Ethnicity and Nationality among The Sakai: The Transformation of an Isolated Group into a Part of Indonesian Society

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Abstract

Dalam tulisan ini, penulis menunjukkan bahwa transformasi anggota-anggota suatu kelompok yang terisolasi ke dalam masyarakat majemuk yang lebih besar, dikondisikan oleh hubungan saling mempengaruhi antara sifat majemuk masyarakat tersebut dan posisi dari kelompok yang terisolasi itu dalam struktur kekuasaan masyarakat majemuk itu.


Dua kasus program pemukiman kembali bagi Orang Sakai, yakni di Muara Basung dan Sialang Rimbun menunjukkan dua lingkungan struktur kekuasaan yang berbeda bagi Orang Sakai. Kedua program pemukiman itu mengalami kegagalan. Tetapi, melalui pengalaman di kedua pemukiman tersebut, Orang Sakai mendefinisikan ulang kesukubangsaan dan kebangsaannya.

Introduction

This paper tries to show that the transformation of members of an isolated group into members of the larger society of a plural society is conditioned by the interplay between the plural nature of that society and by the position of the isolated group within the power structure of that society. The case presented is that of the Sakai, an isolated group, in Riau province of Sumatra, Indonesia (for a general description on the Sakai, see: Loeb 1935; Mozkowski 1908, 1909, 1911; and Stibbe 1918). The Sakai live in an ethnically plural local society of Riau. This group, like many other isolated groups in Indonesia, has been under a resocialization program run by the Ministry of Social Affairs in government resettlement projects since 1952. The main purpose of resocialization is to transform the people from living in isolation and in small communities or bands over scattered areas in the forests, by means of hunting and food-gathering and shifting cultivation, into full members of Indonesian society. The goal of the program is to change them from living in isolation and backwardness into Indonesian citizens living in settled communities with means of living simi-
lar to other Indonesian citizens.

Ethnicity becomes crucial in the life of the Sakai, since they participate in the daily social, economic, and political activities of the ethnically stratified local community. My data show that: first, Sakai ethnicity exists as an idea and a realm in social and interethnic relations. It has connotations of backwardness or being uncivilized, and the term is used to refer to the Sakai as a group of people, as an ethnic group or monolithic entity, while formerly Sakai was known only as a social category comprised of different groups of people living in the forests. Secondly, being a Sakai is similar to being an Indonesian at the bottom level of the socially recognized ethnic stratification of the local setting or community. Thirdly, members of the Sakai transform themselves into members of Indonesian society or nationality, either by maintaining their ethnicity or by adopting another ethnicity of a higher stratum.

This paper also tries to show that the emerging variations of ethnicity and nationality of the individual Sakai are a result of their efforts to redefine their positions individually, by employing certain traits of their culture or other categories of culture that they think suitable in a given situation or structure. The available ethnic and cultural categories are seen as reference systems for self identification and expression of ethnicity or nationality. Individual Sakai have differing social, economic, and political potential for using and manipulating interactions to respond to such power structures, thus, they respond variably to the power structures they encounter.

In the history of culture and society, isolated groups are seen as tribal groups and are minority groups in the relational structure with the society at large (see, among others, a collection of papers edited by Lim Tek Ghee and Alberto G. Gomes 1990). Meanwhile, society at large, defined in relation to the isolated groups, is a dominant majority. Through its social power the dominant society can define general as well as specific styles of life which should or must be lived by minority groups. Or, the life styles of the dominant society may directly or indirectly become models for the direction of change in the ways of life of isolated groups. Ethnographic and historical data show that society at large varies in its treatment of isolated groups. Louis Wirth (1948) has shown that these differences result in differing responses among the isolated groups.

In its approach ethnic group is treated as a category of ascription, as it ‘...classifies a person in terms of his basic, most general identity, presumptively by his origin and background’ (Barth 1969:13). Ethnic group is not seen as a monolithic entity, but as a social category functioning as a set of reference systems for identification in interethnic relations. Because ethnic group generally refers to a particular culture, it is appropriate to define such an important concept for the sake of clarification and sound methodology. Culture is seen as a blueprint for living, as sets of reference systems or cognitive models at varying levels of senses and awareness. People make use of such models selectively, as they appeal to them, to generate meaningful interpretations of situations or things and to guide their actions in their environments, through their activities. Such actions may be seen as a drive to fulfill needs as well as responses to stimuli. In this approach, actors’ interpretations and responses to the defined structure of power and interactions are the focus of this study. Culture and ethnic category are iterated as the reference systems of such interpretations and responses. Such an approach, then, takes into consideration the social power of the actors in comprehending their actions in the defined structure of power and interactions.
This follows Bruner’s ‘theory of dominant culture hypothesis’ (1974), in which he stated that individual migrants to cities adapt to, manipulate, and try to gain resources within the larger system of power relationships in the local setting. Individual migrants to cities are minorities, and in this sense the minority position of the Sakai in their environments is relevant to Bruner’s model. It also follows Wirth (1948) and Hoetink (1967) in their assertion that the defined system of power relationships among ethnic groups in a society influences the types of responses of the minority groups, in that ethnic ascription is determinative in social relationships between members of different ethnic groups. Power will be seen not merely as a structure within the system of social relationships but also ‘...within what the individual perceives of his internal being, what he perceives in the world about him, and how he relates these perceptions to establish his relations with other human beings’ (Adams 1975:xiii). Thus, ethnicity and the transformation of a minority group into a part of the larger society are seen as products of interplay between two variables, i.e., the defined power structure and the position of the minority group within it, in a local setting. The emphasis of the environments then, lies in the local setting as environments of their daily life activities.

