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# Evading Colonial Authority. Rebels and Outlaws in the Borderlands of Dutch West Borneo 1850s-1920s

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# Evading Colonial Authority. Rebels and Outlaws in the Borderlands of Dutch West Borneo 1850s–1920s

Michael Eilenberg*

## Abstract

*Borderlands in Southeast Asia are frequently portrayed as being outside state influence, as zones of anarchy where identities are flexible, loyalties ephemeral and state authority largely avoided. Depicted by shifting state administrators as rebels and outlaws roaming the border hills the populations inhabiting these edges of states further seem especially resistant towards officialdom through their engagement in law-bending practices and a heightened sense of autonomy. This paper examines these dynamics as they unravel on the island of Borneo during the Dutch colonial administration in the mid-19th century and thus aims to contribute to the growing historiography of Southeast Asian borderlands and the more localized dynamics of state formation. By contrasting local Iban narratives and discourses with colonial records in the border regency of Boven-Kapoeas in Dutch West Borneo I show how renowned rebel leaders did their best to take advantage of the differing terms and conditions that colonial rule offered on either side of the border and thus openly challenged colonial state authority. The rebel defiance of colonial authority forced the colonial administrators to impose strict control along the Dutch and British border of Borneo. It is argued that the rebellions and consequent Dutch attempt to establish law and order, largely contributed to the territorial demarcation of the colonial state.*



## Introduction

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

This paper argues that the border ambiguity portrayed in the quote by Joel Migdal is an outcome of the particularities of life at the edges of the state, of being situated between two divergent nation states and is thus a result of the permeability and continuous shifting character of national borders. This ambiguity is particularly apparent when looking at Dutch colonial intervention in the West Borneo borderlands beginning in the mid 1800s and the later Dutch effort to establish an officially recognized territorial border through negotiation with the British colonial administration. Here the Dutch and British attempts to take control of the self-ruling and rebellious border communities by subduing their migration back and forth between the two colonial territories present an interesting case. Especially, how these border populations gradually adjusted to the new colonial territorial divisions by using them to their own advantage.

The challenging geographies of the West Borneo borderlands was the focus of contentious inter-colonial relations, and the border population did their best to take advantage of differing terms and conditions that colonial rule offered on either side; for example, using the border to escape taxes and evade colonial authority through practices deemed illegal or subversive. As "Non-state spaces," borderlands in many ways resemble what James Scott has termed "The last enclosure" a zone where state authorities are especially weak and populations openly resist state political and administrative pacification and standardization (Scott 2009). Difficult-to-police spaces like remote borderlands are promising spaces for outlaws and rebels, just as vast river systems and fertile plains are cordial to state-makers (Scott 2009). Thomas Gallant further claims that the presence of these rebellious populations often headed by "military entrepreneurs" (such as bandits, pirates, rebels, or ethnic chiefs) that "literally and figuratively lived on the edge of society"

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has compelled states to (violently) intervene in an attempt to force their control on the border.[1] These localized processes of state formation have largely facilitated the incorporation of remote borderlands into the colonial and later national economy—an outcome that Gallants terms the "border effect" (Gallant 1999, 48).

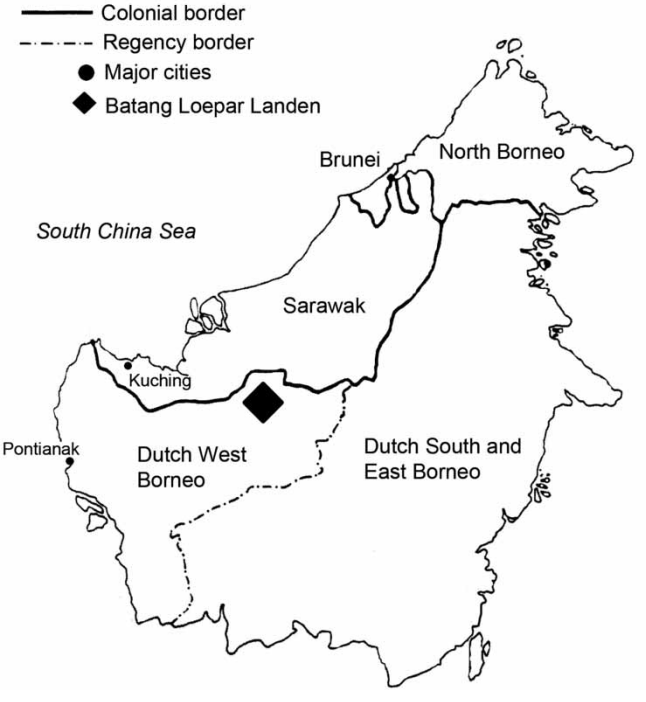
Following Gallant, I illustrate how border rebels and war chiefs worked the border delimiting Dutch West Borneo from British Sarawak. How these "criminal outlaws," as they were often described by colonial authorities, in no small way have contributed to the demarcation of the territorial state. In particular, how they contributed to the continuous reproduction of the border through their ambivalent engagement with the colonial state. These engagements continuously oscillated between processes of cooperation, pacification and the outright defiance of state authority. But most importantly, these processes show that such "men of prowess," whose activities most often are deemed illegal by states, are not the antithesis of modern state formation but instead an integral part of it. As eloquently put by Gallant, "bandits helped make states and states made bandits" (Gallant 1999, 25).

