interpret words “spoken in tongue” (see Chapter 4). SIB acknowledges such ‘gifts’ but SIB does not recognize these as final evidence of piety (Samporoh 1992:172). According to Gerawat Maran, the President of SIB, particular individuals fail to convince others because of the pride they display in being gifted. Due to their pride, they do not use their gift according to its purpose, but to show that they are the chosen ones. They always see themselves as above others in the church. SIB stresses that being a pious Christian does not mean being ‘gifted’, but being humble and kind.

These tensions hardly affect inter-ethnic relations within the SIB institution because they occur among individuals regardless of which ethnic group they belong to. Nevertheless, they have limited interactions between individuals particularly with those who see themselves as neither gifted nor professionals. There is a tendency for these individuals to be reluctant to be associated with those whom they perceived as occupying a higher status. They tend to avoid being grouped together for inter-home prayer meetings or gatherings. They are embarrassed to show their home to “higher standard” individuals.

The main problem that occurs which seems to encourage the sustaining of social status among SIB congregations is the conscious action of a group of individuals who claim status as professionals, administrators and gifted individuals. Bilton terms this subjectively based inequality (see Bilton 1987). Individuals conceive of themselves as inferior and thus draw attention to the existence of inequality in the SIB institution. This creates tension and hostility among particular individuals.
5.3. The Orang Ulu-SIB identity

*Orang Ulu* identify with Christianity as their culture. Vervoorn (1998:24) states that:

“a group’s culture consists of accumulated patterns of thought and action that are not instinctive, that have to be learnt and deliberately passed on from one generation to the next. Cultures evolve over time, and while by definition, they have continuity, they must be understood as an ongoing process of change and adaptation”.

*Orang Ulu* culture includes practices such as, architecture (the longhouse), language, eating habits, courtesy and etiquette which could be referred as cultural heritage, and new forms of practices and values adapted both from Western ideas such as elementary education, hygiene and cleanliness, and from the mission’s Christian teachings.

The *Orang Ulu* have more or less adjusted by treating new practices and values a change in the former culture and passing these on to the younger generation. Thus, the cultural heritage of the *Orang Ulu* may be regarded, as Vervoorn (1998:24) puts it, as the historical record of its efforts to survive in a changing environment. The SIB institution has become the formal institution for the creation of the new culture while Christian teachings in SIB are the source of the values, mores, and norms for the new culture.

According to Keesing (1974) individuals are accepted as members of society by virtue of their knowledge of its culture, by their ability to follow its rules and respect its values (cited from Vervoorn 1998:24). The non-*Orang Ulu* such as the Ibans, Bidayuh and Chinese are accepted as members in the SIB institution because they are now SIB Christians. Based on Goodenough’s
(1972) argument, it does not matter that no two individuals have precisely the same understanding of their culture. All that is necessary for them to function as members of their society is that their understanding be sufficiently like that of others to enable them to interact successfully, to master the rules and expectations that govern the behaviour of those with whom they come into contact (cited from Vervoorn 1998:25).

In the SIB church Orang Ulu and non-Orang Ulu both share a culture and differentiate between themselves on the basis of culture. The non-Orang Ulu still attach importance to their separate culture. Unlike the Orang Ulu in the SIB who only celebrate Christmas and Easter that are confirmed as Christian events, the Iban and Bidayuh celebrate Gawai and the Chinese celebrate Chinese New Year. Thus it is quite difficult for Orang Ulu to accept non-Orang Ulu as their ‘spiritual’ mate because of the differences. This is why ethnic identity remains strong even in the SIB church. For the non-Orang Ulu to identify as SIB members is to distinguish themselves from Anglicans, Catholics and Methodists, yet in the SIB church ethnic identity may be more important in distinguishing individuals. Thus the concept of otherness (see Chapter 1) continues to separate people in the SIB institution despite their common belief system.

The status gap among individuals is reduced by encouraging the participation of the SIB people in many outdoor events such as fellowship, and prayer gatherings in specific place. The language that is used in the outdoor activities is the Malay language that is understood and spoken by all of them.
5.4. Rituals as Interaction Media

I mentioned previously (see Chapter 4), in *adat* religion, ritual performances pulled people together. In indigenous Christianity, religious activities such as prayer, Bible readings, baptism, or fellowship gatherings are rituals that when performed on the communal basis, bring people together.