Ethnicity and nationality are individual phenomena that emerge in social interaction, and they vary as they depend upon the various kinds of interplay between individuals and groups with their natural and social environments. These environments include ethnic categories and cultural systems of power that prescribe significant political, economic, and social norms. All of these function through the local public culture and are expressed in its public spheres. These spheres, in turn, direct and establish norms and positions as defined and acknowledged by the people, thus characterizing the environments. These environments also offer alternative opportunities and limitations for individuals and groups to seize upon available resources and symbols for making and taking positions in the defined interethnic and social relationships. As such, they provide plausible bases for the rational, moral, and emotional justification of behavioral choices. Individual behavior is seen as a manifestation of his-self, of others, and of environments; and it is expressed and acknowledged by others in public spheres (Suparlan 1993, 1995a). The presence and absence of public spheres determine the types of ethnicity or nationality and their expressions, as will be shown in this paper.

The data were gathered from September 1982 to February 1983, during a seven-month period of fieldwork among the Sakai who lived in the govement resettlement project of Sialang Rimbun, and in communities in Muara Basung village and other Sakai villages in the sub-district of Duri in Riau province. The data were updated by a one-month visit to the area in October 1994.

The backgrounds

Indonesia is a plural society and this is depicted in its motto, Bhinneka Tunggal Ika, or Unity in Diversity. It is a society made up of a number of ethnic groups, with varied racial characteristics, languages, and cultures, united by a national power as expressed as a national system. This system unites and integrates more than three hundred ethnic groups of Indonesia into one nation. The networks of this system, in the form of government administration and institutions and other institutionalized activities, are centered in cities organized in a hierarchical order with the center in the capital, Jakarta. Indonesia only came into existence de jure and de facto after the proclamation of independence on August 17, 1945; while ethnic
groups of Indonesia have existed and were recognized long before Indonesia was born. The plural nature of Indonesian society is also reflected in Riau province, with the Sakai as one of its ethnic constituents.

Elsewhere (Suparlan 1979, 1982) I have shown that the plural nature of Indonesian society is founded based on three categories of culture. These are the Indonesian national culture, the ethnic cultures, and the public cultures. Indonesian national culture is the core value of the national system; it is believed to be derived from and standing above the ethnic cultural systems, due to its function to unite ethnic groups into one nation and one state. Its activities are organized and centered in areas above and beyond the ethnic spheres. Urban centers are the main spheres of such activities. Thus, the visible expression of Indonesian national culture is in the cities, lesser in towns and least apparent in the rural areas; not only as a system of ideas but also as structures with networks, and as actions.

Uniformity of the national system provides the uniformity of the expression of national culture in urban centers. This culture functions to generate meaningful ways for promoting and controlling the stability of the Indonesian state and nation, maintaining a sense of nationality among Indonesians, organizing the implementation of development programmes; and for communication in the bureaucratic spheres. It is expressed in ministerial and government offices, in schools and universities, in national ceremonies and celebrations, in seminars, workshops, and national networks of mass communications which are not ethnic or public. This culture, thus, creates and generates the emerging sphere of activities which is defined as national. It is in this national sphere that one’s nationality is expressed.

Ethnic groups of Indonesia are basically homogeneous each with its own distinctive culture and inhabiting an area customarily claimed as their own. Thus, rural areas or villages are basically ethnically homogeneous, with local ethnic culture as the dominant culture pattern for daily life. Villages inhabited by more than one ethnic group tend to use the culture of the dominant ethnic group as the standards for appropriate behavior in public places, as the pattern for daily activities. Ethnic culture functions in family life and kinship relations, in individual and communal life cycle rituals, and in personal and social relations in public which are within ethnic sphere; in rural as well as urban areas. It is expressed in ethnic language, symbols, and manners. In rural areas or in places where the expression of national culture is less apparent, the local ethnic culture is the main sets of reference for interpreting and guiding responses toward and for living within local environments.

Under the Indonesian Constitution all ethnic groups of Indonesia are legally treated as equals, i.e., members of all ethnic groups, including the isolated groups, have the same rights as Indonesian citizens. However, as will be discussed later, at the local administrative level, social and ethnic stratification does occur among different ethnic groups who live side by side and minority category emerges out of such relationships. The common pattern is that the isolated groups occupy the bottom level of the local stratification. Such a phenomenon occurs as cultural differences among ethnic groups in Indonesia is not only based along ethnic lines, but, differentiation is also made possible based on a hierarchical order of cultural development determinant, basically socioeconomic and technological (I have discussed this in Suparlan 1979).

Despite the existing differences among ethnic groups of Indonesia, members of different ethnic groups share common knowledge about each other (Kennedy 1942). This shared com-
mon knowledge, which emerges through inter-ethnic relations in public places, is the basis for the unity of their cultural identity. Communication becomes possible and the exchange of symbols and ideas among different ethnic cultures are not uncommon or unknown. The shared common knowledge among members of different ethnic groups has also been stimulated and generated by their long history of contacts with various foreign cultures, i.e., Chinese, Indian, European and the Dutch, and Arab. Cultural contacts may allow for accommodation of cultural differences or create or expand the already existing cultural differences.

The culture of public places is characterized by core values emphasizing equality, bargaining for one’s own benefit in interactions, accommodating and mediating differences, and bridging social and cultural boundaries or distances. But, on the other hand, it is also characterized by competition and conflict. It is a culture of manipulation and deceit on the one hand, but at the same time it is also a culture of compromise and conformity through brokerage or patronage on the other hand. Public places include markets, streets, street corners, neighborhoods, places of public services, or any open space in a built environment for any form of human activities. Each public place has its own culture and thus has its own sphere different from any other public spheres. This sphere determines the kinds of interactions that actors should engage in. However, people’s behaviors are expressions of their acknowledgement of the sphere and their motives at the same time.

Public places in Indonesia are of several types of degree of complexity in directing and conditioning people’s behavior (Suparlan 1979:69-70). These types are defined by the size of the local community or society, by the complexities of its social, economic, and political institutions, by the number of ethnic groups who live and use such public places, and by the presence or absence of a dominant ethnic culture (Bruner 1974). In the village there are limited numbers of public places; they are mostly concentrated in the foodstalls, soccer field, and neighborhoods. The sphere of such public places is that of the local ethnic culture, or more specifically the local dominant ethnic culture, which through gossip and in other ways, controls social activity and the direction of public opinion.