The idea of the "border effect" is useful when considering the waxing and waning of state power on the West Borneo border and shows how local social-political practices and strategies are constituted in a complementary relationship with shifting state policies and institutions (Figure 1).

## State Building on the Border

Iban oral history shows that some time prior to the 19th century, the Iban migrated out of the middle Kapuas basin[2] in West Borneo and spread across the border into what is known as the Upper Batang Lupar river system (*Ulu aí* in Iban) in British Sarawak and, from there, further afield (Sandin 1967). Although early records of Iban settlement in the border area are scarce, oral accounts paint a picture of

**Figure 1.** Map of Colonial Borneo



Iban interaction with other inhabitants of the area that was characterized by a mixture of raiding (headhunting) and trading (Sandin 1967). Oral accounts and early stories further emphasize the shifting Iban relationship with the small Melayu states (kingdoms) in the upper part of the Kapuas. The hilly borderlands became zones of refuge to escape the reach of these states. Although never under the direct rule of these small states,[3] the Iban frequently engaged in trade and alliances with the Melayu rulers. The Melayu states allied with the Iban against other groups whom they wanted to suppress and engulf under their authority (Kielstra 1890, 1104). The Melayu rulers did not measure their power in terms of territorial possessions, but by the number of people who paid them tribute. By refusing to pay tribute the Iban were known as the free Dayaks[4] "*mardaheka Dayaks*," or those who were under nobody's authority but their own, while the "*serah Dayaks*"[5] were the Dayak groups who paid tribute to the Melayu states (Enthoven 1903; van Kessel 1850). Since the onset of these early pre-colonial Iban migrations, several similar movements have taken place back and forth on the hilly watershed that later came to divide Dutch and British territories and post-independence the nation states of Indonesia and Malaysia.

The idea of modern international borders, as we understand them today, is a historic product of European state building and the subsequent rise of nationalism starting in the 18th century (Anderson 1991). The drawing and creation of territorial borders became essential for developing a national identity and nationhood. Baud and van Schendel (1997, 214–215) argue that borders became markers in two ways: Firstly, as a demarcation of state territories in order to put an end to territorial disputes. Territorial borders helped the respective states to distinguish their own citizens from those of the neighboring state, making it easier to exercise control and collect taxes. Secondly, borders became the ultimate markers of the reach of state power.

The demarcation of borders as a state project in Europe was a long process that took centuries. In Southeast Asia, as in other regions under former colonial rule, this process happened considerably faster as a result of European colonialism and the struggle over people, land, and natural resources (Tagliacozzo 2005). In March 1824 the Anglo-Dutch treaty was signed, which divided the Malay world down the strait of Melaka and assigned the right of influence on each side to the Dutch and British respectively, meaning that the island of Borneo was arbitrarily divided in two. The colonial border cut through a rather homogenous area whereby individuals found their family members on the other side of the border and incorporated into different colonial territories.

The Iban are a vivid example of such a separated people who, ever since their separation by an artificial borderline, have continued their socio-economic relations with kin and family across the border, and thus have maintained a social understanding of belonging that does not correspond with the political nation-state border.

## Colonial Contention

The two bordering areas today known as West Kalimantan (Indonesia) and Sarawak (Malaysia) were in 1848 divided into Dutch West Borneo, or the Residency of the Western Division of Borneo (*Westerafdeeling van Borneo*), and the Brooke (British) Governance in Sarawak.[6] Subsequently, the Iban groups living in each area were divided by a formally recognized border and administrated by the Dutch and Brooke, respectively. The considerable variations of politics and practices between the two administrations have since had a profound effect on the Iban on each side of the border and shaped their lives differently.