The SIB institution has utilised rituals to pull people together in the sense that people observe the same aspect of the rituals. The ritual is valued and observed in terms of its sacredness. However, rituals are only considered sacred if everyone present at the time the rituals are held observe the values of the rituals. In SIB, the sacredness of the ritual attracts many people to participate in performing the ritual.

5.4.1. Mount Murud Prayer Pilgrimage

Pilgrimage to Mount Murud is a most important event. The pilgrimage involves many people and events, such as praying and worship and choir singing. Mount Murud is treated as a sacred site, a site for prayer. According to SIB members, they have a ‘prayer mountain’ to imitate Jesus’ retreats to the mountain as recorded in the Bible (Bulan 1996:48).

The pilgrimage to Mount Murud is performed at the sacred site and at specific times of the year. Pilgrim (1978:65) mentions that “a ritual is religious if it carries an ultimate value, meaning [and] sacrality”. According to Pilgrim, the sacred context basically refers to the sacred times and sacred place that

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80 Please refer to Roberts 1984. The full reference is not available.
Photo 5.1: Prayer meeting in a Kelabit longhouse in Bario.
specifically refers to a place and certain times that is more auspicious and sacred than others (Pilgrim 1978:71). Certain places are believed to carry sacred value and significance. Sacred participants include the people who are involved in the ritual, including those who perform the ritual whom Pilgrim (1978:71) recognised as "specialists [sic] in the sacred" and those who observe and participate in the ritual performance. Initially, most of the prayer sessions at Mount Murud were held overnight. Later, fasting and prayers were carried out throughout the day on the top of Mount Murud.

The "prayer mountain" activity started after the 1973 revival in Bario when the Kelabits in Bario started to form prayer groups. They went up to pray at Mount Murud. Mount Murud later became a regular site for praying and a small house was built for shelter when they prayed at night. It took them about four days to reach the top of the peak where they spent two nights in prayer. Although the journey to the top of Mount Murud was difficult, many Kelabits from Bario and Lun Bawang from Ba’ Kelalan in the Fourth Division of Sarawak went to pray there. Later, they were joined by people from all over the region.

The prayer meetings became an annual event that involved all SIB churches in Sarawak, and not only the Kelabit from Bario and the Lun Bawangs from Ba’ Kelalan. With the SIB church as the organiser, participants included not only the congregation of SIB, but also people from other churches. The first organised prayer meeting involved 670 people from Sarawak and Sabah that took place on 17-21 July, 1985. A similar prayer meeting, again held in July 1990 involved 400 people. In the following year, in conjunction with the Sarawak SIB State Level Youth Camp, this prayer meeting consisted of about
960 people including people from Sarawak, Penang in Peninsular Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. As the number of people involved in these prayer gatherings increased, a larger building was built (called “prayer house”) at the prayer site at Mount Murud to replace a wooden shack previously built for the people to gather and pray (Bulan 1996:50-52).

The first official organised prayer meeting at Buduk Nur, Ba Kelalan held in 1985 was perceived as the second revival in Sarawak because the pilgrims believed that they had witnessed a sign from God. The sign was a ball of fire. Rays brightened up clearly the clouds above the top of the mountain. It was described by the people who witnessed the fire ball that twice, or more, it moved sideways, downwards behind the mountain tops and then upwards again. It gradually dimmed and diminished from view (Choo 1994:53). During the sightings, many men and women broke down and cried (Choo 1994:54).

They also believed that God had instructed them to dress in uniforms\(^1\) when dancing and singing at this pilgrimage\(^2\). Each village prayer group (Buduk Nur, Long Langai, Lawas, Limbang and Sibu, Buduk Bui, Buduk Aru Bible School, and Bario) was given a special design which they wore on official functions. For example with the group from Buduk Nur village, women dressed in yellow skirts and white blouse with a colorful sash across their chests. The men likewise dressed in white shirts, yellow pants with the same sash across their chests (see Photo 5.2 & 5.3). According to Choo (1994:53), collectively they symbolized “the end-time Church, the Bride of Christ, all prepared and decked out in colors symbolizing purity (white) and glory

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\(^1\) The uniforms was inspired by an individual who was perceived to be a ‘prophet’ for the Lun Bawangs called Agung Bangau (see Choo 1994).

\(^2\) I treat the annual prayer meeting at Mount Murud as a pilgrimage because it is held annually and attended by SIB members (those who believe and have faith in the practices).
Photo 5.2: Pilgrimage at Mount Murud in Sarawak.

