interaction (Yelvington 1991:168). Ethnicity is thus constituted through social contact. In this sense, ethnicity is an aspect of relationships, not the cultural property of a group. Therefore, only in so far as cultural differences are perceived as being important, and are made socially relevant, do social relationships have an ethnic element (Eriksen 1993:12).

Nevertheless, it is difficult to determine the criteria that constitute ethnicity, because they may vary. As Eriksen (1993:34) has explained, it was previously common to equate ‘ethnic groups’ with ‘cultural groups’, and this to define any category of people who had a ‘shared culture’ as an ethnic group. This position has become difficult to justify, however, because the sharing of cultural traits frequently crosses group boundaries. Moreover, people do not always share all their ‘cultural traits’ with the same people. One may have the same language as some people, and share a common religion with some of those people as well, yet at the same time, one may also share that religion with members of a different linguistic group. In other words, cultural boundaries are not clear-cut, nor do they necessarily correspond with ethnic boundaries.

There are two fundamental approaches that can be used to conceive ethnic groups, namely the ‘ascriptive’ (or primordialist), and the ‘situational’ (‘subjectivist’ or ‘instrumental’) approach. In brief, according to the ‘ascriptive’ approach, members of an ethnic group are bound together by their common descent. Primary blood ties dominate group of largely British decent (Eriksen 1993:4).

9 For example, Moerman (1965) in his work Who are the Lue? The Lue were the ethnic group his research focused on, in which he tried to describe who they were - in which ways they were distinctive from other ethnic groups. However, after listing a number of criteria commonly used by anthropologist to demarcate cultural groups such as language, political organization and territorial contiguity, he states: ‘Since language, culture, political organization, etc., do not correlate completely, the units delimited by one criterion do not coincide with the units delimited by another’ (Moerman 1965:1215). The Lue mentioned cultural traits which they in fact shared with other neighbouring groups when they were asked about their typical characteristics. Therefore, being unable to argue that this ‘Lueness’ can be defined with the reference to objective cultural features or clear-cut boundaries, Moerman defines it as an emic category of ascription (the native’s point of view) (Eriksen 1993:11).
instill immutable emotional attachments and allegiances. Being ‘given’ and rigid, ethnicity transcends individual perceptions and changing circumstances\textsuperscript{9}. Fredrik Barth (1969) has argued against those anthropologists who identify ethnic groups with cultural units. Barth stresses that such definitions of ethnic groups ‘allow us to assume that boundary maintenance is unproblematic and follows from the isolation which itemised characteristics imply: racial difference, cultural difference, social separation and language barriers, spontaneous and organised enmity’ (Barth 1969:11). According to Eriksen (1993:37), Barth suggests that shared culture may be seen as an implication or result of a long-term social process, rather than as a primordial feature of groups. Therefore, Barth regards the ethnic group chiefly in terms of social organisation, and consequently that ethnic groups must be defined from within, that is from the perspective of their members. Instead of listing traits of ‘objective culture’, which members often share with non-members anyway, Barth defines ethnicity as categorical ascription which classify individuals in terms of their ‘basic most general identity’ (Eriksen 1993:37). Barth (1969) argues that it is the boundary of the group, which defines the group rather than the “cultural stuff” within it. The invisible boundary dividing line between ethnic groups, and the relationship between the two, demarcate their identity and distinctiveness vis-à-vis the other (Eriksen 1993:41). Barth (1969) has convincingly argued that the identity of a group depends on the maintenance of its boundaries, even these boundaries can be “crossed” under certain conditions. In Barth’s example, these conditions concern the nature of the interactions between neighbouring groups in a situation of limited resources (Lian & Rajah 1993:240).

The opposing view of ‘situational’ approach posits that what really matters is people’s definition of themselves as culturally or physically distinct from others.