Dutch intervention and growing interest in western Borneo was, among other things, a counter response to the increasing expansion of the British powerbase in the adjacent region of Sarawak and reflected the Dutch desire to strengthen its general sphere of influence in the sparsely populated outer regional possessions (Irwin 1955, 151). In particular, the upriver interior in western Borneo was little known and

represented by empty spots on the colonial maps. However, it was widely known among the Dutch that the interior was rich in natural resources and their access to these resources was under threat by the British (Brooke) expansion. The Brooke administration in Sarawak had, before Dutch solidification of power in the area, begun initiating various trade contacts with local Melayu and Dayak rulers in Dutch West Borneo and the Dutch feared that the communities living along the edge of their territory would eventually be engulfed into the Brooke power sphere (NA 1847).

In the 1840–1850s, a series of concerned letters about the British colonialist James Brooke's intrusion into the lower and upper borderlands was sent from the Resident of Dutch West Borneo to the Governor General of the Netherlands East Indies in Batavia [Jakarta] and from there to the Minister of *Kolonien*. The letters requested additional officers to be posted near the border with Sarawak in order to check the influence of James Brooke on the border-dwelling Dayaks. Especially, the trade in salt and firearms across the border was among the illegal trade items that were of most concern to the Dutch. Trade in firearms was a military threat while the salt trade was an economic threat as it reduced local Dutch tax profit. These two trade items could be purchased considerably cheaper in Sarawak than through the Dutch trade channels (NA 1855).

The Dutch were highly concerned by the Brooke government's lax attitude towards its citizens breaching the boundary line into what the Dutch claimed as part of the Netherlands East Indies territory. They were particularly concerned about Brooke's moral influence and authority over the border population on Dutch territory, with whom he traded and periodically fined and punished without involving the Dutch. Such meddling in the affairs of Dutch subjects was seen as a serious border offence and disregard of Dutch sovereignty. This further convinced Dutch officials of the importance of border control and expanding government presence in order to settle the authority of the Netherlands East Indies in West Borneo. As stated by the Dutch Resident[7] Cornelis Kater in Pontianak: "In order to solve the disputes with our Sarawakian neighbors it is necessary for government regulation along the border (*grensregeling*)" (NA 1868) (Figure 2).

## Batang Loepar Landen

In the 1850s, several Dutch delegations were dispatched up the Kapuas River in order to make contact with local rulers and establish firm Dutch administrative rule in its most northern regency, the *Boven-Kapoeas*. Here the colonial administrators directed a particular focus on the hilly region inhabited by the Iban bordering the British possessions in Sarawak (Kater 1883). In the subsequent years, several attempts were made to delimit the border between the two administrations, although there was a general agreement that the hilly watershed represented the border. Under the Dutch administration, the Iban were referred to as "Batang Lupar Dayaks" and the area they were living in as "Batang Lupar country" (*Batang Loepar Landen*) (Figure 1). Consequently, the Iban in the area were called "Batang Lupar Dayaks" or "Batang Lupars" (*de Batang Loepars*) (Bouman 1924, 174).

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

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

It was at this time that the Dutch first encountered the Iban. In 1854, a meeting with all the customary Iban leaders in the border area was held (Niclou 1887). During the meeting, the Iban leaders made a vow

**Figure 2.** Consultant Ir. G.A. de Mol and Iban headman on the border between Dutch West Borneo and Sarawak, 1932 (Photo courtesy KIT—Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen, Amsterdam)

of allegiance to the Dutch in which they promised to stop what the Dutch saw as undesirable acts, such as warfare and smuggling.

> These leaders were presented with gifts and a sort of uniform, while various matters were arranged. They would stand outside any intermediate government of Malay sultans but would be immediately under the authority (*gezag*) of the Nederlands Indie Government, restrain themselves from hostilities and headhunting, pay no direct taxes to the government but perform some services such as chopping wood and supplying ironwood shingles. By establishing these services, our principal aim was not to increase our fund with such scanty amounts but to have our authority acknowledged (*ons gezag te doen erkennen*). (Kater 1883, 3)

The Iban were further prohibited from settling and farming in near proximity to the border. In the decades to come, the Dutch extended their presence in the border area and experienced their first difficulties in handling the Iban, and the Dutch subsequently named the Iban "[ … ] the terror of the Kapuas (*de schrik der Kapoeas*)" (Kater 1883, 4).

## Small Zones of Autonomy

The Dutch colonial administration, like other European powers at the time, was obsessed with demarking their territorial possessions by drawing lines across the landscape and creating borders. The creation of these exclusive borders was an attempt to regulate and control colonial subjects and resources.

