.

Notes

All pictures by Wendell Gingging, used by permission.

¹ While “headhunting tourism” is the focus of this paper, it is but one aspect of cultural tourism in Sabah, which also features, among many other things, home-stays, visits to *tamu* (weekly market), and attendance at various festivals. Additionally, it should be noted that eco-tourism in the state is as significant—if not, more significant—an industry.

² Malaysia consists of two parts: West Malaysia on the Malay peninsula and East Malaysia on the island of Borneo, on which Brunei and Indonesia's Kalimantan are also located. West Malaysia holds eleven of the nation's thirteen states, as well as its capital, Kuala Lumpur, and its administrative centre, Putrajaya. East Malaysia, which is separated from peninsular Malaysia by about 400 miles of the South China Sea, includes the states of Sabah and Sarawak.

³ The multi-ethnicity that typifies Malaysia as a whole—its population is made up of Malays, Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples—is also true of the indigenous com-

munities in Sabah. They comprise more than thirty ethnic groups speaking over fifty languages and eighty dialects. The KadazanDusun, the largest indigenous group, live primarily on the west coast and the interior portions of the state. Other groups include the Rungus, Murut, Bajau, Orang Sungei, and the Muslim Bisaya (Tongkul 2000, 6).

⁴ In this piece, I use the labels Kadazan, Dusun, and KadazanDusun somewhat interchangeably. Although the Kadazan and Dusun are closely-related ethnic groups, many who belong to them tend to identify themselves as one or the other. Since becoming an officially-recognized designation in the 1990s, however, the term KadazanDusun has come into general use.

⁵ Additional research on the other indigenous communities in Sabah, some of which are listed in note 3, will enrich and perhaps complicate the analysis offered here on the basis of my experience among the Kadazan/Dusun.

⁶ See note 4.

⁷ Additional research on the other indigenous communities in Sabah, some of which are listed in note 3, will enrich and perhaps complicate the analysis offered here on the basis of my experience among the Kadazan/Dusun.

⁸ The Sabah Tourism Board is a semi-private agency working under the aegis of the state's Ministry of Tourism, Culture, and Environment.

⁹ In his welcome address to visitors of his Ministry's official website, Sabah's former Minister of Tourism, Tan Sri Chong Kah Kiat, identifies eco-tourism in the state as playing an important role in rebuilding the nation's economy, especially in the wake of the Asian economic crisis of 1997. He states: "With the...economic crisis...tourism has become an important economic sector for Malaysia.

The tourism industry was identified as a leading sector to assist in the national economic recovery. Sabah, with its many natural assets and tourism icons such as Mount Kinabalu, its beautiful beaches and islands, its unique flora and fauna, its pristine rainforest and renowned wildlife conservation centres, has all the ingredients to become a major tourism destination in this region" (www.sabah.gov.my/mocet/ministry-objective.htm).

¹⁰ Singapore joined the Federation but pulled out in 1965 due to political differences and became an independent nation. As for Brunei, the sultan felt he was being asked to concede too much power and declined the invitation to become part of the new Malaysia.

¹¹ According to recent reports, the current Sultan of Sulu has renewed his territorial claim over Sabah and is asking that Malaysia hand over the state. The Sultan has also said that he will bring Manila to the International Court of Justice to settle the matter. In 1962, when preparation for the new Federation was underway, President Macapagal of the Philippines opposed it (the Federation) on the grounds that the inclusion of North Borneo (Sabah) could not be legally upheld. According to the Philippine claim, the 1878 transfer of the territory of North Borneo from the sultanate of Sulu (now part of the Philippines) to the British was in the form of a lease rather than a sale (Andaya and Andaya 2001:, 86).

¹² See note 4.

¹³ It is important to note also that the applicability of the *bumiputera* designation to the Orang Asli, an indigenous people living in the interiors of the Malayan peninsula, seems to be ambiguous because while the Malaysian government sometimes seeks to include them in this category, according to Winzeler, it does not offer them the special economic and educational benefits of the Malays as

well as the native groups in the East Malaysian states (Winzeler 1997, 8).