\textsuperscript{9} Cited from \textit{The Social Science of Encyclopedia} (eds.) Adam Kuper & Jessica Kuper Pp.268.
Their shared descent is secondary and, if necessary, may be manufactured and manipulated (Cohen 1974)\textsuperscript{11}. Cohen (1974) has accused Barth of being a ‘primordialist’ because he (1969:13) explicitly defines ethnic ascription as categorical ascription, which classify ‘a person in terms of his basic general identity, presumptively determined by his origin and background’. Cohen argues that Barth promotes a static view of ethnicity (Cohen 1974:xii-xv). In Cohen’s view, ethnic identities develop in response to functional organisational requirements. He defines ethnicity simply as a particular form of informal political organisation where cultural boundaries are invoked so that the group’s resources or ‘symbolic capital’ can be secured. In this way, Cohen goes even further than Barth in severing the tie between ethnicity and culture (Eriksen 1993:55). Cohen’s position, opposed to a primordialism he attributes to Barth, can be described as an instrumentalist view, where the sole raison d’être of ethnicity and ethnic organisation lies in its political functioning. According to Eriksen (1993:55), and in this perspective, ethnicity needs no historical or cultural explanation: it rises entirely from contemporary social conditions\textsuperscript{12}.

In relation to the study of ethnicity in Borneo, Barth’s argument has been criticised by Rousseau (1990). According to Rousseau (1990:46), the above approach has some limitations because Barth sees ethnicity as the ‘most general identity’, thus, membership of distinct ethnic groups “implies a recognition of limitations on shared understanding, differences in criteria for judgement of value and performance, and a restriction of interaction to sectors of assumed common understanding and mutual interest” (Barth 1970:13). Rousseau argues that when

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, Pp.268.

\textsuperscript{12} The view of instrumentalist seems has been dominantly applied in recent studies of the ethnic relations in Southeast Asia that focused on the contemporary society. King (1982:3) remarks on lack of emphasis on historical background by both anthropologist and sociologist and there have been some recent attempts at examining ethnicity in relation to the state but most studies have been limited to the contemporary state. Lian & Rajah (1993:247) suggest that these need to be complemented by more
ethnicity is not the most general identity, it does not lead to restricted interaction or limited sharing. Hence, Barth’s framework is not applicable in Borneo because in a poly-ethnic situation, one cannot start with an *a priori* discussion of ethnic relations (Rousseau 1990:46).

Rousseau also criticises the central importance that Barth has given to ethnic boundaries, and instead asserts that whilst boundaries are crucial in defining scientific concepts, everyday concepts often lack clear boundaries. Ethnic boundaries, therefore, may or may not be clearly specified. Thus, according to Rousseau (1990:46), Barth is wrong to assume that in poly-ethnic systems, ethnic boundaries will necessarily be rigid, while patterns of ascription to ethnic categories may not; ascription patterns may indeed be flexible, but so can the boundaries themselves (Cohen 1978:387). Rousseau (1990:46) points to the fact that there may be ethnic categories that do not form groups in a sociological sense, and consequently suggests that it is inappropriate to assume a priori that the existence of ethnic categories is linked in a specific way with ethnic identity. An example given by Rousseau is the Kenyah people. Rousseau emphasises that it does not follow that people who are called Kenyah necessarily have a feeling of identity or are seen as a unit by others (Rousseau 1990:46).

Weighing into the subject, King (1982:23-24) writes that the delimitation of ethnic categories and groupings becomes extremely problematical in an area such as Borneo when a variety of criteria are used in combination, for example, political organisation, economic activity, territorial proximity, and various aspects of culture such as clothing, ritual, myth and language. In this situation, it is obvious that though it is inappropriate to define ethnicity by criteria, they can be used as an *a*
posteriori justification: once people have been ascribed to an ethnic category, some traits can be adduced to justify this attribution (Needham 1975, quoted from Rousseau 1990:50). Therefore, King suggests that ethnic identification should include self-ascription, which entails examining native perceptions of ethnicity in the context of the interrelationship between ethnic groupings (King 1982:30).

Nevertheless, it is also problematic to include the self-ascription into the examining of ethnicity because while people identify themselves as belonging to unit A (and obviously they are making a statement that, in certain respects, they are different from unit B), there are some people who would claim to belong to A and B simultaneously, or A or B situationally.

This situation has been confirmed by King earlier (see 1982:24). In this situation, as Nagata states, ethnic identity is not necessarily a constant, but instead a dependent variable (1975:2-3) because identity depends very much on a 'sense of otherness' and is subject to the fact that identities can be created, reinforced, manipulated and changed (King 1982:24). In fact, this statement is particularly relevant to the situation in Sarawak as a result of the Brooke government, European colonialism, and the present state government. This situation is acknowledged by a local scholar\(^\text{13}\) and in the most recent contributions on the study of the formation of identity in Malaysia, the critical role of the state (colonial and post-colonial) in the emergence, consolidation and transformation of plurality of identities is emphasised. Shamsul (1998c:27) fundamentally emphasises the