In the village, where people tend to use verbal or personal communications, such public places are channels for and sources of information about each other, and the world, and are places for public opinion making. Such interactions are usually expressed in gossip about each other. It is through such gossip in public places that information flows in the community, and a shared common knowledge is established. Such shared knowledge could be directed to a certain goal or to maintain particular situations depending on the motivation of the people or groups who usually dominate the public spheres in the village community.

The Sakai live in Riau Province, known as the province of the Malays. This is one of the 27 Indonesian provinces, with Pekanbaru as its capital, and it comprises six districts. This province is known as the home of the Malays, due to their dominant majority roles in the social, economic, and political activities of the Malay kingdoms in the past, despite the facts that this province is also inhabited by isolated groups, by the Minangkabau, Batak, Javanese, Chinese and the Arabs, and others of diverse ethnic groups of Indonesia (Suparlan 1986). The Malay dominant majority roles are still apparent today in various Riau social, economic, and political environments.

There are six categories of isolated groups in Riau. They live in their own communities with their own environments different from each
other, and tend to be separated from the rest of the Riau society. However, each of them was the subject of different Malay kingdoms in the past. The general characteristics of these isolated groups are that their subsistence economy is based on shifting agriculture and food-gathering and hunting, or on fishing, with simple and appropriate technology for the local environment. They believe in local spirits and supernatural power, have an egalitarian social organization based on kinship and organized in bands of two to four families, with either a nuclear family or an extended family makeup. Leadership is based on one of these factors: male inheritance, age, strength, wisdom or a combination of these. They live in poverty, and in unsanitary and unhealthy conditions, since most of them have skin disease and wear dirty, smelly, ragged clothes. Physically they show a variation of racial characteristics, from light to dark and black skin color, from short stature of about 145 centimeters to as tall as 180 centimeters, and straight, wavy, curly, or kinky hairs, and other kinds of physical variation (see: Mozowski 1908, 1909, 1911; and Tideman 1953).

The Sakai

In anthropological literature (see among others, Lebar 1972: 46-47), the Sakai is categorized as similar to and being grouped as the Kubu. In reality the Sakai is not the same as the Kubu. First, the Sakai live in Riau province and the Kubu live in Jambi province. Second, their culture and language are not the same. According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (1991), based on the population of the villages known as Sakai villages, there were 9017 Sakai in Bengkalis District. They live in thirteen villages of this district. According to their mythology they are originated from Pagarruyung, a mythical Minangkabau kingdom of West Sumatra.

Based on their mythology, they came to this area in two waves of migration around the 16th century. Each group came at a different time and occupied a different territory of the forest in the Mandau area of Riau. Traditionally they organized themselves into two categories of social organization, namely, *perbatinan delapan* (eight lineage hamlets) of the descendants of the first group, and *perbatinan lima* (five lineage hamlets) of the descendants of the second group. Each hamlet is lead by *batin*, who acts as head of his lineage as well as head of the community. Each *perbatinan* or hamlet consists of members of the main lineage of the hamlet and members of other lineages from other hamlets who came and live there, through matrilocal system.

Their kinship system is matri-bilateral, as they recognize the role of mother’s brother, especially the oldest mother’s brother, as representing the father; and the prescribed rule of residence is matrilocal. However, this matrilineal character is weakened as it is combined with the importance of the generational system and siblingship, along with the freedom of personal choice in marriage, the male family pays a bride-price instead of a dowry being paid by the female family, and inheritance is divided up based on a combination of personal choice and matrilineality. Kin-groupings are based on kin-dred rather than matrilineality. They also have developed a system of adopted siblingship, in which the notion of generation is crucial in prescribing rights and obligations between the older and the younger brothers. Kinship terms for cousins for both father’s and mother’s sides and for both genders are the same. Most Sakai families are monogamous and nuclear, although extended families do occur.

Traditionally the Sakai live from hunting, fishing, food-gathering, forest product collecting, growing rice in dry fields through slash and burn agriculture or shifting cultivaton sys-
tem, and growing poisonous manioc immediately in their former dry rice fields. Poisonous manioc, or *ubi menggalo*, is their staple food. Rice is for social and religious rituals or offerings. The way they use the fields to grow rice, and then to grow poisonous manioc, follows a set of traditional prescribed rules which they believe will bring prosperity. If violated, people will be sanctioned by the *batin* or head of the hamlet, paying fines to the *batin* and performing rituals to erase sanctions of the spirits. Such are set by the spirits and sanctions usually take the form of misfortunes, sickness or even death to members of the family or the band (*banjar ladang*).

Although the religion of the majority of the Sakai is Islam, they still maintain their traditional belief system. They believe that their world is not only inhabited by human beings and animals but also by the local spirits. These spirits live in the real world, side by side with men, in their houses, in their fields and gardens, in the forest, in a tree or in anything. The problem is that the spirits can see and hear them, but they cannot see or hear the spirits’ activities. They are formless and nameless, but these spirits have thoughts, wishes, feelings, and emotions just like human beings. They believe that fortune or misfortune, health or sickness, and death are caused by spirits. They have to deal with the spirits to make peace with them, or to use them for certain purposes in the acts of sorcery, through rituals.

A hamlet or *perbatinan* comprises at least one band. This band or *banjar ladang* (neighborhood of fields or gardens) comprises two to four families each live on their own fields side by side, and traditionally are flocked together as a neighborhood (*ketetanggaan*) or *banjar* (band). A band lasts for one year up to three years. This depends on the decision of the band members, whether to continue to live together or to decide to stop one year after their being together as neighbors, after they harvested the rice. This agreement is always renewed every year up to three consecutive years.

