

# *The Dayak: Close to the Eyes, Far from the Heart*

Nasrullah

Sociology Anthropology Education Departement  
 Faculty of Teacher Training and Education  
 Universitas Lambung Mangkurat  
 Banjarmasin, Indonesia  
 eje\_jela@yahoo.com

**Abstract**— This article aims to discuss multicultural transformation problems of Dayak Tribe. As we know, Borneo or Kalimantan is one of the big islands in the world and owned by three nations named Indonesia, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam. Of these three countries, Dayak and Malay are dominant ethnic-groups living on this island. Though Dayak is so well-known in Kalimantan, it does not mean that all people in the island are familiar with this ethnic group. This article is to explore my experience as a university lecturer where *Society and Culture in Kalimantan* is one of my teaching materials that I taught. This article is also based on my students' responses, knowledge, experience, and perception about Dayak itself. I found so much more misperception about Dayak which tends to bring a negative stigma on it. In this case-study, therefore, I used an autoethnography approach in anthropology which I relate to my experience in teaching the theme about Dayak and also to my students' responses that they made in middle test and final test. The purposes of this article are (1) to show the interaction of Dayak with other people in multicultural society through my subject matter in class, and (2) to know misperception or misunderstanding about Dayak by the others. Though the result relating to both objectives is not final, I found misperception or misunderstanding about Dayak was far from the fact; for example, Dayak is uncivilized, it tends to gather food by hunting and the like. Consequently, we are stigmatized with unpleasant images about Dayak. In addition, this is supported by stereotype factors such as negative stigma from western literature and discourse in society as well. Finally, I suggest for the multicultural transformation of knowledge about Dayak that we have to read more books or to write more essays about Dayak in a popular culture.

**Keywords;** *Dayak, student, misperception, popular-culture.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

"Sir, how to get along with the Dayak?" The sentence is sample a student asks me about Dayak because she wants to befriend with Dayak. I look her expression worried with hope. This moment was not the first time for me when I taught in the classroom. This paper presents my teaching experience in classroom in Sociology-Anthropology Education Department. As we know, Kalimantan is part of the bigger Island in the world, where the dominant ethnics are Dayak and Malays. Studies about the Dayak are conducted more by researchers overseas in social science. Thus, Dayak is very popular in the world. In Kalimantan Island, Dayak is everywhere with the various sub-ethnic group. For example, Dayak in South of Kalimantan include Bakumpai, Ngaju, Meratus/Bukit, Deah,

with culture area around of Barito River, Meratus Mountain (From Banjar district to Tabalong district) till bounders of South Kalimantan. Banjarmasin, the city of South Kalimantan has Dayak people since thousands of years ago. For example, Dayak live in Banjarmasin with activities as ordinary people and also professional like doctor, military, academician, politician, or mayor of Banjarmasin, namely Mr. Ibnu Sina from Dayak Bakumpai. Mr. H Sulaiman HB is a public figure because he was the head of Golkar Party, a businessman and owner of Barito Putera, a most famous football club in South Kalimantan. Dayak can live together with Banjarese people as dominant ethnic in Banjarmasin. Dayak is very close to Banjarese people since Dayak is also part of our society.

From this fact, we know Dayak is popular in Kalimantan and South Kalimantan. But, in my class, my students consider I Dayak people as ancient people or people in old time. The great problem in this article is why Dayak ethnic group or Dayak is unknown or not famous among students despite their close existence. I have taught my students for 14 meetings in class with themes about multi-ethnics in Kalimantan including Dayak. In spite of having learning material related to Dayak, the students' perception on Dayak remains and tend to be negative stigma. I found this when I read my students' answers from middle test or final test. I was quite shocked when I read the answer sheet. There were contra productive or out-off my target because I hoped my students know about Dayak as the first ethnic group in Kalimantan and about the problem of Dayak's lives. I wanted they know that Dayak is not like Superman, do not have demonic magic, and do not embrace barbarianism like the headhunter (*ngayau*) who is constructed by western literature or by horizontal conflict in Sampit, Central Kalimantan in 2001. I think this case is my mistake when I tried to do transformation knowledge in the classroom, or unconsciously, I made trouble and triggered negative stigma in my students' imagination. However, I do not know the real factor. Like my case, my colleague who is also lecturer showed similar information from her students' answer sheet. She was confused when the students stated in their answer sheet that Dayak people eat cassava. The students' answers suggest that Dayak people still live in the forest and do food gathering and hunting like thousands of years ago. Therefore, I am not alone, and my experience is not subjective since other people have the similar case which indicate the inter-subjective experience.