\(^{13}\) Shamsul (1996a) explores this subject from a number of dimensions. The dimensions included the competing discourses on national identity framed within the notion of ‘nation of intent’; the tension between an “authority-defined” (observed and interpreted) and the “every-defined (experienced) notion of identity (Shamsul 1996a); the impact of Islamic of Islamic revivalism on collective and individual identity formation (Shamsul 1998); colonial knowledge and identity construction, comparison between the “Malayness” and “Chineseness” in colonial and postcolonial Malaya (Shamsul 1998b), and the cultural construction of the ‘new Malay’ identity (Shamsul 1998a).
importance of colonial knowledge as the baseline knowledge in identity formation in Malaysia.

1.4. Colonialism and the Formation of Ethnicity in Sarawak

In Sarawak, as has been mentioned, ethnic categories and identities have been created, reinforced, manipulated and changed. This, to some extent, is an outcome of some factors that involved the activities of the governments\(^\text{14}\).

Noakes writes that the people in Sarawak, particularly those in the interior, identify themselves by the name of a place or river or mountain, or by the name of a local chief. These people may have adopted some community name to distinguish themselves from others, yet may be still conscious of kinship with other communities. Kinship, language, customs, physical characteristics, behaviour, and so on, play a part in determining the degree of relationship that one community shares with another. Yet, separate ethnic groups may exhibit affinities one with another of which the people themselves may or may not be conscious (Noakes 1947:29). It is obvious that this situation created confusion in the process of ethnic classification, especially when European foreigners gave ethnic labels. Furthermore, with ethnic mobilisation due to the inter-ethnic warfare and in some circumstances, shifting agriculture\(^\text{15}\), identity based upon geographical location became less relevant.

\(^{14}\text{The governments refer to the Brooke Government, European colonialism and current state government.}\)

\(^{15}\text{To be discussed in Chapter 2.}\)
Ethnic labels were used extensively by administrators to identify and to contrast various ethnic groups in Sarawak. The identification was undertaken, as Pringle has stated, 'merely by talking about the people in terms of broader ethnic categories, as well as by treating each category differently, [and] the new rules gradually communicated to the people themselves a growing awareness of such differences' (Pringle 1971:62). The Brooke government in particular, as Babcock (1974:197) has noted, 'did their best to keep various people separate, to make neat and tidy categories that were more in keeping with their orderly British minds'. Therefore, ethnic labels which were formerly vague and flexible references became precise and fixed (King 1982:27). Nevertheless, names such as the Iban, Kayan, Kenyah have never described their origins, hence it is difficult to clarify how these groups got their ethnic labels. But in general the earlier classifications formulated by Europeans were decided by one or more defined criterion, including language, cultural traits, religion, economy, social organisation and presumed origin (see Harrisson 1950). The reinforcement of the ethnic categories by Brooke government was later improved and used for the population censuses of 1947 and 1960.

Generally, during British colonialism, regional variations in ethnic names suggest that the river basin was still the primary framework for ethnic conceptualisation (Rousseau 1990:62). In the general framework offered by Tom Harrisson in his attempt to classify the population of Sarawak and Brunei for census purposes (1950:271-80), there is a useful distinction between “the subjective (self-imposed) and objective (external imposed) classification”. The subjective category is subdivided into (i) local naming, (ii) group naming, while the objective category consisted of (i) general form (ii) scientific grouping (Harrisson 1950:275). King (1979), to identify how the term ‘Maloh’ was obtained, uses the relation between the two frameworks. King shows that the ‘river-based groupings’ are an important
element in determining identity and difference. For example, King mentions that
the ‘river-based groupings’ are the strongest and most frequently invoked
subjective method of classification used by Maloh to determine their relationships
with outsiders (1979:3). Here the main criterion for the definition of a Maloh
‘river-based groupings’ is that of geographical location. The ‘river-based
groupings’ were equated with an ethnic identity as the residential locations were all
situated along the river (see King 1985). The habitation of a single river system
also resulted in the sharing of certain cultural and linguistic traits, common
folklore, closer ties of kinship and friendship, and more intense social interaction
(King 1979:4).