In the period between 1886 and 1895, the Dutch government sent out surveying teams led by a Captain J. J. K. Enthoven whose main purpose was to map the entire province of West Borneo. The task was accomplished in nine years and the results were published in a two-volume (900 pages) book meticulously describing geographical and ethnographic features of the province (Enthoven 1903). Although the Dutch from the very outset of their presence in the area had been enthusiastic and determined to delimit the exact borderline between Dutch Western Borneo and British Sarawak, it was not until 1912 that the exact border line was set along the hilly and mountainous watershed, demarcating Dutch territories in the south and British territories in the north of the island (Irwin 1955). This treaty was later followed by several other treaties and conventions in 1915 and 1928 (NA 1916/1930).

On a map, these borders might have created clarity but, on the ground, local response to these new divisions of the landscape was seldom in line with colonial understanding. In Dutch West Borneo, especially in the borderland inhabited by the Iban, the Dutch experienced much frustration as their territorial divisions with Brooke's Sarawak were constantly defied and resisted by the Iban population's cross-border activities. As mentioned above, before the colonial intrusion into Western Borneo, the Iban had a long history of migration and movement and a well-established network of trade, communication, and kinship ties. The creation of the colonial borders did not mean an end to the interaction between the closely-related Iban communities on each side of the border; on the contrary, the new border was at times ignored or in several ways used to their advantage when it suited their needs. The Iban were quite aware that the border was of great importance to the Europeans, and that the watershed defined this new borderline. As such they referred to the Dutch side as *Ai' Belanda* (*Ai* being the Iban name for watershed while Belanda being the local name for the Dutch) and the other side as *Ai' Sarawak*.

Iban migration and movement were often associated with warfare and raiding; from the mid-19$^{th}$ century and onwards, these two Iban institutions became a continuous concern of both the Dutch and the Brooke administration who initiated a series of punitive expeditions against the rebels. Iban raiding was often directed against other ethnic groups, but also inter-Iban raiding was normal. Iban raiding parties attacked local communities in both Dutch and Brooke territories. These wandering warriors were locally referred to

as *Urang Kampar*, which is an Iban term for men who wander, trade or fight outside their own country (Pringle 1970, 229).

The two colonial administrations began patrolling the border and initiated military attacks on rebellious Iban; as a tool of pacification they burned down longhouses, cut down fruit trees, and destroyed rice fields (Niclou 1887, 50). When the Iban raiding parties sought refuge from their enemies or from Dutch and Brooke punitive expeditions, they exploited the dividing effect of the borderline. When Iban from Sarawak entered Dutch territory for raiding, they could afterwards retreat over the border without the Dutch being able to follow them. The border was also used by the Sarawak Iban to escape taxes issued by the Brooke administration. Today, as then, a network of old trails and routes crosses the borderline connecting the two partitioned Iban groups. During the colonial era, the Iban used these trails as escape routes when fleeing the Dutch and British. As mentioned by the Dutch Resident in a December 1872 monthly report: "Raiding (headhunting) was the order of the day" (*Sneltogten waren aan de orde van den dag*) (NA 1872). Although Iban on the Dutch side were active in raiding, the main Dutch frustration was a result of the more frequent raids conducted by the Sarawak Iban.

On several occasions, the Dutch used Iban mercenaries' to suppress Malay rebellions elsewhere in their West Borneo territory (Bouman 1924, 187). Iban mercenaries were also widely used by the Brooke administration in Sarawak. The Iban themselves seemed to welcome this opportunity to take part in officially sanctioned government punitive expeditions because it gave them the chance to raid and take heads (King 1976, 101). The Dutch quickly abandoned the use of Iban mercenaries because they believed that it only encouraged more raiding. The Brooke administration on the other hand chose to continue the practice, as it was much cheaper to use the Iban mercenaries than regular soldiers (Pringle 1970, 241). Charles Brooke, the Sarawak ruler at the time, justified his use of Iban mercenaries through the assertion that only "Dayaks can kill Dayaks" and it was better to leave such matters in their hands:

> It is my firm belief that if left to themselves there will be a prompt and lasting settlement brought about, but on the other hand if there is interference from our Governments, inexperienced as they must be concerning the real feelings of the people, there will be an imbroglio which may last for years. (NA 1882)

Instead of using local mercenaries, the Dutch began erecting permanent military posts equipped with officers and regular soldiers close to the border in Nanga Badau. The main aims of this border patrol were, according to the Commandant, to flag Dutch authority and provide protection to the Resident on his expeditions among the hostile Batang Lupars, in order to force their submission and retrieve severed heads (NA 1880a).