¹⁴ Unlike their counterparts on the peninsula, many *bumiputera* in both Sabah and Sarawak practice Christianity, not Islam. It should be noted, however, that the Bajau, one of the main ethnic groups in Sabah, are traditionally Muslim.

¹⁵ Another point of contention between the federal and Sabah governments has to do with the Twenty-Point Agreement, a list of guarantees to which Sabah and Sarawak were entitled when they joined the Malaysian Federation in 1963. Over the years, those advocating for Sabah's autonomy have cited the federal government's failure to honor Sabah's rights under the Agreement, for instance, in matters relating to immigration; the special position of indigenous groups; tariffs and finance; as well as the Borneonisation of public service positions (i.e. appointing East Malaysians to government jobs).

¹⁶ Donald Stephens served as Sabah's chief minister twice, from 1963 to 1965 and for a few months in 1976. His second tenure was cut short by his death in a plane crash. Donald Stephens was also known as Mohammed Fuad Stephens, a name he took after embracing Islam in 1971.

¹⁷ It might be worth noting at this point that in Malaysia, anyone who adheres to Islam, speaks the Malay language, and observes Malay culture is considered to be Malay, regardless of ethnicity.

¹⁸ The complete title reads: *Among Primitive Peoples in Borneo: A Description of the Lives, Habits & Customs of the Piratical Headhunters of North Borneo, with an Account of Interesting Objects of Pre-historic Antiquity Discovered in the Island*. After its publication in 1922, Evans continued to study and write about the Dusun, producing in 1953 an ethnography entitled *The Religion of the Tempasuk Dusuns of North Borneo*.

¹⁹ Besides the House of Skulls, Monsopiad's legacy is also displayed in one of its most visible attractions, the *gintutun do mohoing* or the stone monolith. Standing at four meters, this massive stone is an imposing presence in the middle of the compound. It is said to have been placed in its position by villagers with the help of *bobohizan* or Kadazan high priestesses and other unknown forces in the spirit world after being commanded by Monsopiad to build a monument in his own honor.

That the Village sees itself as just as much about skulls and headhunting as it is about Kadazan culture seems apparent from its other offerings and its stated goals. According to its website, the Village perceives its principal purpose as follows: "The mission and objective of the Cultural Village is to become a living museum, a showcase of KadazanDusun culture, and a unique attraction for travelers to Sabah, be they international [visitors] or Malaysians" (Ibid). To this end, visitors who go to the *kotos di Monsopiad* or Monsopiad Main House, for instance, can see exhibits featuring implements one would expect to find in a traditional home, such as jars of rice wine, rice sifters, as well as local fruits and medicines. Enacters are also on hand within the Main House (and at the other structures as well) to demonstrate the carrying on of daily work within a typical KadazanDusun household, such as the preparation of rice and other traditional foods, the making of *lihing* (the local rice wine), as well as handicrafts. Aside from live enactments of KadazanDusun daily life, a tour of the Village includes the chance to participate in the dancing, a taste of *lihing*, as well as a go at blow-pipe shooting and betel-nut chewing.

²⁰ Charmaine Siagian, email message to author, March 20, 2005.

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Responses

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Embarrassing But Cool

As I write this, I've recently returned home from Oxford and the Pitt-Rivers Museum's gala opening for its new modern wing. The featured speaker, Michael Palin (of Monty Python fame, now a television-explorer and major patron of the museum), praised the “wonderful eclectic displays” and the “spirit of discovery” they inspire. As I listened to Palin, I was standing two cases away from the museum's most popular attraction, the exhibit of *tsantsa*, shrunken enemy heads made by the Shuar and other Jivaroan peoples of western Amazonia.

The shrunken heads are a magnet for visitors to the Pitt-Rivers; an encounter with them seems to occupy a charmed place in many a British memory of childhood's spirit of discovery. So it was not surprising that controversy flared last spring when a (false) rumor spread that the Pitt-Rivers might take the heads off display. Critics derided what they labeled as arrogant political correctness interfering with an institution that is “a national treasure” (see French 2007 and blog comments).