If they decide to continue to live together in the same *banjar ladang*, after the harvest is over, they will expand their fields together on the front part of their fields. They are not allowed to plant rice in the same field after harvest, thus they have to expand their fields to the front, not to the left or the right sides of the fields or to the back part of the fields. The expanded border or fence of the front part of one field must be followed by all of the fields of the same *banjar ladang* by following the same line from corner to corner. Usually they also move their houses to these new fields. A *banjar ladang* is dissolved after three years. Members of the *banjar ladang* have to move out of their fields, either to continue their old *banjar ladang* or to create new one, or to join another *banjar ladang*. A *banjar ladang* is also stopped or dissolved when one of the members of a family dies. They believe that the spirit of the dead haunts the houses and the rice fields to cause misfortunes. To avoid this the relatives of the dead and all members of the *banjar ladang* have to leave their houses and rice fields. However, they can still harvest the poisonous manioc tubers from their gardens (a detailed description of the Sakai traditional culture can be found in Suparlan 1993, 1995b).

Their staple food is *menggalo mersik* (dried grated manioc). It is made of neutralized fresh poisonous manioc by soaking it in running water for three days, then grated and pressed until almost dry, and then, this grated poisonous manioc is to be placed in a pan and fried on medium heat without cooking oil. After dried or cooked this stuff is edible and named *menggalo mersik*. About thirty kilograms of poisonous manioc will make 10 kilograms of *menggalo mersik*. An adult Sakai con-
sumes about three quarters of a kilogram of *menggalo mersik* a day.

Preparing *menggalo mersik* involves the whole family, and on certain occasions all the members of the band. Collecting forest products, i.e., rattan, logs, resin, camphor, aloe wood, and other kinds of incense, is done individually or in groups consisting of male adult members of the band. However, ownership of such commodities is personal and not shared by the group or the band. When collecting aloe wood (*Aquilaria malaccensis*), they usually do that in a group. This group consists of members of the *banjar ladang*, who for two or three days explores the forest around their settlement. This expedition, called *mandah*, recently became a business expedition involving up to twenty people drawn from nearby bands.

Through this forest commodity the Sakai have contacts with the outside world, namely with the Malays, Chinese and Minangkabau traders, and in return they buy food supplies (sugar, salt, salted fish, coffee, biscuits, and candy), tobacco and cigarettes, and clothing. In the past, they had contacts with the Malays through the *Penghulu Dagang*, the representative of the king of Siak Inderapura, who lived in the village of Balai Pungut. The *Penghulu Dagang* collected forest commodities as their tributes and levies, and also bought or bartered food with them. Under the Malay kingdom of Siak Inderapura, the Sakai were given the right to live in the forests in Mandau and Bengkalis areas, and in return they had to give tributes and levies to the king. They also had to guard the boundaries of the kingdom in this area from intruders.

Thus, the Sakai was not a completely isolated group, as they were citizens of the kingdom of Siak. However, they were not regular citizens like other Malays of this kingdom. They were the kingdom’s slaves, as expressed in their name *Sakai* which in Malay language means slave (see also description by Dentan on the Sakai or Semang People of the Malay Peninsula 1964). As slaves, the Sakai were at the bottom of the social hierarchy of the Malay kingdom of Siak Inderapura or lived in the peripheral areas, i.e., in the forest. Although the present situation is different from that of the past; however, the old model of stratification remains. As an idea and a realm, the local Malays see the Sakai as forest people who should remain living in the forest. The appearance of the Sakai in public places of the Malay villages, towns and cities, until the late nineteen seventies, demonstrating their poverty, backwardness and unhealthiness, was considered a common characteristic of the forest people.

**Government resettlement projects and the Sakai**

In 1952 a small group of Indonesians, all educated Malay civil servants from Bengkalis district and Mandau sub-district, led by the Bengkalis district head, founded a committee to help the Sakai alleviate their backwardness and poverty. This committee was named *Panitia Civilisatie* or committee for civilizaition (Hasmy 1970). Through their campaigns, directed toward the government and general public, they were able to collect money and supplies (mostly secondhand clothes and rice) for the Sakai.

The committee concluded that the main reason for Sakai backwardness was their isolation. They lived in the forest isolated from civilization and from access to modern economy and technology, and wandered continuously from one place to another. In order to be able to overcome their backwardness the committee thought that they should live permanently along the main roads, with enough land for intensive agriculture to support themselves and enable them to establish a permanent commu-
nity. They should get vocational training for decent jobs, and their children should get a proper school education. The committee, through its leader, the Bengkalis district head, got a permit from the province to use provincial land along the road in Muara Basung. Muara Basung at that time was a forest area. The intention of the committee was to use this area to resettle the Sakai.

In its efforts to campaign for resettling the Sakai in Muara Basung, the committee was assisted by the Provincial Offices of the Ministries of Social Affairs, Agriculture, Religious Affairs, Information, and by the Office of Community Development of the Ministry of Home Affairs. The campaigns were carried out by district personnel. To attract the Sakai to resettle in Muara Basung, this committee built a temporary one classroom of elementary school for the Sakai children in 1963, which went up to second grade the following year. There were 16 students and one teacher. This was also the year when the committee was dissolved. All of its assets and activities were taken over by the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs set up a local office in Muara Basung, named Pos Masyarakat Terasing or Temporary Office for Isolated Groups. In 1964 this Office built a resettlement for the Sakai in Muara Basung, and the work was completed in 1965. It comprised 70 buildings, 68 houses for 68 families, each house 4m x 5m in size on 32m x 85m plots of land, and an office and a storage house. The Office also built two houses of the same size in the resettlement area for its local officials. In 1965 the houses were filled by Sakai, Malays, and the descendants of Malay-Sakai families. The Sakai came from Penaso and Beringin Sakai, and the Malays and the Malay-Sakai came from Balai Pungut. The Sakai were attracted by the offer of the Office of the Resettlement Project, which included a one year provision of food (10 kilograms of rice per person, monthly) and other necessities, and used clothes donated by charity organizations. Some Malays from other villages and Minangkabau people from West Sumatra province also came and lived in Muara Basung, near the resettlement project. They were workers of the local logging companies, shopkeepers, and farmers. In 1966 Muara Basung was established as a village administration, to include a larger area than the resettlement area and its immediate community.