As mentioned by Resident Cornelis Kater, the Nanga Badau military post was not only to protect "our citizens" (*onze bevolking*), but also to see that the borders were respected and to keep "our Iban" (*onze Batang Loepars*) from headhunting (NA 1880b). The stationed soldiers consequently began patrolling the border on a regular basis, a strategy that turned out to be more effective than the former use of mercenaries (Niclou 1887, 51). Not particularly pleased with a large Dutch military posted on the border with Sarawak, Brooke wrote several letters to the Dutch Governor General complaining that he doubted the effectiveness of such a show of force (*machtsvertoon*) and that he was not entirely clear about its main purpose; situated at the border "it might also be considered somewhat as a menace to the state of Sarawak" (NA 1882).

The different approaches in dealing with the Iban cross-border raids resulted in several controversies between the two colonial administrations and they usually ended up blaming each other for the continuing cross-border raiding (Pringle 1970, 217–218). The Dutch were particularly agitated by the continuous violation of the border and acts of indiscriminate headhunting (*koppensnellen*), which they blamed on the Brooke administration's alleged lack of control over its undisciplined Iban mercenaries and wider Iban citizens (Kater 1883). Meanwhile, the Brookes blamed the Dutch for being too lenient in their

handling of the Iban (Pringle 1970, 218). In 1882, Charles Brooke, actually offered to take the Dutch Iban population under his control and suggested that it would:

> [ … ] lead to a more settled state of affairs if the whole tribe of Batang Lupar Dyaks, some of whom are living in Kapuas waters, were put under the control and direction of the Sarawak Government - even if a certain portion of the land adjoining the frontier where these Dayak are located, were transferred to the Sarawak rule [...] it is not my wish to seek for enlargement of territory, or gain of any kind. (NA 1882)

Brooke further emphasized that, with the exception of this specific part of the border, the rest of Sarawak was in a state of peace, advancement, and prosperity. Despite this, the Dutch Governor General refused Brooke's suggestion, as he did not see the advantage of such secession. He believed instead that the best means to solve the Batang Lupar question was cooperation between governments.

The cross-border raids peaked in the late 19th century. The Dutch tried to govern the rebel Iban by sending military expeditions up the Leboyan River but without much luck, as the Iban again used the strategy of escaping across the border to where the Dutch could not follow them. The landscape of the upper Leboyan is scattered with locations of confrontation from Iban rebellions in the late 19th and early-20th century. These locations have become symbols of how the Iban courageously fought the Dutch and Brooke colonial regimes. An example of such a location is a large flat rock located in the upper Leboyan, where many former Iban settlements were located. The Iban call this rock *Batu Bangkai* (the stone of corpses) referring to the fierce fighting that took place in the 1870s and 1880s between the Iban and the Dutch at that location (Niclou 1887, 50). Nearly all Dutch reports on "the Batang Lupars question" from that period mention the Iban at Batu Bangkai as especially resistant towards colonial authority. The Dutch Resident Kater noted how the isolated and almost inaccessible Batu Bangkai: "[ … ] gradually became a hide-out for all with whom we had a score to settle" (Kater 1883, 10).

In 1879, patrol Commandant Lt. Schultze reported on a military expedition up the Leboyan River accompanied by an attachment of 55 men. Arriving at Batu Bankai, an Iban stronghold, he sent emissaries to the Iban in order to seek their submission and arrange for their resettlement away from the border. Not getting any response from the Iban, he decided to burn down two longhouses and destroy fruit gardens and swiddens. Nothing was spared (NA 1879). In a letter dated June 7, 1880 to the Dutch Resident Kater, Brooke stated the importance of ruthlessly subduing rebellious Iban along the border, especially those at Batu Bangkai, who were particularly hostile and outside the control of colonial power. He further claimed that these Iban were so savage and inaccessible, that peace, even among themselves, is hopeless (NA 1880c).