Even though in cyber media era or globalization era, we can gain advantage by accepting information from the Internet from the other place in the world, social media as a platform in

the Internet might give us disadvantage by creating representation identity, production of content, and doing interaction by information. Even, a commodity in the information society is information [1]. It remains a question of why the misunderstanding to Dayak people is still happening whereas we can meet them everyday and the positive information about them is rich in our surrounding. Therefore, in this article, to discuss multicultural transformation problem, several foci are used. The first is the interaction of Dayak with others as my subject matter in classroom. The second is misperception or misunderstanding about Dayak. The third covers some factors which impact as negative stigma. The fourth is multicultural transformation as problem-solving.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### A. Multicultural in Indonesia

Ethnicity study is important in the plural state for national strategies for the sake of realization national integration [2]. Indonesia is a multicultural society consisting of diverse ethnic groups and various religious beliefs. They are united as a nation by the national state system of Indonesia. The Indonesia state was built by founding father on the basic ideology of 'Unity in Diversity' (*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*) [3]. However, the maintenance the nation is not easy. Suparlan said, cultural uniformity of tribe in the regions has been done, among others, by cornering these cultures as part of Indonesia [4], while the development of thought about difference and similarity indicates that on certain level the difference cannot be avoided and similarity cannot grow [5]. Suparlan also stated as follows:

The Indonesian plural society characterized by its emphasis on ethnicity and ethnically diverse groups of cultures may have to be re-examined given its socially and politically divergent potential to divide Indonesian and anti-democratic nations [6].

Relation between ethnic group and state with diversity problem in Indonesia as relation of inter-ethnic groups make new culture area. First, there are usually more ethnic groups in Indonesia who spread in the border area with physical boundary. Second, the physical boundary is no longer real and have difference from the past with multi-ethnic social interaction. Third, creating new area like suburb causes melting pot of multi-ethnic group. The area is redefined on the land status and free from any ethnic as owner of the location. This place makes the egalitarian community [7].

### B. The Bridge of Multiculturalism

Anyone who is studying Anthropology always knows multicultural because the major of the study is making relation with an ethnic group. In Indonesia, anthropology is not included as high school subject. Shahab, who is a professor of Anthropology from Indonesia University states that this is the saddest thing that the abolition of Anthropology subject in Middle School occurs precisely when Indonesia is racked by sorrows related to the problem of ethnic diversity in this country [8]. So, studying Anthropology since high school should be related with government policy.

Furthermore, multicultural subject in university is a continuation from high school. However, multiculturalism is not only in the subject, but it should be in social intercourse among students since it is very important for students to know similarity dan difference among ethnic groups through formal or nonformal education. In another fact, many of the new social subsystems that developed in the urban environment, such as club and peer groups, were based on ethnic membership [9]. In cyber media era, more people or netter make the social group as the new identity without physical boundaries. This phenomenon is the current concern in multiculturalism because new communication models using new symbols are formed in the process of social interaction that produces its own subculture [10] as agreement for meaning in social interaction.

## III. METHOD

This article used qualitative data to describe, understand and discuss social phenomena. To describe the phenomena, the social moment in the classroom such as taking and giving information in lecturing process was observed. The data were from the same and different social moments and compilation of some data was required. The data analysis was conducted by using approach in anthropology called autoethnography.

### A. Autoethnography as Approach

The development of Anthropology is not only objectivity by research, but it is also used in terms of researcher experience like a case study. "Ethnography is an attempt to examine a very personal case. I see a "personal" tendency here as an intimate study or a study of the researchers themselves" [12]. Autoethnography is a qualitative research method that focuses on self as a study subject but transcends a mere narration of personal history [13]. Muzayyanah's article with title *Aku adalah Perempuan Pesantren: Sebuah Etnografi Biografi*, is a full story about the author. She writes about living in pesantren (Islamic Boarding Scholl) as *santri* (student) and Muzayyanah's big family. Her father is *ustadz* (teacher in Islam) and her grandfather is the owner of the *pesantren*. She is very special woman and called as "Ning". Ning is female guard for saving religion and moral in her pesantren [14].