However, King (1979:8) concludes that among the Maloh, despite the recognition
of the Maloh as socio-cultural unit, there is no generally agreed upon, internally
derived name appropriate for them as a whole. The term ‘Maloh’ is, in fact, an
externally (objective) imposed term. Although the term ‘Maloh’ has been used to
label them, it is not the term the people used for themselves, and that they cannot
agree on an internally derived name. Rather, they accept the label ‘Maloh’ from
outsiders because it is a valid designation, indicative of a socio-cultural unity (for
example, language, and customs) which distinguishes them from other Borneo
peoples (King 1979:10).

In Sarawak, most ethnic labels were externally imposed terms. As a consequence,
in some instances different peoples have been categorised within the same ethnic
label. Take for example the term ‘Dayak’ which in some languages (for example,
among the Bidayuh in Kuching, Sarawak) means “person”, but which assumed a
more complex meaning under colonial classifications. The term ‘Dayak’ in the
classifications applied to refer to both the Iban (recognised as the Sea Dayaks), and
the Selako and Bidayuh (recognised as the Land Dayaks). These three groups apparently share very few cultural traits and speak different languages, but they are categorised in an ethnic label called ‘Dayak’. They dislike the externally imposed term (Harrisson 1950:273) and thus they have their own internal ethnic label that was later used in the census population.

The most complex and complicated ethnic classification is portrayed by the term ‘Orang Ulu’. According to Ding Seling and Jayl Langub (1989:19-48), “Orang Ulu” is a Malay term which means “people” (orang) of “the upriver” (ulu); hence, “people of the upriver”, or “people of the interior”. The Orang Ulu are a complex group, comprising several indigenous minorities. One way to define Orang Ulu is that they are non-Muslim indigenous groups who are not Iban, Bidayuh or Melanau. So, in Rule 3 (11) of the Orang Ulu National Association (OUNA) Constitution mentions the term Orang Ulu thus: “The Orang Ulu shall mean the Kelabit, Kenyah (including Sebop, seping, Kiput, Badang and Berawan), Bukitan, Bisaya, Kayan, Kajang (including Sekapan, Kejaman, Lahanan, Punan, Tanjong and Kanowit), Lugat Lisum, Lun Bawang, Penan, Sian, Tabun, Ukit and Saban” (Jayl Langub & Ding Seling 1989: 35).

Geographical, socio-cultural and linguistic factors also have been taken into account in defining Orang Ulu. Geographically, they inhabit the interior of northeastern Sarawak in the interior of Kapit, Bintulu, Miri and Limbang Divisions. Except for the Penan, the various groups of Orang Ulu share a system of social stratification in at least three ranks, and hereditary chiefs (Rousseau 1974:1).
The definition even includes the cultural affinities between various groups of *Orang Ulu*, in settlement pattern and housing, agricultural technology, arts and crafts, burial practices, etc. The Kayan and Kenyah form the largest groups in the *Orang Ulu*. Both groups consider the Batang Kayan in Kalimantan, Indonesia (Rousseau 1978, Whittier 1978). Although the two groups are quite distinct, especially in language, they are often found in association, or living in related areas, or in a close proximity to each other. The Kayan and Kenyah are found side by side in the Balui and its tributaries, the Baram. According to Southwell (1959), their arts and crafts have inspired and influenced the culture of all other people in Borneo.

The linguistic affinities between groups are also taken into account, for instance, the Lun Bawang and Kelabit, the Penan and some Kenyah sub-groups. Harrisson (1959) mentions that Kelabit and Lun Bawang are often perceived by outsiders as one people. There are valid reasons for this: they speak the same language with minor dialectical variations; they consider the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands as their heartland (Schneeberger 1945); they practised wet rice irrigation (Harrisson 1959); and perhaps, they are the only ethnic groups in the interior that make salt out of salt springs (Ding Seling & Jayl Langub 1989:22). Other groups such as the Lisum, Punan, Ukit, Bukat and Sihan have linguistic affinities (Ding Seling & Jayl Langub 1989:23). The most common element of the culture that exists in the majority of the ethnic groups categorised under *Orang Ulu* is the performing of the *ngajat* dance which is accompanied by three string guitars called *sape’* (see photo. 1.1).

It is argued that categorisation such as *Orang Ulu* created more general identification of each different ethnic groups under this category. This results in an
Photo 1.1: Orang Ulu dance in traditional costume accompanied by music from the musical instrument called sape.
overlapping of ethnic identity, or possibly the exclusion of identities which do not fall under Orang Ulu.