Photo 5.3: Prayer meeting during the pilgrimage.
(yellow)”. To an observer, the uniforms appear fancy, or worse cultic (Choo 1994:60). Nevertheless, according to Choo, the ball of fire witnessed by the people who were there for the prayer gathering was perceived as a sign that confirmed the uniform was the “Lord’s desire” (Choo 1994:53).

The pilgrimage is important because it is an event that encourages a closer social interaction. It involves not only individual to individual social interaction such as greetings and conversation but an interaction based on spiritual experience, people praying together, praying to each other, and assisting each other in spiritual needs.

The most important experience that people feel at this particular time and place is the sense of togetherness. The team-work and the spiritual experience attract people into a religious community at a particular time and place. It is a temporary religious community because it is formed only during the pilgrimage. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of the interactions during the pilgrimage probably determine the pattern of interaction and contact afterwards. It is possible that many people in this temporary religious community continue to keep in contact with each other after the pilgrimage while others probably treat the pilgrimage more as a personal spiritual experience. For those who are interested in ongoing interactions, the contacts may be followed by spiritual activities in the church, or more informal friendships. In this sense, a ritual such as the pilgrimage to Mount Murud does play an important role in pulling people together, and ritual performances during the pilgrimage do encourage interaction among the participants.
5.5. The Relations between the SIB People and Non-SIB People

Roberts (1984:339) mentions that “one of the most important functions of religion is to provide a sense of belonging, a sense of a group identity, a sense of we”. However, this may lead to a situation where, “a number of Christian groups place a strong emphasis on particularism. Such a belief would tend to add to the in-group sense of superiority and to the distinction between us and them” (my emphasis, Roberts 1984:339).

I suggest that this is happening in the SIB institution as well. The concept of ‘us’ and ‘them’ originally occurred in the identification of ethnic groups. At present, the distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’ occurs when the SIB people attempt to differentiate themselves from other denominations such as the Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics, or from other religions, such as the Moslems.

Roberts (1984:336) states that “religious belief is correlated with certain kinds of prejudice. This revolves around the assumption that one’s own religion is uniquely true and legitimate and that all others are false. Only members of one’s own group are expected to be saved’. SIB people, in general, see other denominations, namely the Anglicans, Methodists and Catholics as different because of the different patterns of worship, evangelistic work, and emphasis of religious practices (see Chapter 2 & 3). This orientation is referred as particularism53 (Glock & Stark 1966:19-40). “Particularism in this sense, refers to the orientation of - some Christians groups who teach that persons who are members of any other denomination or any other faith are

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53 Particularism mentioned in the thesis is a form of ethnocentrism.
“damned” (my emphasis, Roberts 1984:337). This orientation applies to “some charismatics, fundamentalists, and born again Christians who emphasise that only those who have experienced the Holy [Spirit] in exactly the way they have [sic] eligible for salvation” (Roberts 1984:337). By adopting the charismatic practices such as ‘speaking in tongues’, and a emphasis on personal spiritual experience, and being born again Christians (see Chapter 4), SIB people do have an orientation to particularism. It is because other denominations do not have these characteristics that SIB people perceive SIB Christianity to be the most factual pattern of Christianity, meaning that SIB practices and values are the most true. Other denominations who do not practise this factual pattern are perceived as not teaching the true practice of Christianity. Nevertheless, SIB people seem to believe that the contents of Christian teachings of other denominations are uniform with SIB’s teaching. However, due to their orientation to particularism SIB people do not see certain practices of other denominations as effective or true. As a result, they attempt to evangelise people from other denominations. This has given a negative impression to other denominations that SIB churches are “stealing” their congregations.

However, other denominations and SIB share a similar perspective on other religions, especially Islam. As Roberts mentions, “in societies where members of one racially identifiable group is Christian and members of another physically identifiable group are Moslems, particularism may contribute to antipathy between them” (1984:337). In most situations, other denominations do not show a great interest in evangelising the Moslems. In Sarawak, Malays are identified as Moslems even though the majority of the Melanau and Bisaya are also Moslems. SIB people mainly attempt to evangelise the Melanau and Bisaya but avoid the Malay. As a consequence, some Moslem religious groups
repeatedly complain to the Sarawak Government about the evangelistic work of the SIB people to the Sarawak government. According to reliable sources (the SIB people whom I interviewed who do not want to be mentioned), the SIB institution is currently under government observation. This surveillance of SIB evangelistic work is to avoid the possibility of an eruption of tensions between the two religious groups, namely the Christian groups and the Moslem groups.