The strategy of criss-crossing the border, used by Iban settled on both sides, later triggered what was to be known as the Kedang Expedition (Niclou 1887, 60–67).[8] A Dutch official in 1885 wrote:

> The Rajah of Sarawak, C. Brooke suggested starting an extermination-war (*verdelgings-oorlog*) against the rebellious Batang-Loepars as he doesn't regard it possible to find a peaceful solution (*vredelievenden weg*) to the conflict with the Batang-Loepars at the border along our area and the war should be started by us (Dutch), by Sarawak or together, though in the last case it shouldn't be simultaneously, but at different periods. (Niclou 1887, 29)

The Iban name for the expedition was *Serang Rata* meaning "the attack that struck everywhere." Charles Brooke described the borderland situation as follows:

> The Kedang Range is supposed and is practically the boundary line, as near as can be roughly estimated, and the Dayaks living on it drink both Sarawak and Kapuas waters. (Brooke quoted in Pringle 1970, 218)

Although the Dutch did not agree with the approach used by Brooke, in 1886 they allowed a Brooke military expedition to cross the border in the Kedang hills to punish rebellious Iban in certain specified areas (NA 1886). With a force of 10,000–12,000 men consisting of Iban loyal to Brooke the expedition burned down around 80 longhouses on both sides of the border, 41 of which were located in Dutch territory. The Dutch were very displeased with the manner in which the expedition was carried out, especially the rampant raiding and looting conducted by the Iban mercenaries and their attacks on several Iban longhouses that the Dutch regarded as friendly. Longhouses were systematically plundered and destroyed. The period up to and after the expedition made such a large impact on people's lives that it was referred to as the time of war (*musim kayau*).

In the period after the expedition, in an attempt to handle the Iban problem, the Dutch created a new special district (*Onderafdeeling Batang-Loeparlanden*) in the immediate border area inhabited by the Iban and stationed a Dutch district officer (*controleur*) in the vicinity as well as increasing the number of soldiers at the border crossing point in Nanga Badau. This show of force subsequently compelled Iban leaders on both sides of the border to tender their submission to the Dutch and the Brooke's administration respectively. The Dutch gave the Iban on their side two conditions for submission: firstly, they had to pay a fine as a promise to stop raiding and, secondly, all longhouses upriver affected by the expedition had to move away from the border into specific territories further downriver that were easier to administer (Wadley 2001, 634–635).

## Bantin—A Border Rebel

> Where two countries like Sarawak and Netherlands Indian Borneo territory meet, with a thickly afforested and sparsely populated border line, the difficulty of arresting criminals before they have had time to pass into the neighbouring territory is very great, especially in cases where as in Sarawak proper, the distance to be covered not very great. [...] Persons who find it politic to hurriedly shift from one side of the border to the other can hardly be considered as valuable citizens of either State. In the interests of the security of both life and property we shall always be glad to know that mutual accommodation of these matters is practiced to the benefit of peaceable inhabitants and to the discomfort of the criminal classes. (NA 1914)

This Sarawak Gazette quote from 1895 clearly elucidates the border dilemma as experienced by the two colonial powers concerning their "unruly" Iban. Along with raiding and migration, the collection of taxes was one of the most frequent reasons for conflict between the Iban and their colonial administrators, both the Dutch and the Brooke's. The Brooke administration introduced a regular "door tax" or tax on each Iban family (Pringle 1970, 160–164). When the Dutch first arrived in the Iban area, they also issued taxes, although they did not appear to be collected on a regular basis. Under the Dutch, taxes were raised several times in an effort to control the raiding Iban. The Dutch purpose for taxing the Iban is made clear in the following statement by the Dutch Resident Cornelius Kater: "The Dayak recognizes no authority than that to which he brings taxes" (Kater 1883, 3). The taxation of the Iban was not just carried out in order to increase government revenue, but to a considerable extent as an attempt to execute authority over the Iban, who were considered especially recalcitrant by the Dutch and British. When the Iban refused to pay taxes they at the same time denied colonial authority and signaled rebellion (Pringle 1970, 164).

Following the Kedang Expedition and the subsequent (forced) peace agreement, the raiding seemed to cease and a short period of stability began, but trouble broke out again a few years later. Bantin, a renowned Iban war-leader from the Delok River in Sarawak, got into a conflict with the Brooke administration by refusing to pay taxes and resettling away from the border. Bantin was at the time one of the most feared Iban warriors in Sarawak (Pringle 1970, 220). In an 1897 letter to the Dutch resident, Brooke requested that the Dutch prevent their Iban from aiding Bantin, who in the previous years had moved back and forth across the border. In a reply to Brooke's letter the Dutch resident agreed to talk with

his Iban citizens about the matter, but also explicitly stated that no Sarawak punitive expedition would be allowed to cross the border:

> However Sir, in the event of your directing a *bala* [large raiding party] to punish the rebels, Your Highness will highly oblige me by strictly forbidding Your Dyaks to pass the frontier, as this would be unnecessary and dangerous. Unnecessary because I dispose of sufficient means to prevent criminals from hiding within our territory, dangerous because of the possible consequences of some misunderstanding easily to be conceived. (NA 1897)