Ethnic identity only becomes important when the non-Orang Ulu people attempt to interact with the Orang Ulu. In this sense, ethnic identity is situational. The members of Orang Ulu recognised each other as Orang Ulu, but they also do use a more specific identification to acknowledge which ethnic groups they belong to. Thus, each group may still attempt to establish an identity, which will distinguish itself from other ethnic groups. For example, the Kelabit distinguished themselves by holding in common a set of traditions typically include ‘folk’ religious beliefs and practices, language, a sense of historical continuity, and common ancestry, or place of origin. According to De Vos (1975:9), the ethnic group’s actual history often trails off into legend or mythology which includes some concepts of an unbroken biological - genetic generational continuity, sometimes regarded as giving special characteristics to the ethnic group.

However, sharing the same legend and mythology may not be the only deciding factor in creating a distinctive ethnic identity since different ethnic groups also claim the same myth and legend. For example, the Kelabit and Lun Bawang share a common sense of historical continuity in which both consider the Kelabit-Kerayan Highlands as their heartland. Yet, they do not claim to be the members of the same ethnic group. They do accept that they are the Orang Ulu, but they also claim to be two distinctive ethnic groups. Thus, claims of ethnic identity are often situational.

While notions of the past for the Kelabit exist only in songs, legendary epics, and myths, some of the same notions exist for the Bisaya group. Both claim to have
blood relations with the Sultan of Brunei. While the Bisaya oral tradition suggests that the wife of the first Sultan of Brunei originated from the Bisaya stock, the Kelabit, on the other hand, claims that she was partly Kelabit (Maxwell, 1995). Through this example, myths, legends or history do not make a distinctive ethnic identity. I suggest that language spoken by every ethnic group in the Orang Ulu to a certain extent may be appropriated to constitute a firm ground for an ethnic identity. Although certain ethnic groups speak almost a similar language, some minor dialectical differences may be used as a reason to show that the individuals are affiliated to particular ethnic groups, and thus, distinguish themselves from other ethnic groups.

A similar situation where language is claimed to be the only ethnic marker is among the Semai group of the Orang Asli in the Peninsular Malaysia. Accordingly, Gomes stated that “there is no clear ethnic marker apart from language but even that is sometimes negotiated and contested given the existence of numerous dialects” (Gomes 1994:180, see also Gomes, 1988, for a detailed discussion). In the Semai case, Gomes showed that the individuals Semai constructed their Semai identity socially by maintaining a sense of membership with the group which is somewhat inclusive, as ‘outsiders’ are readily accepted if they show an interest in identifying themselves as Semai and are prepared to adopt a Semai ‘lifestyle’ (Gomes 1994:180).

However, it is a different case among most of the ethnic groups in Sarawak. Even among the Orang Ulu, a distinctive identity is retained and sustained. For example, among the Kelabit, the ‘outsiders’ are not readily accepted to hold the Kelabit identity. Even if a member of Orang Ulu (any other non-Kelabit) marries a Kelabit, and adopts the Kelabit lifestyle as well as showing interest in being identified as a
Kelabit, the membership of this non-Kelabit to be known as a Kelabit individual among the Kelabit community may not necessarily be accepted. Any ‘outsider’ is accepted in the Kelabit community and to live with the Kelabit but not to be identified as a Kelabit individual. Most ethnic groups in Sarawak, particularly the members of the Orang Ulu, struggle to have a distinctive ethnicity, and attempt to set a boundary with the outsiders who live among its community. The boundary is set to avoid the non-individual-Kelabit who lived among the Kelabit community being recognized as a Kelabit by non-Kelabit, in order to make the name ‘Kelabit’ as an autonym in Kelabit interactions with non-Kelabit; Also, to make it become more meaningful to the Kelabit as a means of self-identity formation.

At present, ethnic identification is even more complicated. The emphasis of cultural similarities and differences may not be quite as applicable as it was because these ethnic groups have been assimilated into a more contemporary society. The contemporary society in Sarawak hold a mixture of cultural values and practices from every ethnic groups. Furthermore, with the inter-marriages, identity becoming more crucial because the individual do want to obtain a self-identification even though the offspring of the inter-marriages are assigned to carry the father’s ethnic identification. Besides, embracing a new belief such as Christianity can also change people’s values and practices. However, as Barth (1969) points out, although the ethnic markers (dress, language, house form, lifestyle, and even basic value orientations) used by members of ethnic groups to signal belonging may change with time, the process of self-ascription and identification need not necessarily undergo a similar change. Ethnic groups may thus become behaviorally assimilated while yet still maintaining a strong sense of ethnic identity. In this light, ethnicity is not so much a product of common living,
but as a product of self-awareness of one’s belonging in a particular group and one’s distinctiveness with regard to other groups (Hutnik 1991:19).