The activities of the Resettlement Project in Muara Basung were run by local officials of the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs, whose personnel regularly changed. The assignment to work in this project was considered as an exile for them. Therefore, program activities were managed and executed inconsistently and sporadically. A well designed program to alleviate the Sakai backwardness and poverty was not clearly apparent. This resettlement project was abandoned by the Sakai in 1976, and considered a failure by the officials. The only program that may be considered as successful as emancipating the Sakai in a long term objective is the school education, an elementary school which goes up to fourth grade.

The Sakai in Muara Basung

Muara Basung became socially and economically important in the late nineteen sixties, when the Caltex activities in oil exploration were intensified, and timber companies were granted concessions to exploit the forests in and around this area. In 1968 Muara Basung was a resting and eating place for the Caltex and timber workers. Some of the workers also built houses for their own lodging, or rented rooms from the Minangkabau residents.
The resettlement project was formally opened up for the Sakai in 1965. The resettlement was occupied by 34 Sakai families or 146 persons from Penaso led by their *batin* Amir Tigo, 21 Sakai families or 102 persons from Beringin Sakai led by their *batin* Saepel, 19 Malay-Sakai families or 122 persons from Balai Pungut led by Mohamad Nur the son of the Balai Pungut village head, and there were 3 Malay-Sakai and 8 Sakai families or 41 persons from other villages and hamlets from the surrounding areas of Muara Basung. The total number of residents were 86 families or 411 persons. There were more families than the number of houses provided in the resettlement project by the Office of the Resettlement. To solve this problem, some houses were occupied by more than one family.

In the resettlement members originating from the same *banjar ladang* or *perbatinan* or place of origins were grouped together in the same compound of houses separated from the others. Beside the Sakai and the Malay-Sakai resettlement residents, there were 9 Malay families, 13 Minangkabau families, and 3 Batak families who lived in Muara Basung, outside the resettlement area. The Malay and the Malay-Sakai families tended to associate themselves with other non-Sakai resettlement residents. They created friendship and brotherhood among themselves through the idiom of Islam. They built a mosque, as a place for their prayer and for gossips and information. They would rather spend their time at the food stalls for gossip while having tea or coffee and pastry, than socializing with the Sakai of the resettlement; who they considered as socially inferior.

In the first year of resettlement the Sakai lived with ease because every month they received 10 kilograms of rice for per-capita, sugar, salt, cooking oil, and other necessities. They ate rice mixed with *menggalo mersik*. Some of them just ate the *menggalo mersik* and sold the rice to the Minangkabau or the Malay shopkeepers. To obtain the *menggalo mersik* they had to go to their old gardens, in a group, with members of their former *banjar ladang*. One week in the gardens usually produced thirty to fifty kilograms of *menggalo mersik*. The group then returned to the resettlement with *menggalo mersik* and some forest products. They usually stayed in the resettlement for one week to ten days, to work on the allotted piece of land, and then went back to their gardens again, to make *menggalo mersik*. They sold the forest products to the Malay or Minangkabau shopkeepers.

In the resettlement the Sakai set up *banjar ladang* among neighbors. They grew rice, planted poisonous manioc and vegetables in their traditional way. Now they faced a new problem: how could they expand their rice field after one season year of planting since their allocated land had a fixed size and boundaries? They had to move out, because according to their traditional customary law the Sakai are not allowed to plant rice in the same field consecutively. If they moved out, it meant that they would have to make new fields near the resettlement. Or, otherwise they had to move out of the resettlement and lived in the fields in their traditional way. Some of them opened up new fields on the southeastern side of their resettlement. These fields were located within 1 to 3 hours walk from their house in the resettlement, some closer and some farther away. Others, who could not find a suitable forest area to open new fields, did not plant rice fields in the second year of their stay in the resettlement. They thought they could probably still depend upon the free rice and other supplies but were disappointed when there was no more.

As they needed cash money to buy goods offered in the shops, but not much hope were given by the officials of the resettlement project to increase their earnings, they had to turn to
their traditional economic activities of collecting forest commodities. They organized themselves into groups to collect rattan, resin, timber, etc from the forest. Their activities of mandah to explore the forest to find aloe wood were intensified. They formed groups of about five to ten male adults for an expedition and spent about five days to one week in the forest. Some of these groups were also financed by the Malays in Muara Basung who gave them credit to borrow food supply and tobacco from their shops, and in return they had to sell their aloe wood to these creditors, usually at a cheaper price.

However, although now they could earn money from collecting forest products and from mandah, the Sakai felt that their economic condition was not better off than when they were still roaming around and living in the banjar ladang in the forest. They felt that everything cost them money. Even their children’s schooling, although it was supposed to be free they still had to pay for the teachers and the children’s pocket money. They depended on some of the Malays and the Minangkabau people for earning money, since these people bought all the forest products brought to them. However, they did not trust the Malays and the Minangkabau. They always felt they were being tricked and cheated.

In 1966 Amir Tigo was elected as the village head. As head of the village, Amir Tigo was also head of the resettlement resident. As he was barely able to read and write, his daily routine administrative jobs was assisted by one of the local officers of the resettlement project. As head of the village he could ask for levies and tributes from the logging companies in Muara Basung. He was also treated with special care by shop and foodstall owners whenever he came to visit them—and was given special prices for things he purchased. But behind his back he was being ridiculed as ‘the dumb Sakai’.

Amir Tigo, in his position as the resettlement head, claimed his sovereignty over the process of distributing any goods (mostly used clothing) received as donations to the resettlement residents. The local office of the resettlement, then, appointed him as one of the members of the committee to distribute these goods. In 1966, not long after his appointment as the village head and member of the committee, he was accused of stealing some of the better used clothes and other goods. The rumor spread in the community that he was a corruptor and a thief. The following year, in 1967, a conflict among the Sakai residents originating from Beringin Sakai and Penaso flared. The main reason was the continuing rumors of the wrongdoing of Amir Tigo in distributing used clothes. The fight was quickly stopped by the local officers of the resettlement. A police patrol from Duri was asked to come to Muara Basung to observe the peace agreement between the Beringin Sakai and the Penaso groups. As a result of this conflict, to avoid further conflicts, 12 families from Beringin Sakai left the resettlement.