Sensitivities about human remains in museums and research collections are old hat in the U.S., where NAGPRA (the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990) and other changes in curatorial policies have led to widespread de-accessioning and disappearance of indigenous body elements

from public displays. The issue has surfaced with less urgency and under different circumstances in Britain and elsewhere in Europe. Flory Ann Mansor Ginggaing's account of the Monsopiad Cultural Village in Sabah, Malaysia adds a fascinating case to the panoply of cross-cultural differences. Pair this with Steve Rubenstein's (2004) insightful account of taking Shuar friends to see *tsantsa* on display at New York City's American Museum of Natural History and you have material for a marvelous teaching moment.

These shifting cultural-historical relations to displays of indigenous heads recall the tropes of disappearing native bodies and assertions of native agency through headhunting that run through the film *Bontoc Eulogy*, Marlon Fuentes' (1996) provocative exploration of Filipino-American identity, historical “truth” and representation (see Homiak 2000). Fuentes traces colonial power dynamics through a story of his Igorot warrior grandfather's journey from a tribal village to perform at the St. Louis Exposition of 1904. The fictional journey ends with the film maker standing in front of a glass case at the Smithsonian that contains preserved Igorot brains.

The celebration of headhunter identity in Sabah is a striking contrast to other trends in indigenous cultural politics and post-colonial criticism. Body-mutilating and life-taking practices such as cannibalism, infanticide, and headhunting pose thorny challenges to ethnographers and indigenous intellectuals: how to acknowledge native practices of which outsiders disapprove without contributing to more negative “othering?”

The two common responses are to emphasize the flimsy factual basis for claims about unsavory non-western practices and/or to sanitize accounts of them. Cannibalism is a perennial favorite target for ethnicity-cleansing. Inspired by William Aren's (1979) suggestion that people-eating may never have been a socially accepted practice but just racist propaganda, the extreme version of the impulse to erase the stigma of cannibalism from non-western cultures culminated in the academic proposal to erase cannibalism itself from the record of human behavior by claiming that no one ever really did it. (See Gardner 1999 for a dissection of the cannibalism-denial position.) As Arens (1998) notes, this claim was embraced more enthusiastically in 1980s-90s literary and cultural studies than in anthropology. In a review of recent cannibalism studies, Shirley Lindenbaum (2004:475) suggests that scholarship has matured to a point where we might finally be ready shed the ethnocentric baggage that has burdened both colonial mentalities and the post-colonial critics who assume that cannibalism must be savage and therefore unreal.

Most ethnographers, myself included (Conklin 1995, 2001), who have written about anthropophagy as a social practice have tended toward the relativizing approach that Frank Lestringant (1997:12) calls "culturalist," which tends "to idealize the violent act of eating, to shift the noise of teeth and lips towards the domain of language." Like the explanatory labels that surround the Pitt-Rivers' shrunken heads, ethnographic representations mute violence and

trauma by emphasizing their ritual context and religious and symbolic meanings.

Gingging's account suggests that some native activists see other alternatives. By embracing images of violent agency as a mark of their autonomy from the dominant culture, the KadazanDusun of Sabah assert their independence from state control and from the homogenizing *bumiputera* nationalist identity that includes Muslim Malays. As Gingging acknowledges, this works only from the safe distance that locates such practices in an ancestral past distant from contemporary Sabah self-identity. The idea that a pagan headhunting past may be common ground around which diverse non-Muslim groups can rally resonates with a point that Alcida Ramos (1998) and others have emphasized in pan-indigenous movements: that native activists' self-representations are directed not only to non-indigenous publics, but also to establish solidarity with other indigenous people.

This is a fascinating variation on a global theme. As native people grapple with the need to make "room" for themselves in a crowded world (Turner 1992:14; Clifford 2000), they try to carve out spaces for innovative, *indigenous* ways of being modern by mobilizing discourses that are (at least partially) independent of state control, yet consistent with the need to enhance native access to economic resources and political support. To do so, they employ diverse discourses, ranging from the universalist claims of human rights and environmentalism, to assertions of localized ties to land, culture-specific spirituality, and

mystical knowledge beyond the ken of science as well as the state (Conklin 2002).