To a certain extent, Barth’s perspectives applies to the situation of the members of the Orang Ulu, because they focus on the ascriptive elements of ethnicity (‘who conceive of themselves’, and ‘who are regarded by others’), rather than upon cultural content. I suggest that Barth’s perspectives are relevant, due to the lack of distinctive elements of culture within the Orang Ulu that can distinguish clearly one ethnic group from another.

The relevance of the Orang Ulu category on these groups is that they are more recognized by larger ethnic groups such as the Iban, Bidayuh, Chinese and Malays. In this sense, Orang Ulu thus becomes an ethnicity for all ethnic groups which constitute the Orang Ulu. This ethnicity is institutionalized under the “Orang Ulu National Association” (OUNA) which functions to represent the Orang Ulu. At present, the OUNA mainly organizes social and cultural activities.

Also, the Orang Ulu category basically enables the marginal groups’ economic, social and politic needs to be noticed. In this conditions, ethnic identity is essentially less important than the identity of Orang Ulu. Fundamentally, Orang Ulu identity to a certain extent developed in response to function organisational requirements - to achieve social, economic, political needs of the marginalised groups. In this sense, Orang Ulu ethnicity is intricately linked to the consequences of modernity. Thus, to borrow Eriksen’s (1995:55) expression, “ethnicity needs no historical or cultural explanation: it rises from contemporary social conditions”. Ethnic identity, nevertheless, is important as self-identity as a recognition of which ethnic group one belongs to. This become more meaningful in the interactions
between Orang Ulu groups. All of these ethnic groups hold the Orang Ulu ethnicity in a larger society but they also hold another distinctive ethnic identity within the Orang Ulu.

Nowadays, the ethnic identity is justified through ethnic gatherings that have become annual events. For example, Kelabit from all over Sarawak gather in Miri, the Fourth Division, in June annually to participate in a meeting called the "Highlanders Carnival". In this meeting, Kelabit interacted with each other through sport activities such as volleyball, tennis, soccer and badminton, and Kelabit cultural performances. I suggest that the relevance of the “Highlanders Carnival” to the Kelabit is that the Kelabit identity become stronger, as well as to justify this identity not only to the ethnic groups of the non-Orang Ulu but also to other Orang Ulu.

In this situation, Barth’s argument regarding ethnic boundaries may be relevant. Here, people are able to distinguish themselves from other groups even though they are perceived by outsiders to share a common cultural trait. Another example is the situation mentioned by Rousseau:

"Baluy Kayan informants did not readily classify the Badang as Kenyah, but, with a slight hesitation, they accepted my suggestion that they were. The Long Nawang Lepo’ Tau, who sometimes had Badang neighbours, show a similar uncertainty: Penghulu Apoi Injou considered that ‘in due course they should be known as Kenyah Badang’ ...Thus despite the presence of clear cultural and linguistic similarities, they (the Badang) could not be considered as fully Kenyah because they were not part of the Kenyah sphere of interaction. The Badang themselves are somewhat reluctant to define themselves as Kenyah” (Rousseau 1990:60).
In this situation, it is clear that the people (the Badang) know their ethnic boundaries. Nevertheless, the Badang might in certain circumstances perceive themselves as Kenyah. However, the main point that needs to be made here is that, the ethnic identities do not refer to the territorial boundaries. The boundaries are basically psychological in nature (De Vos 1975:6). These boundaries are maintained by ascription from within as well as by external sources which designate membership according to evaluative characteristics which differ in content depending on the history of contact of the groups involved.

So, how do the people conceptualise other people outside their boundaries? At the local level, as King has demonstrated, a Maloh identifies himself with his village (banua) - a territorial residential unit. Inspite the apparent trivial nature of certain differences in linguistic and customary usage between villages, the Maloh will emphasise them in their conceptualisation of “us” and “them” (King 1982:31). At a higher level, Maloh individuals identify with “river-based grouping”, what Freeman (1950) calls a “tribe” among the Iban.