In 1970, 4 families from Penaso, 2 families from Beringin Sakai, 3 families from Balai Pungut, and 2 other families from villages around Muara Basung moved out of the resettlement. The main reason was that they would die of hunger because no more free food was given to them by the resettlement office while their garden in the resettlement did not yield well. It was apparent that sufficient training in agriculture had not been given to the Sakai by the local officials, added to the pattern of ignorance of the traditional agriculture and food habits of the Sakai on the part of the resettlement officials.

All of these above phenomena, added to the felt social position of the Sakai in the resettlement and in the Muara Basung commu-
nity, were the main reasons for the emerging feelings of dissatisfaction and unsettlement among the Sakai. The Sakai felt that they were not considered as full members of the Muara Basung community, which was dominated by the Malays and the Minangkabau. Such domination was expressed in terms of Malay culture, i.e., Islam, customs, language, and manners in public places or public spheres. The Sakai did not own any space in this public culture in terms of a sphere for expressing their thoughts, feelings and emotions about the world around them. Whenever they were in public places of Muara Basung, they felt they were being ridiculed by the Malays or the Minangkabau through ethnic jokes or through their looks at their ragged outfits. In the resettlement, the Sakai only had ethnic spheres in their own neighborhoods. These ethnic spheres were very limited to each of their own neighborhood, since they were differentiated among themselves based on their *perbatinan* and *banjar ladang* origins.

The position of Amir Tigo as village head was actually in jeopardy as he too did not have access to public culture. Thus, he did not have access to create and direct gossip and public opinion-making for and in his favor. Instead, he was influenced and directed by the Malays. He tried to be Malay-like, according to the Sakai. He took the Malay side by giving favors to the Malays and to other non-Sakai for his own benefit, instead of helping the Sakai through his authority as village head. He was still in office because he was supported by the Ministry of Social Affairs for the successful campaign in resettling the Sakai. For that reason, the Malays and other non-Sakai in Muara Basung did not dare to challenge Amir Tigo directly.

In 1971 a group of Sakai hit a Malay as they were deeply insulted by his ethnic jokes. A fight broke up between a group of Malays and this group of Sakai; fortunately no one was badly injured. Fearing revenge by the Malays and also fearing that the police would take the Malay side, they were also Malays, this group of 9 Sakai families fled the resettlement. Amir Tigo as village head could not do anything to stop the fight; it was the police who did that. He also could not act as a mediator in setting up the peace between the conflicting Malays and Sakai, due to the public opinion that he was a Sakai and therefore would favor only the Sakai. On the other hand this group of Sakai considered him a Malay and thought that he would only favor the Malays.

The number of Sakai remaining in the resettlement project in 1971 were only 22 families. Those who decided to stay in the resettlement said that the main reason was that they had to tend their children who went to school, and that their fields were nearby or within walking distance from the resettlement. With the permission of the the resettlement officials, empty houses in the resettlement were occupied by the Malays or Malay-Sakai descendants, who had recently come to live in Muara Basung. Some were relatives of people already living in Muara Basung. The number of non-Sakai residents of Muara Basung in 1971 were 58 families.

In 1976 the Office of the Resettlement received a donation of five big boxes of used clothes to be distributed to the resettlement residents. These boxes were stored in the village office, which was also the village head residence. Some of the members of the community complained to the resettlement officials suspecting that Amir Tigo and his family must have stolen some of the contents of the boxes because the boxes were already opened up the following day when their contents were distributed. The news was spread out rapidly among the Muara Basung residents and became a public accusation that village head and
his family had stolen clothes from the boxes. The non-Sakai, including Malay-Sakai group, believed that Amir Tigo and his family indeed stole the clothes. Ethnic jokes and labels about Sakai were added to this accusation. The main theme inherent in such ethnic labels and jokes was, that a Sakai was not fit for the position of village head but should live in the forest. They were forest people not villagers. With feelings of anger and frustration, at the suggestion of the officials of the resettlement, the local police, and the Mandau sub-district head, at the end of 1976, after ten years of serving as village head, Amir Tigo resigned from the office.

A new village head would be elected soon. There were two candidates. Amir Tigo was nominated by his group of Sakai originating from Penaso; and, Muhammad Nur, a descendant of Malay-Sakai, was nominated by the Malay-Sakai group from Balai Pungut. The election was held in 1977. The voters were all residents of Muara Basung village, including those who lived scattered in the hamlets within the boundaries of the administrative area of Muara Basung village. Muhammad Nur was elected. Amir Tigo and his group left the resettlement in anger, and lived in Simpang Tiga about four kilometers east of the resettlement. He still had his children enrolled in the Muara Basung school, and he wanted them to finish their school education.

Although in general the resettlement project activities were unsatisfactory in terms of alleviating the Sakai backwardness and poverty; this project made a great impact through school education. Sakai parents were very enthusiastic about educating their children through school. They would do anything to send their children to school. Other impacts are the strengthening of the ethnic boundaries between different Sakai categories based on their origins of *perbatinan*, i.e., between the Penaso and the Beringin Sakai, and based on their descendency, i.e., between the Sakai and the Malay-Sakai descendants. Still, other impacts are the emerging ethnicity and ethnic boundaries between the Sakai and the non Sakai, and the strengthening ethnic stratification through stereotyping based on the old system of the Malay kingdom of Siak Inderapura. The idea of nationality in the local level politics has been hindered by the politics of ethnicity of the domination of the Malays over the Sakai.

**The Sakai in Sialang Rimbun**

After the Sakai, led by Amir Tigo, left the Muara Basung resettlement in 1976, the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs in Pekanbaru realized that its resettlement project in Muara Basung had failed. Its officials concluded that the failure was due to the fact that the Muara Basung resettlement project was located too close to market and public activities and to the Malays and the Minangkabau cultures. Their solution was to make up a new program and to find the right location in order to be able to successfully resettle back the Sakai who were now living in the scattered areas of the forest of Muara Basung. In 1977 a new program was installed, i.e., Project for the Development of the Welfare of the Isolated Group (*Proyek Pengembangan Kesejahteraan Masyarakat Terasing*). The goal of this program was to resocialize the Sakai in preparing them to become full members of Indonesian society similar to other Indonesian citizens. In the same year they also found the right location for this purpose and was granted 400 hectares of land in Sialang Rimbun area by the Office of the Governor of Riau for resettling the Sakai. It was located about 14 kilometers east of Simpang Muara Basung.