5.6. Conclusion

SIB has emerged as a contemporary and modern institution within Sarawak society. In large measure the SIB has ignored older patterns of social identity and interaction based on language and adat criteria such as those promoted by the Brooke Government and perpetuated in Anglican and Catholic affiliates.

However, SIB has engendered other identities of distinctiveness, most prominently distinguishing Orang Ulu from other ethnic groups such as the Iban, Malay and Chinese, and SIB from the other Christian denominations. Within its membership the distinctions between English and Malay language congregations and between degrees of spiritually gifted are also the focus of social status. The sense of status difference and distinctive identity has in part been fostered by the recent SIB emphasis on the direct experience of the Holy Spirit, a focus intended to cut across ‘traditional’ hierarchies and social distinctiveness. It points to the persisting significance of distinctive identity and relative status in social relations in contemporary Sarawak.

To a certain extent, while SIB has successfully cut across the ethnic separation created by the Brooke Government that has limited social interaction, however
social status rises as a new barrier for social interactions. Social status has been created by people in the SIB institution and is sustained by conscious social action. In short, I suggest that ultimate social integration has not been achieved even though the people hold a common belief system.
Chapter 6
Conclusion

Introduction

Sarawak became a partner in the formation of the federation of Malaysia in September 1963. When compared with the ethnic/racial conflict in Peninsular Malaysia in 1969, ethnic conflict in Sarawak is generally seen as non-existent. However, in this study it has been argued that in a culturally plural society such as Sarawak, there may still be tension due to the non-integration of its ethnic groups. However, ethnic relations in Sarawak largely most likely take the form of peaceful but routine relations that lead to a continuation of ethnic separateness, though there is intermingling at some levels.

The main issue discussed in this thesis is the non-integration of ethnic groups in Sarawak. It has compared ethnic relations in Sarawak through different periods. It discussed the antagonistic relations in Sarawak during the pre-colonial period in which tensions and hostility between ethnic groups were caused by rapidly inter-tribal warfare and headhunting activities among the Iban and the Iban alliances with the Malays against other native groups. The Iban-Malay alliances were the major cause of hostile ethnic relations in Sarawak during that period, and these created a gap between ethnic groups. They lived separately in defined territories so as to avoid raids by the Iban. Thus, interactions were only among the small dispersed groups such as the Lun Bawang, Kelabit, Bisaya, and Tagal who lived upriver in the Fourth and Fifth Divisions.
Second, during the Brooke regime (1841-1941), antagonistic ethnic relations were moderated due to policies intended to abolish the inter-tribal warfare and headhunting in Sarawak. The ethnic groups were able to communicate peacefully through trade and they intermingled in the market place. However, the ethnic groups still remained separate and not integrated. The ethnic groups’ separateness instead was heightened by the territorial segregation and Christian church affiliations imposed by the Brooke regime.

Third, attempts at bringing ethnic groups together in one religious institution by the Borneo Evangelical Mission (BEM) improved the interaction, particularly among the dispersed minority groups in the Fourth and Fifth Divisions of Sarawak. BEM has cut across ethnic boundaries and artificial markers created by the Brooke government by creating a community of believers among the dispersed ethnic groups as well as larger groups such as the Kayan and Kenyah. This effort was continued by Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB), a Western style religious organisation administered by the indigenous people in Sarawak, essentially under the supervision of BEM. Individuals from diverse ethnic backgrounds were gathered in the SIB institution under a common belief system where they shared Christian values and practices.

_The concept of ethnicity in Sarawak_

This thesis found that ethnic awareness is created through inter-ethnic interaction. Ethnic identity is consolidated only in situations where people of different backgrounds come into contact or share the same institutions or political system. An analysis of ethnic interaction must determine the criteria
used to define ethnicity. From an anthropological perspective, cultural characteristics are the most common criteria emphasised. However, there are no absolute criteria to determine ethnicity for the following reasons:

(a) Defining any category of people by equating ‘ethnic group’ with ‘cultural traits’ is difficult to justify because shared cultural traits frequently extend cross group boundaries. Cultural boundaries are not clear-cut, nor do they necessarily correspond with ethnic boundaries.

(b) To assume that maintenance of boundaries determines the identity of a group is a fragile argument. These boundaries can be redefined under certain conditions such as during interactions between neighboring groups when resources are limited.

(c) People's own definition of themselves as culturally or physically distinct must be seen as being based on subjective rather than objective criteria, since criteria such as lines of descent can be manufactured or manipulated.

In the case of Sarawak, ethnicity and ethnic identification are very complex. However, the process of formation of ethnic identity and ethnicity in Sarawak, can be summed up roughly in a three stages.