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

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

Additionally, as stated in a letter dated April 12, 1903 from Brooke to the Dutch Resident de Neve in West Borneo:

> Bantin seems to have no power, if indeed, he has the wish to do so, to prevent his people from making marauding expeditions, and these people rely upon their vicinity to the frontier for protection and for the necessities of life. They are careful to keep on good terms with the Nederlandsch Indie government officials, police, and Chinese traders across the border. It is known that Dutch Batang Lupars are involved in Bantin's raids [ … ]. Pronounce Bantin and his follower's enemies and forbid any Dutch subjects from having any relations with them. They should be declared outlaws and be dealt with severely and any measures taken against them, even to their being attacked, will not call any official notice from me, so long as they continue in the lawless state. (NA 1905a)

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

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

In the same letter, the Resident further asks whether Brooke had any objections:

> [...] to Bantin and his own people establishing themselves after submission on Dutch territory under the special control of the Dutch officials. (NA 1905b)

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

> I am certain that until these people are dealt with there will be no peace in the Ulu of this river. All the other people are insignificant compared with these notorious head takers – Bantin, Ngumbang, Alam, Rangga [Bantin's son] and others, whose houses are near the border in Ulu Delok, on Bukit Katupong. (Sarawak Gazette 1908b)

Not welcome in Sarawak territories, Bantin fled back and forth across the border and, in 1909, he eventually took refuge and permanently settled in the Ulu Leboyan with his followers, approximately 80 families (Pringle 1970, 220–233). Not entirely satisfied with permanently settling on Dutch territory Bantin, in the years to come, occasionally enquired among his relatives in the Ulu Ai, Sarawak, as to the reception he would receive should he return to Sarawak territory. Branded as a dangerous criminal in Sarawak, Bantin was destined to remain on Dutch soil (Sarawak Gazette 1911).

## Pacification

Despite Bantin being on good terms with the Dutch, the continuing violation of the Dutch prohibition against raiding and the threat of another punitive expedition by the Brooke's administration prompted the Dutch to send troops into the Ulu Leboyan in order to control Bantin early in 1917. The outcome of this (peaceful) Dutch show of force was the movement of as many as 300 Iban households downriver away from the border (Bouman 1952, 83–84). This movement was carried out under the threat of force, and although no fighting took place, several Iban were jailed for obstinacy, weapons and severed heads were confiscated, and longhouses and fields burned. The Iban were warned that if they did not comply with Dutch authority they would be expelled back across the border to Sarawak—where the brutal mercenaries of the Brooke's administration would meet them. After some resistance, Bantin and the rest of his followers took an oath of allegiance to the Dutch and settled permanently along a small stream further away from the border in the Ulu Leboyan, where Bantin died in 1932 and was buried on a hilltop, as was the custom for brave men (*urang berani*) (King 1976, 104–105).

In the half a century from July 1868 to August 1917 there were approximately 17 documented punitive expeditions carried out by the Dutch and Brooke forces against the rebellious Iban inhabiting the Dutch side of the border. Six of these were directed against communities in the Ulu Leboyan. During this period a total of 115 longhouses were destroyed (Wadley 2007, 117–119).

Even after pacification of the Iban border communities, the colonial governments treated the Iban with caution in order not to antagonize them. For example, Iban on both sides of the border paid fewer taxes than other native peoples—in Sarawak because they were obligated to serve on government expeditions, and in Dutch West Borneo it was probably to keep things equivalent with Sarawak practice. The Dutch government commissioner A. Prins stated that the Iban should not pay considerable taxes in order to ensure that it is in the Iban's interest to side with the Dutch (NA 1856).

The Dutch efforts to govern the Iban seemed to have had an effect. From the 1930s up until the Japanese occupation in 1940s, only sporadic raiding took place in the borderland. Then in 1942 the Dutch were forced to leave their East Indies Colonies as a result of the Japanese occupation. After the Second World War and the surrender of the Japanese, the Dutch once more tried to regain control of their East Indies colonies but after immense local resistance and international pressure they formally recognized Indonesian independence in 1949. The last mention of the Iban border communities in the colonial archives appeared in a small note in 1947 mentioning how a military patrol was sent out to the *Batang Loepar-landen* in order to prevent a rumored Iban headhunting trip along the border (NA 1947). In more than a decade after independence the borderland was left without any form of strong state authority, the Dutch had left and the Indonesian state-makers were preoccupied elsewhere. During this period of waning state authority the borderlanders experienced increased self-autonomy, however, already by the early 1960s, the borderland again experienced a waxing in state authority when President Sukarno initiated a small-scale war or confrontation (*konfrontasi*) against the newly created Federation of Malaysia. The Iban borderlanders were

drawn into the conflict, and like the Dutch a few decades earlier, the new Indonesian government also experienced the borderland paradoxes of fluid loyalties and the local ambiguous relationship with officialdom (see Eilenberg 2011).