### B. Classroom as Field Research

Since 2009, I has been a lecturer in Sociology-Anthropology Department Faculty of Teaching Training and Education, Lambung Mangkurat University. I am teaching *Masyarakat dan Kebudayaan Kalimantan* course with my expertise and experience. The data source for this article is from a case study of my experience as lecture and what I feel, see, and part of learning process in the classroom support the data. Thus, auto ethnographers use personal stories as windows to the world, through which they interpret how themselves are connected to their sociocultural contexts and how the contexts give meaning to their experiences and perspectives [15].

#### IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The part of this article is to describe and to discuss my experience as a lecturer in Sociology-Anthropology Education Department. Since 2009, I received duty from my department to teach the subject called *Masyarakat dan Kebudayaan Kalimantan*. It is easy for me because I have studied ethnic group in Kalimantan in Postgraduate Program in Anthropology Department at Gadjah Mada University with my thesis about Dayak Bakumpai. However, a process in class is unpredictable, because at the first time, I think the theme of Dayak is very popular. In the fact, responses from my students become current concern for this article.

##### A. Subject Society and Culture of Borneo

I choose the Dayak to be the primary theme because of iconic and native ethnic group in Kalimantan with Malays. The teaching materials about Dayak that I use in the classroom, are genealogy of Dayak and history of Dayak coming to Kalimantan since thousands year ago. I also teach using research on Dayak, such as seven classifications of Dayak by Charles Hose, general governor in Sarawak. From Hose, I tell to the students that Dayak come from overseas in Asia, such as Burma and Filipina, such as Murut, Punan, Kahayan, Iban, Kenyah and Klemantan. Sub-ethnics of Dayak are about hundreds types. Dayak people have different activity and life style such as cultivation, a nomad with a small group, staying in a place for temporary. The nomadics usually do food gathering and hunting or settlement. They have special blowpipe weapon and *mandau* (special sword from Kalimantan). Some of them married by endogamy and exogamy. Some of them live around the river, and others live around the mountain. I explain to the students that it was the way Dayak people live in the past. I also explain that nowadays Dayak people have education and work in governmental sector, work as employer, lecturer, public figure, and so forth.

##### B. Misperception from Others

I explain to the students that the Dayak people are human too. They have the problem of life by the pressure of state, the policy of the central government, and negative social and environmental impact by a foreign company or national company. More people from the outside of Kalimantan presume Dayak people are rich because they have extensive land, they have a forest, they have diamond, gold, coal, rubber, wood and other natural resources. However, in fact, I tell them that Dayak people as a native ethnic group in Kalimantan experienced hard life. I tell them when I had field trip in North Kalimantan from Kutai Kartanegara district to West Kutai district, I see the old woman working in her land for the unirrigated agricultural field. When I approached her, I looked bruise on her neck. Her face looked sweaty. I think she is a hard worker on the day, whereas, her boy enjoy the day on his motorcycle under the trees near the location.

She is Dayak Benuaq woman and she told me that season for cultivation is unpredictable now. Sometimes they have more pay and less from the results of cultivation. Unfortunately, unirrigated agricultural field is decreasing because of the company of mining coal. I saw near we stood

the excavator from mining coal to scrap land. Domination of mining coal company in Kalimantan is one sample that Dayak as a native ethnic group have less area for living. Lahajir found cultivation area is changing or decreasing because of rubber plantation. Consequently, it has changed the custom of cultivation, and changed the meaning of ecosystem cultivation and paddy [16]. This case occurs not only in West Kalimantan, but also in Central Kalimantan. Dayak Kadori People living near Paroi river has land which is also removed by wood or timber company [17].

Another theme is about Dayak identity with religion. Current religious issues commonly presumed toward the Dayak is that they are closely related to Christians, or if they have converted to Islam, they no longer call themselves Dayak as they are most likely referred to as Malay. In fact, there are Muslim Dayak sub-ethnic such as Bakumpai, Ngaju, and Tidung. The Bakumpai as part of the Dayak ethnic clearly practices the Dayak tradition either consciously or unconsciously. The use of the Bakumpai language which is also understood by most of the Ngaju Dayak sub-group is very influential to the aspects of thinking, acting and behaving. Mystically, the Bakumpai people also believe in the unseen spirits ranging from ones that disturb humans to those who help people in the healing of diseases. Viewed from the Islamic tradition, the Bakumpai observe the pillars of Islamic obligations with various religious activities heavily influenced by the ethnic Banjar majority as the dominant Islamic adherents. The encounter between the Dayak and the Islamic traditions is manifested within the Bakumpai society [18].