In 1978 this office began to clear the forest to build 75 houses for Sakai families, one build-
ing for the resettlement office, and another one for community activities. All the buildings were made of planks of wood, from the trees of the cleared forest. Each house was 18 meters square or 4m x 4.5m, and built on poles 80 centimeters above the ground. The size of the office and the community building were each 54 meters square or 6m x 9m. Each house was built on 600 square meters of land or (20m x 30m). The houses were built in four rows and there were two roads to connect them. Nearby the resettlement, a five-hectare forest area was cleared. This five hectares of land was planned as a communal garden for the Sakai. Included in the resettlement was also a soccer field. The settlement was ready for its residents by the end of May 1979.

Meanwhile, the Provincial Office of the Ministry of Social Affairs appointed a committee to attract the Sakai to move into the Sialang Rimbun resettlement project. The committee would organize the strategy for the campaign and select the candidates of the resettlement residents. The committee attracted the Sakai to live in the resettlement by offering them food provisions and other necessities for one year, similar to what they had received when they were in the Muara Basung resettlement. Amir Tigo and his family would not be accepted in the resettlement because they would only cause troubles. The Malay-Sakai descendants who scorned them in Muara Basung would be rejected; because the Sialang Rimbun resettlement project was designed specifically only for the Sakai. What is interesting about this campaign is that the Sakai ethnicity is emphasized and it is a special kind of Sakai ethnicity, which does not include the attributes of Amir Tigo and his group.

The committee received 189 applications, and the committee chose only 75 families, who were considered well-behaved and diligent persons. Among the 75 Sakai families chosen, were two non-Sakai families. One family head was an elementary school teacher from Palembang of South Sumatra who married a local woman of Malay-Sakai descendant, and another person was an Islamic teacher from Minangkabau who married a Sakai woman. The Sakai chosen by the committee were those from Penaso and from Beringin Sakai, and a smaller number were from villages or hamlets outside Muara Basung area.

From August 1979 to February 1980 all of the 75 houses of the resettlement were occupied by their residents. Residents were assigned to live in houses based on their arrivals for registration and the availability of vacant houses in sequential order. The first ones who arrived were assigned to live in the houses located in the front part of the resettlement, and those who came later were assigned to live in the back parts. This was to avoid groupings based on locality of origin or kinship ties, in order to avoid conflicts between the Penaso and the Beringin Sakai groups, or between kin groups. However, since they came in groups of two to four related families, then, each group was assigned to live in the houses of one neighborhood. Thus the policy of separating members of a kin group from each other was not really effective.

For Sialang Rimbun resettlement project, the Ministry of Social Affairs had outlined the following program for settlers, as stated in the Program for the development of the Welfare of the Isolated Group:

- to help them to be able to live in a settled community, to have permanent jobs and decent income, and become part of the larger community and the Indonesian society;
- to raise their productivity in agriculture as well as in non agricultural sectors;
- to develop their ability in self-help and cooperatives in order to raise their capa-
ability of developing their own community;
• to help them to develop their creativity and independence;
• to provide civics and nationalism education; and
• to promote belief in one God, in accordance with *Pancasila*.

However, none of the above items were carried out by the resettlement officials. During the first year of resettlement, the activities of the officials were to distribute food and other necessities, to distribute used clothes donated by charity groups for members of the resettlement, to monitor the residents to keep their houses and yards clean, to train settlers in home economics and in sanitation and health habits, to teach at the temporary elementary school of the resettlement, to invite people to join the Islamic Friday mass prayers and teach them how to pray properly, to train them in proper behavior and manners in public places, to keep the social order of the resettlement and to mediate conflicts between members of the resettlement.

The activities of the resettlement office were divided equally among the six officials. The routine job of teaching at the temporary elementary school (from first grade to fourth grade), was mainly done by the school teacher assisted by three other officials, and was held in one half of the room of the community building. The other half was used as a storage room. This classroom was equipped with one blackboard and twenty desks and benches. First and second grade students sat in rows close to each other and shared one blackboard. Their school time was from 7.30 to 9.30. Third and fourth grade students would do the same from 10.00 to 12.30.

Life in Sialang Rimbun was similar to the one in Muara Basung resettlement, i.e., characterized by conflicts between different kin groups and groups from different locality of origins. These conflicts were based on old feuds between the Penaso and Beringin Sakai hamlets, deepened by conflicts happened in Muara Basung resettlement, and also caused by feelings of being dishonored or disgraced by others through gossip or symbolic actions, jealousy and envy, theft, and adultery. A conflict was expressed verbally and physically between the concerned actors in the neighborhoods of the accused, since the accuser usually came to the house of the accused. This drew the attention of the neighbors, and usually the accused would get help from them. The accuser would defer further quarrels or attack, but would come back later with his friends and relatives to continue the conflict.

In this resettlement, a neighborhood as a sphere of interactions was an expression of personal and family socio-cultural systems of that neighborhood, similar to the one in the life of a *banjar ladang*. Neither the Sialang Rimbun nor the Muara Basung resettlements, had public space and therefore did not have a public sphere as an expression of public culture that could generate social cooperation and accommodation for reducing or mediating conflicting views and feelings.

The soccer field, which could function as a public place was not really used by the residents of this resettlement. Friday mass prayer was too formal and rigid, since there was not much time before the formal ritual for members of the community to chat and gossip and the Sakai also felt that Islamic religious activities in the mosque were formal and imposed on them by the office of the resettlement. The resettlement office was the only place where the Sakai usually came and had chats. But they did it among their own neighbors or kin or with the resettlement officials. Usually they came to the resettlement office because they wanted something from the officials and not because they
wanted to socialize there. Another place which had the potential to become a public place was the space in front of the house of a successful mandah boss. Once in a while and sometimes every day during the week, he put on his tv set facing the road. Members of the resettlement came to watch until midnight. However, since he did not do it regularly this place was never a real public place.