## Conclusion

Emanating from a detailed historical account of the Dutch and British colonial partitioning of the Borneo border in the mid-20th century, I have discussed the deep anxieties of the Dutch colonial state towards the border population and its attempts to subdue these recalcitrant subjects and extend its administrative discipline to the "wild" frontier. Moreover, these colonial accounts illustrate how local strategies were shaped in response to conflicting state discourses on either side of the border. One major contributing factor to these Iban and colonial skirmishes was a long history of movement, particularly for trade, warfare and headhunting, which did not recognize arbitrary state borders. The paper shows how state borders in Borneo have not only been static or permanent structures, separating territories and excluding people as originally intended by colonial state planners. For many borderlanders these borders were and still are as much a basis for opportunity as a barrier.

These first colonial encounters on the island of Borneo further show how the border population strategically took advantage of the artificial line dividing the Dutch and British territories and the anxiety experienced by the colonial rulers concerning the shifting national loyalties of their border subjects. As demonstrated, the border population never did become the loyal "taxable" state-subjects as envisioned by the colonial administrators. On the contrary, the Iban border population continued its economic, social, and political interactions with communities on the other side of the border and still do so today (Eilenberg 2009; Eilenberg and Wadley 2009). As insightfully noted by Joel Migdal:

> [ … ] borders are impermanent features of social life, dependent on particular circumstances rather than being permanent fixtures of human society. (Migdal 2004, 5)

The explanations proposed here suggest that border rebels such as Bantin played an important role in forming the territorial border between Dutch West Borneo and British Sarawak. As declared outlaws—Bantin and other "men of prowess" who could not be easily tamed posed a problem for the two colonial states. The continuous movement of Iban communities and raiding parties between the two territories was viewed, especially among the Dutch authorities, as a problem of territorial sovereignty that made it extremely difficult to define citizenship and establish authority. In order to control the rebellious and self-ruling Iban, the Dutch invested considerable energy in stationing military and government officials in the remote border regency of *Boven-Kapoeas*. Iban communities along the hilly border were resettled, longhouses burnt and raiding parties prevented by threat of military force. The large volume of Dutch colonial documents dealing with the Iban stretch of the border, suggests that without doubt the "Batang Lupar issue" was among the most contentious in Dutch Borneo. One could argue that the rebellious Iban in their defiance of colonial authority compelled colonial authorities to act—triggering a "border effect" (Gallant 1999) that contributed to the delimitation and hardening of Dutch and British territories.

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## Endnotes

[1] Gallant (1999, 26–27) does not refer to the formal institution: "national army" when using the term "military entrepreneurs." Instead, he wishes to stress the tendency, of these entrepreneurial men, to "take up arms" and apply the "threat of violence."

[2] The Kapuas is the largest river in West Borneo, stretching approximately 1,145 km from its source at Gunung Cemaru in the Upper Kapuas Mountains to the coast at the provincial capital of Pontianak.

[3] Many other ethnic groups in the area, like the less numerous Maloh, frequently paid tax and tribute to these rulers (Kater 1883).

[4] The term Dayak is an umbrella term referring to all non-Muslim populations living in the interior of Kalimantan, with the Iban being just one of many ethnic groups named Dayak. The Dayaks living along the border were later referred to by the Dutch as "border Dayaks" (*grens-Dajakhs*) (Kater 1883).

[5] "Serah" is a kind of forced trade/labour where the exchange rate was to the advantage of the Malay ruler.

[6] Sarawak was, from 1841, governed by a self-ruling British colonialist named James Brooke. In 1839, Brooke first arrived in the area where he helped the Sultan of Brunei in putting down a local rebellion. For his help in ending this rebellion Brooke became the sovereign ruler of Sarawak. A few years later, in 1845, he was appointed British agent in Borneo (Irwin 1955, 103). Sarawak became a British protectorate in 1888 and the Brooke family administered the area for several generations until it was passed on to the British crown after the Second World War (Pringle 1970).

[7] The Resident was the highest colonial authority on the provincial level.

[8] The Kedang Range runs along the part of the border inhabited by the Iban.

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