##### C. Negative Responses

After I taught about Dayak and other themes in subject *Society and Culture of Borneo*, I gave them some questions about the Dayak as follows:

What do you know about Dayak from your experience, study and perception? Please explain how it influences you. This question was for middle test on May 3, 2012. Other time, I modified question for middle test on December 8, 2015.

Explain what you know about the Dayak tribes in terms of: (a) Experience; (b) Knowledge; (c) Perception; (d) Of those three things, what is your conclusion about the Dayak tribe?.

When I received answer sheets from my students, some of them wrote as follows.

“Dayak people live in forest. They do not want to meet other human.”

“Dayak people live at upstream area and far from the village.”

Sometimes I received:

“They still live as nomads for food gathering and hunting”

The answers do not suit my expectation. I was thinking Did I make mistake in classroom which caused some of the students gave me those answers?. As a lecture, I feel sinful. Although there were not many wrong answers, and more students gave good answers, this case remains extraordinary. I think we live in Kalimantan and Dayak people are popular, so

it is very impossible that such answers could emerge. I am actually not alone since my colleague Mrs. Alfisyah who teaches other departments also experiences similar to mine. She gave questions about Dayak too. When she received answer sheets, she talked to me "Look at this, Pak Inas. The students say that Dayak people always eat cassava as primary food". It means that, in their imagination, Dayak people still do food gathering and hunting.

#### *D. Some Causes of Negative Stigma*

When I wrote article, I accepted message from someone by facebook messenger. She wrote:

*Assalamualaikum pak.. mohon maaf mengganggu.. ulun Dina alumni mahasiswa sosiologi angkatan 2005 Yg dulu pernah bertemu pian di klinik kimia farma.. Maaf pak handak batakun aja.. begini ulun ni ada kawan di bandung yg mertua nya sedang sekarat dan mencari mantan bini dan anak sdin org bakumpai pak.. nama bini sdin tu Diang usia sekitar 68-70 tahunan dan anak sdin nama nya Ati.. nama mertua kawan ulun ini nama nya Dadang.. sekitar 50 tahunan yg lalu pernah bekerja di tambang emas dan bebini org bakumpai.pas anak sdin usia 6 bulan ditinggalakan sdin ke bandung karena bini sdin kada mau ikut.. Sekarang kondisi pak Dadang sekarat pak semua dokter angkat tangan dan menyarankan agar sidin meminta maaf pada pihak yang pernah sidin sakiti.. lalu sdin keingatan bini sidin.. ulun sudah menakuni kawan ulun di bakumpai kada ada yang tau nya pak.. mohon maaf pak lah siapa tau pian pernah dengar nama itu.. Trimakasih banyak Pak.. maaf sekali lagi kalau ulun mengganggu pian.. (Note all names are initials by me)*

This email is from an alumnus of our department. She has a friend named Wati from Bandung. Pak Dadang is Wati's father in law and be in agony. The doctor cannot treat Pak Dadang and suggests that he has to ask for forgiveness to everyone who has been hurt by Pak Dadang. Pak Dadang remembers that he has a Bakumpai woman as wife, Diang, who is 86 years old. About 68-78 years ago, he has left his wife when they had six-month old daughter. He left because his wife did not want to join him to Bandung. Now he wants to see his daughter and to ask for forgiveness. My alumnus asked me, whether I know Dadang's family because I am Bakumpai too.

There is also another story. "When his youngest son seemed closer to Dayak women, Mrs. Hartanto was confused. With all means, she tried so that her youngest child George forgets immediately her beloved girl. Mrs. Hartanto's effort was useless since George did not change his mind. In fact, George who kept changing girlfriend was impressed by the naif Ehet. For George, Ehet always acted naturally. Not once that Ehet refused if being asked for a favor by everybody. Ehet never differentiates person based on social status. When George acted to force his will which did not go along with Ehet's willing, Ehet dared to act firmly to express her disagreement" [19].