These are positive images. But Sabah use of the headhunting warrior as their logo (www.monsopiad.com) and origin narrative recalls other indigenous experiments with more aggressive stereotypes. In Brazil, belligerent warrior stances worked well at times for Xavante and Kayapo activists, especially under the military dictatorship when the indigenous causes were one of the only “safe” issues around which citizens could articulate criticism of the government (Ramos 1998). In more democratic contexts when support from image-sensitive NGOs became a major resource, aggressive imagery has tended to backfire, slipping too easily into old stereotypes of savagery, backwardness, or irrelevant buffoonery (Conklin and Graham 1995).

Gingging acknowledges that there are risks in the Monsopiad gambit, but one wishes for more ethnographic insight into what these risks might be. How do people negotiate the pressures to perform “tradition” in some contexts and “modernity” in others? Does the lone Sabah individual quoted in this article represent the views of all when she characterizes ancestral headhunting as “embarrassing but cool?” And what exactly does “cool” mean here?

Then there are the skulls themselves, forty-two enemy heads strung up for tourists to photograph. Are the people whose kin inhabited those skulls concerned with their present treatment or not? Gingging’s account suggests the tantalizing possibility that some years from now when the centers of empire

(the Smithsonian, museums of natural history, perhaps even the venerable Pitt-Rivers) may have purged themselves of indigenous remains, indigenous museums like those of the Shuar and Sabah will find that in the competition for space in ethnic cultural politics, capitalizing on the display of such remains is still a time-honored way to get ahead.

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I know nothing about Borneo, except for what this essay by Flory Ann Mansor Gingging has taught me. "I Lost My Head in Borneo': Tourism and the Refashioning of the Headhunting Narrative in Sabah, Malaysia" argues that, in today's tourism industry in Malaysia, KadazanDusuns, the most prominent indigenous group in the state of Sabah in Borneo, put their headhunting past on display parodically to overturn their colonial relegation to a subhuman category and also to assert their distinctiveness—and possibly their right to independence—from a Malaysian national identity. The essay foregrounds the KadazanDusuns' agency in their "refashioning" of headhunting for the benefit not so much of tourists, but of the indigenous people themselves: the Monsopiad Cultural Village is a "tourist destination" but one where the tourist's visit can "contribute directly to the conservation of one of Malaysia's rich cultural heritages and traditions" (www.monsopiad.com/Welcome.html). I was so ignorant that even the headhunting association with Borneo had not readily been accessible to me. What does "learning" from this essay then mean? What kind of a position should or can I take in responding professionally—as a folklorist and cultural critic—to the essay? How to respond to it without putting into play a different kind of ignorance?

One section of Gingging's essay briefly discusses "how early literature

about the region, written primarily by European travelers, has played a role in the 'invention' of Borneo; an invention that has lived on in tourist literature, and . . . an invention to which the invocation of headhunting in the tourism industry in Sabah is responding." Here Gingging addresses a type of colonial and colonizing cultural production that I am familiar with from my research about Hawai'i, where I live as a settler-teacher and scholar. In writing about the early 20th-century beginnings of Hawai'i's touristic representation as "tropical paradise," I identify "legendary Hawai'i" as an imaginary space "constructed for non-Hawaiians (and especially Americans) to experience, via Hawaiian legends, a Hawai'i that is exotic and primitive while beautiful and welcoming" (5). That this promotion of "legendary Hawai'i" was built on early Euro-American travelogues to the islands, and took place shortly after the forced annexation of Hawai'i to the United States in 1898, solidifies its legacy in the western social imaginary. Furthermore, it does so specifically at the expense of Native Hawaiians, who have, however, then and now, produced counter-narratives of Hawai'i as an indigenous, "storied place."