(a) Originally, people in Sarawak identified themselves by the name of a place, river or mountain or by the name of a local chief. However, ethnic mobilisation due to inter-ethnic warfare and swidden agriculture resulted in identity based on geographical location becoming less relevant. This identification however remained vague.

(b) Because of the vagueness of the identification, the Brooke government fixed ethnicity. Ethnicity was formulated based on one or more defined criteria such as language, religious affiliation, economic or social organisation, or presumed origin. However, this formulation created even more
complex ethnic classifications such as Orang Dayak and Orang Ulu. Both of these were multiple ethnic categories, comprising several indigenous minorities.

(c) Self-ascription becomes relevant in the formation of ethnic identity because these ethnic groups need to distinguish themselves from others with whom they come into contact. The ascriptive elements of ethnicity ("who do they conceive themselves to be" and "who are they seen to be by others") are still important in Sarawak.

In short, ethnicity depends on a sense of otherness. In the case of Sarawak this was facilitated by the Brooke regime’s definition of who the “other” was. However, people mainly defined ethnicity as they defined themselves against the other, rather than through categorisation of specific cultural traits.

**Loosely structured social relations**

Ethnic separateness in Sarawak during the Brooke regime (1841-1941) was caused not only by the categorisation of ethnic groups by the Brooke government but also through territorial segregation. The latter used by the Brooke regime for the purpose of ending inter-ethnic warfare, by limiting interactions between ethnic groups. Although trade relations brought people into contact, wider social interaction was almost impossible. The interdependence of traders and customers was based on their mutual interest in trade. However, in the case of the Iban who previously formed diverse territorial groups, ethnic consciousness developed as a result of the Brooke government’s strategy of aggregation.
Missionary societies further strengthened these ethnic identities. When the Brooke government allowed the missionary societies to work in Sarawak, it assigned them specific locations, among specific ethnic groups, and insisted that they provide schooling and other welfare services. Of course, the positive impact of this was that most major ethnic groups such as the Iban, Bidayuh, Kayan and Kenyah were provided with closely-supervised education. However, different denominations brought different ideas and taught the people different perspectives on Christianity. Ethnic identity was consolidated with church affiliation that led to limited interactions, due to this segregation, mutual suspicions were only heightened among different ethnic groups.

*The promotion of “coming together” by BEM and SIB*

The Borneo Evangelical Mission challenged the separation of ethnic groups because of church affiliation and delimited territories. The BEM chose to train Lun Bawang for mission work rather than provide them with secular education. The BEM missionaries were able to exert a strong influence among the Lun Bawang due to the lack of exposure of the Lun Bawang to non-missionary activities, particularly elementary education. These Lun Bawang trainees then missionised among the Kelabit, Kayan, and Kenyah, thus bridging these ethnic divides. Partly because of the BEM evangelistic work among the local people, interaction between the people improved. Kayan, Kenyah and Lun Bawang individuals were very ‘useful’ in evangelism because they were examples of indigenous Christians. No doubt the strength of the local indigenous missionaries was that they were able to attract more local people to Christian teachings through their personal testimonies about their new Christian lifestyle and values.
This inter-ethnic character of the BEM was further strengthened by mission policy to hand over control of the church to indigenous pastors under the SIB institution. Although the SIB organisation was created on a Western model, SIB still showed that it was an indigenous church through the local values perpetuated by the indigenous pastors who acted as the SIB administrators and missionaries. SIB strengthened its influence among the local people by introducing Christian rituals and teachings into certain indigenous practices and indeed as discussed in Chapter 3, always intended to show that Christianity was more practical than traditional beliefs. These differences attracted more individuals to join SIB.

SIB was formed through the collaboration of individuals from many ethnic groups namely the Lun Bawang, Kayan, Kenyah, Tagal and Bisaya. This collaboration demonstrated how the SIB institution was geared towards the unity of individuals from diverse cultural and ethnic background rather than the unity of groups. This showed that SIB has cut across the ethnic boundaries in Sarawak. Furthermore, its inter-ethnic relation policy stressed that individuals from any ethnic group were equal in the SIB institution. That SIB encouraged everyone to join its churches demonstrated that SIB made its churches available as a place for interaction of all peoples through Christian rituals and value systems.

*The revival promoted interpersonal relations*

The 1973 Bario spiritual revival, discussed in Chapter 4, has provided SIB leaders and the congregations with guidelines on interpersonal relations.