Accordingly, in this thesis, I view the conceptualisation of native people in Sarawak towards others who are outside their boundaries in terms of the conceptualisation of “us” and “them”. The concepts of “us” and “them” are blatantly different than the ethnic groupings imposed by the Brooke government. Nor are they the same as the definitions applied by the colonial government, because in this case “them” may refer to people who have the same cultural traits as “us”, but at the same time are conceptualised by “us” as “them” because they do not live in the same residential unit. I would conceptualise the notion of “us” and “them” as “otherness”, because the relevant people perceived those who do not live

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16 This Brooke government’s concept of ethnicity and ethnic group is discussed in detail in the
in the same residential unit as “other people” even though they may be in the same group of cultural background.

This idea of ‘otherness’ may also explain why relationships between groups in Sarawak were not always civil. During pre-Brooke rule, for instance, raiding and headhunting occur in a number of situations - intra-groups, inter-longhouse, or inter-tribal (i.e., between people who lived in a different river system and a different cultural background). Similarly, the hostile relations discussed in this thesis sometimes can be called inter-ethnic/tribal hostility, inter-group hostility, as well as inter-longhouse hostility.

1.5. Conclusion

Ethnic identity is not a constant variable because identity depends very much on a “sense of otherness” and is subject to the fact that identities can be created, reinforced, manipulated and changed.

Brooke government in Sarawak used ethnic labels extensively to contrast various ethnic groups for administrative purposes. However, the identification was taken merely in terms of a broader ethnic categories based on one or more defined criteria such as cultural traits, religion, social organization and presumed origin.

It is, nevertheless, inappropriate to define ethnicity by defined criteria because cultural traits in particular, frequently cross group boundaries. In addition, cultural boundaries are not clear-cut, nor do they necessarily correspond with ethnic

following section as the main concept in this study.
boundaries. Criteria in fact, can only be used as a post-hoc justification, when once people have been assigned to an ethnic category.

Furthermore, ethnicity is not so much a product of a common living. It is a product of self-awareness of one’s belonging in a particular group and one’s distinctiveness with regards to other groups. The result of self-ascription is important. The process of self-ascription and identification need not necessarily undergo a change similar to ethnic markers such as material possessions or heritage, architecture, life-style and language that can change with time.

Among the indigenous people in Sarawak, the concept obviously used to distinguish themselves from others is the concept of “us” and “them”; this is clearly a product of self-awareness. The sense of otherness referred to the people who do not live in the same residential unit even though they may at the same cultural background. This concept is continuously used. This is portrayed by the Orang Ulu who focuses on the ascriptive elements of ethnicity which is “who conceive of themselves” and “who are regarded by others”, rather than upon cultural content. In this sense, the term Orang Ulu (consisting of various ethnic groups) is situational while the name of ethnic groups such as the Kelabit and Lun Bawang are used as a permanent identification.

1.6. Scope of the Study

The first part of the study is an analysis of the relations between the people in Sarawak before Brooke rule and after Brooke rulers came into power (1841-1941). The main concern are the consequences of the involvement of Brooke rulers in the local affairs, and particularly in traditional inter-groups hostilities such as raiding
and headhunting. The influence of the Brooke Government involvement is analysed by looking at the tactics employed to tackle the “problems” of inter-group warfare in Sarawak.

The second part of this study analyse the work of Christian missions in Sarawak during Brooke rule. I begin by looking at the SIB’s emphasis on the “Christian faith” in every individual, something previously stressed by Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM), the overseas mission group that was responsible for the formation of SIB. The discussion is divided into two periods; the pre-revival (1960-1973) and the post-revival (1973 onwards). The case study is the Kelabit community.

I chose the Kelabit community as a study of the SIB’s focus on the concept of “individual spiritual experience” through “Christian faith” partly because the renewal of SIB began amongst the Kelabit, but also because the Kelabit community and social structure provides an interesting example for the understanding of the reconstruction of inter-individual relations. This reconstruction has been mirrored in inter-ethnic relations in Sarawak society at large. According to the SIB’s views, a hierarchical system causes disintegration between individuals within a single community because of differences in both social status and in privileges accorded to different ranks. It also segregates groups within one community. Hence, the Kelabit community was seen as the starting point for SIB to promote social integration and unity as well as commitment to SIB.

The third part of this study concerns the involvement of SIB in urban plural societies that consisted not only of Kelabit but also the Lun Bawang, Kayan, Kenyah, Iban, Bidayuh, and Chinese. This section looks at SIB people relations