I gather that the "invention" of Borneo by European travelers produced a kind of primitivism that is different from the "soft primitivism" associated with Hawaiians (Desmond and Smith), but in both cases the narratives of "wild men" and "hospitable women" respectively, have been replicated by the tourist industry to produce in Westerners the desire to visit faraway islands. Nevertheless, even about Hawaiians who, as Na-

tive scholar and activist Haunani-Kay Trask has noted, are consistently imagined as sexually inviting, feminized, and smiling "natives," literary tourists, such as Mark Twain, would pose the question of cannibalism. As with headhunting in Borneo or South-East Asia more broadly, "cannibalism" in Oceania brings excitement—the frisson of fear—to the tourist's encounter with the exotic, as long as that hostility is safely confined to an historical or imagined past.

In his book *American Pacificism: Oceania in the U.S. Imagination*, Paul Lyons convincingly draws a line of continuity between travel writing and tourism in ways that foreground their complicity as *histouricism*—where indigenous history is misrecognized for the sake of an exoticism that serves Euro-American economic and ideological interests. Particularly resonant in relation to Gingging's argument is Lyons's discussion of cannibalism in literary tourism (as still practiced by, for instance, Paul Theroux) and of "cannibal tours," whereby tourists are taken "to places where the Islanders are supposed to have until yesterday, by native admission (or practical joking), practiced a fantasmal 'cannibalism' (generally in the next village over)" (129-130). Lyons also insightfully analyzes literary "antitourism"—"an alternative mode of seeing, always concerned with the materialist conditions obscured by Pacificist writing" (22)—in the works of Albert Wendt, Sia Figiel, Teresia Teaiwa, and many other Oceanian writers who document contemporary indigenous resistance to Euro-American takeover, a resistance that politically and culturally has

a long history in the region and in Hawai'i (Silva).

But it is Lyons's careful reading of this colonial archive that I am thinking about the most in forming my response to Gingging's essay, partly because like Lyons, I am a settler whose position is necessarily different from Gingging's, who is writing as a member—be it a diasporic one—of the KadasanDusun people. Lyons shows the scope of *histouricism*, as it includes Charles Warren Stoddard, Jack London, Fred O'Brien, Margaret Mead, and Annie Dillard. The result is chilling: "Most of the canonical U.S. writers about Oceania were literally tourist boosters, and, especially in the twentieth century, were constituted as native informants to metropolitan readers in part by writing directly for the tourist industry" (Lyons 20). The authority of these widely circulated narratives sustains a "willed and stunning ignorance/ignoring of Oceanian priorities" (2) specifically in American cultural productions of Oceania, an active "ignoring of Oceanian epistemologies, political institutions and forms of cultural and intellectual tradition and performance" (8-9). It is this authority, as Charles Briggs has shown, that some anthropologists have unwittingly defended by denouncing indigenous "invention" of traditions.

National, touristic, and even academic interests have a deep investment in this kind of ignoring because, as we know, it is the grounds on which the expert subject builds her/his authority. My lack of knowledge about Borneo's history and diverse ethnic groups does not mean that I am not to some extent implicated in the Western "invention of

Borneo"; nor does it excuse me from at least attempting to refrain from reproducing this kind of ignorance in my scholarly but not "expert" response. It is one thing as an outsider and settler for me to write about "legendary Hawai'i" in an effort to re-orient myself, and others, towards recognizing our collective ignoring of the epistemologies and histories that I would not pretend to "know," but that I am actively trying to learn about and from. And it is another for me to respond to Gingging's assertion of an indigenous response that subverts the "invention" of Borneo's "wild men."

I did find Gingging's discussion of indigenous agency at work in the Monsopiad Cultural Village in Sabah to be informative and significant. I also found her discussion of the tension between Malaysian national identity and the KadazanDusun indigenous self-identification very interesting, especially as it is played out in relation to modernity. The Monsopiad Cultural Village is owned and run by Monsopiad's descendants and has no support from the national government. I learned a lot from the essay, and I know I will draw on it to question touristic representations of Borneo's headhunting narratives when I encounter them. That, in itself, is a meaningful step away from ignorance, not only of Borneo but of an indigenous perspective on Borneo.