The correlation of the two stories of Dayak people might suggest the public that Dayak women have witchcraft (magic) or something to make someone always closed or make negative stigma, whereas we know that in the both cases are

problem of attitude and psychology or interpretation. Although, Riwut said "I lie if I say that witchcraft does not exist, the fact is that it exists. Once or two families might lose control and practice it. However, the word "love to" is an exaggeration. All return to the self-control of each personality" [19].

In another case, Maulani writes his experience:

In this event, some players are out. To resemble "Dayak people" their bodies are smeared with charcoal powder, so at night their bodies look shiny black with kerosene lamps hung around the venue. Their body is covered only by a coconut leaf, with a head-cap adorned with feathers that I think are plucked from a rooster's tail. They look so scary. With a bamboo spear painted in black and a shield of mismatched, they jumped up and down as they shouted the battle cry, "huu, huu. Huu! "It was all comforted, and Captain Untung Sridadi, the cadet's company commander who led us, could not resist his bursts. Smiling, he whispered to the lurah who was sitting in the chair beside him. Sir, in this group there are also cadets from Dayak origin. "Why is that true, sir?" Asked the lurah, with disbelief [20].

Since past time, people presume negative stigma on Dayak. Miller has negative campaign of *ngayau* (headhunting): "It is easy to explain head-hunting. To the Dayak, a dried skull is the most powerful magic in the world. The freshly cut head is potent enough to save an entire *kampung* (village) from the plague. A seasoned head, properly manipulated, is powerful enough to produce rain, increase the rice yield, warn away evil spirits, and impart knowledge to the tribe's wise men [21].

Finally, the impression we get from some cases above is that Dayak people are old-fashioned, have full of magic and whatever which can create negative stigma. As one peaceful community and as part of Indonesian nation, we must change negative stigma on Dayak people by describing the real Dayak in daily life.

#### V. CONCLUSION

To continue Maulani's writing, he said that the cases of misunderstanding about Dayak ethnic-group are not only by simple people in Dangkel. This nation has not known itself that Kalimantan lost of ethnic authority although they have great marginalization in political, economic, law and social – culture. They do not become a boss in their village [20]. In fact, my students in classroom have misperception about Dayak, even though they also live and come from Kalimantan. Multiculturalism in Kalimantan is still in process, and what we can do for Dayak as a native ethnic group in Kalimantan is to know the other without misperception.

I suggest bridge multicultural as diagram below:

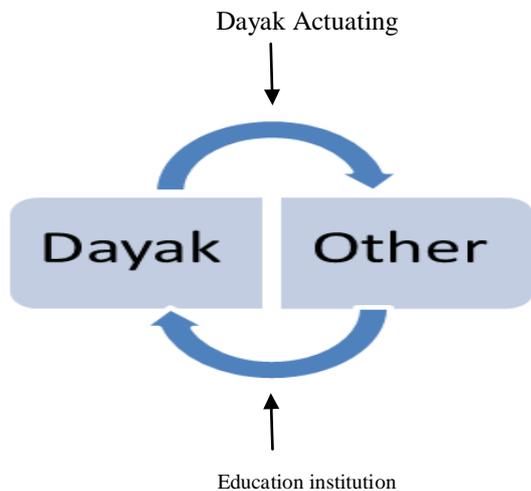


Fig 1. Bridge Multicultural

From the diagram, two components of reciprocity are as bridge between Dayak and others who must connect to each other. The first is actuating extension of Dayak by new literature, biography, autobiography, and learning materials or books for students which are very important. Other people need more information about Dayak ethnic group by local sources or from experts. Dayak people should not reduce their identity in public. They should show their role for the public with identity. Second, education institution is the most important bridge of information to convey knowledge on the Dayak. The channel of education institution by university can use subject on ethnicity of Dayak. Furthermore, in high school subject, anthropology must be included, or there should be local content to convey the culture of Dayak ethnic group

**VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT**

I express my gratitude to the Dean of Teacher Training and Education Faculty who has supported me for joining the international conference. Thanks to my colleagues in Sociology-Anthropology Department because every day with you all is very joyful. Thanks to my wife Desy Mardhiah who has remembered me every time.

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