I do have a lot more questions. Some of them stem from my experience with a different kind of colonial history, an experience in a different region and place. The kind of tourism I am more familiar with in Hawai'i is large-scale transnational corporate tourism, of the

kind that Haunani-Kay Trask condemns for prostituting Hawaiian culture; Gaye Chan and Andrea Feeser blame for turning Waikiki, a previously self-sustaining community, into a haven of capitalist development and exploitation; and John Zuern de-romanticizes by focusing on workers' lives in the hotel industry. At the same time, I would not be alone in rejecting the proposition that there is no agency for Hawaiians putting their heritage on display, for instance, through hula: well-respected halau perform in a range of settings, and maintain control over what to share or not with different audiences; irony and parody have a long-term role in the history of hula performance (Diamond; Imada). Thinking about Monsopiad Cultural Village from Hawai'i, where the Polynesian Cultural Center is a foremost tourist attraction, I want to ask for more information about the Village in relation to what Gingging identifies as the more developed industry of (eco)tourism in Malaysia. How are the two economies connected? How many hotels sponsor the tour to the Monsopiad Cultural Village? What percentage and kind of tourist will go to the Village? Who has designed their website and packages?

The Monsopiad Cultural Village incorporates headhunting legend and material displays into what the website refers to as a "living museum," the purpose of which is to educate visitors and "to document, revive, and keep alive the culture and traditions" of the Kadazan people. In *Global Villages: The Globalization of Ethnic Display*, a documentary video produced by Tamar Gordon and Bruce Caron, several "ethnic theme

parks" in China and Japan are viewed as contributing to a "global genre . . . run by governments and corporations politically intent on shaping public narratives of ethnic minorities and foreign nationals in the context of the nation-state." One of these parks is explicitly modeled on the Polynesian Cultural Center in Hawai'i. One aim of the documentary is to show how the performances and activities of ethnic minorities, such as the Wa, are mediated in Chinese ethnic parks by market considerations and tourists' expectations of "spectacle." Gordon states that these parks are "controlled fantasy environments" where "tourists and performers participate in the production of heritage" and of the "unity of the nation-state." When Gordon and Caron document the representation in the Yunan Park of the Mosuo, a matrilineal group, as spectators we see how verbal statements by the male spokesperson and the silent behavior of the women do not necessarily match: another form of mediation that seeks to mask gender tensions within the group itself. The other side to this observation is that Gordon, who has no connection with the ethnic groups displaying their heritage at the Yunan or the "Windows of the World" parks, conducts much of her research by relying on translators when interviewing performers. Whether that gets her to some "authenticity" or even to a response that is not staged is questionable—especially given the transparency of translation in the documentary—but a range of views, for instance among Wa performers in different parks, is represented.

I'd like to know more about tourists' engagement in the Monsopiad Cultural Village experience. I'd like to know if

everyone in the Village—including the women—identifies with "headhunting" as a form of "cultural intimacy." I'd like to know how the decision was made to build this Village around the "House of Skulls," which the website tells us was "already a prominent tourist attraction since 1979." But part of the point of the KadazanDusun people "refashioning the headhunting narrative" is that it is up to them to establish what the parameters for "front" and "back" of their display are, for asking questions, rather than answering them. In addition to working with different media, Gordon's and Gingging's projects as well as their positions as researchers are different. Gingging's focus is on the re-visionist perspective and parodic practice of her own people, especially what it means to them. If I want to learn from her and them, I must also be aware of how my questions may not be of interest to, or even in the interest of, Gingging and her people. I've posed questions, but have I earned the right to have them answered? In writing this response, I've considered more *this* kind of problem and others like it. When I ask to know more about the KadazanDusun people and the Monsopiad Cultural Village, however worthy my intentions may be, which "ignorance" is at work? How can this "will to know" not carry out a colonizing scholarly agenda if my "homework" is elsewhere? And can ignorance of and the ignoring of non-Western priorities operate in complete separation from one another? This is one of the mind-turning reflections with which I was left as part of the process of engaging with Gingging's indigenous troping of the "headhunting narrative."

Notes

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