As a result of this condition, the conflicting actors in the Sialang Rimbun resettlement project had nowhere else to go to get help to solve problems, except to the office of the resettlement or to his kin or neighbors to get proper support against any opponent. The resettlement office usually acted like a court of justice. If the accused was blamed, he did not have any other means to defend himself. The only way to save face was to hide in his neighborhood or to leave the resettlement accompanied by his neighbors and relatives, as was the case in Muara Basung and also in Sialang Rimbun resettlement. In such situations, the boundaries between we and they were established and persisted. As a community, this resettlement was composed of fragments of social units each with its own social, economic, and political autonomy, living side by side not for the sake of living together as a communitas but for the purpose of getting free food and other necessities, under the control of the office of the resettlement project.

The first year of living in this resettlement was a relatively happy and orderly year. Conflicts did occur but were limited since they all were aware of the consequences of enlarging such conflicts, i.e., they would suffer a loss of one year of free food. Because before they were accepted as resettlement residents, the resettlement officials had told them that anyone who started a quarrel or fight would be expelled from the resettlement. The way they expressed their dislike and contempt about each other was through gossip in their own neighborhood or kin group.

During the first year of settlement most of the Sakai did not plant dry rice fields. They ate the menggalo mersik made from the poisonous manioc they harvested once a week from their old gardens. Or they mixed the menggalo mersik with rice. Those who did not make or work on their dry rice fields collected forest products and to go mandah to collect aloe wood. They learned that through forest product collecting and mandah they could earn cash. Cash could be used to buy anything, while yields from dry rice fields or from poisonous manioc gardens could only be consumed, and if they should sell the rice it would not be worth much compared to the forest products, especially aloe wood.

Groups of mandah were organized based on old banjar ladang membership, siblingship, kin group, and friendship. A small mandah group comprised not more than five members, an average size mandah group would not have more than ten people, while the largest mandah group ever organized in 1982 comprised twenty people. Small groups of mandah usually left the resettlement to explore the forest in a radius of five kilometers, and spent three to five days there. An average-sized mandah group would explore the forest in a radius of ten kilometers at the maximum, for about ten days; and the largest mandah group explored an area of about twenty kilometers from the resettlement for eighteen days. In a small mandah group each member had to be responsible for the welfare of their own household, i.e., leaving some money and food for their family while they were away from home.

An average mandah group was always led by a leader or a boss, as the Sakai named this position. The boss was the one who financed the mandah activities, by lending money to its members for their families to buy food or for
other expenses while they were away from home. The agreement was, that members of this *mandah* group would only sell their aloe wood to the *boss* and would pay all the borrowed money through this transaction. Trust in each other and loyalty to the *boss* emerged out of this kind of transaction. Helping each other among *mandah* members was not uncommon, and the *boss* was expected to provide help and protection in social and economic difficulties. The *mandah* groups, through their business networks, have access to information and resources beyond the ones provided in the resettlement.

These *mandah* activities had directly or indirectly maintained the boundaries of the social fragments of the Sakai resettlement community in Sialang Rimbun. Because each *mandah* group was organized along the line of locality of origins, i.e., Penaso or Beringin Sakai, or others. Potential conflicts which was suppressed during the first year of the resettlement and expressed only in the form of gossip in one’s family or neighborhood, were openly expressed in verbal and physical abuses in the second year of their resettlement. Such phenomena occurred as the Sakai realized that there was nothing to lose if they were kicked out of the resettlement by the officials because of their socially disrupting behavior. Nevertheless, the Sakai also learned that after the first year of resettlement was over not all of the officials were as active as they were before. Some of these officials did not even show up in the resettlement regularly. In fact, these officials did not pay much attention to the conflicts occurred among the Sakai as they did in the first year of the resettlement.

As for the Sakai, since there was no more food provision, they had to make dry rice fields to grow rice and poisonous manioc. They cleared the forest area around the resettlement to make their dry rice fields. They spent more of their time in their fields than in the resettlement. Usually the whole family lived in their house in the field, or the husband and the wife took turns to stay in the field since one of them had to take care of their children who were still in the resettlement elementary school. Or, among members of the same *banjar ladang* they would take turns to guard their fields in order to be able to take care of the children who were still in school. A small number of them also remained in the resettlement because they did not make any dry rice fields in the second year of their stay in the resettlement. They were the *mandah* groups and those who decided to live by collecting forest products, and their aging parents.

In the second year of the resettlement, the total number of the residents registered in September 1981 were, 28 families full residents and 24 families temporary residents. In January 1982, the numbers of full residents were 22 families, and the number of temporary residents were 27 families. In September 1982, the numbers of full residents were 22 families, and the temporary residents were 14 families. In December 1982, there were only 18 families of full residents and 9 families of temporary residents.

In October 1994, I had the opportunity to visit the old Sialang Rimbun resettlement. There were only 11 families of the original Sakai residents of the resettlement. The other residents had either died, or were living as the traditional Sakai in the forest area farther away from Muara Basung (since the forest in and around Muara Basung has been turned into a vast rubber plantation), or had become residents of other resettlement projects for isolated groups, and some had become regular members of the community of Muara Basung. These regular members of the community were the former families of the *mandah* boss. They became businessmen and traders, and three of them married Javanese women. They told me...
that Sakai identity is not a good reference for doing business since it is based on the Sakai stereotype, and by marrying Javanese their Sakai identity is covered up by the Javanese attributes as a reference for their ethnic identification in their business interactions. They feel that they gain respect and trust from others through their wife’s ethnic identity. They learned that stereotypes originating from the old Malay kingdom remained in use by the Malays and other ethnic groups in their business interactions. They also learned that they have to be cunning in their business dealings but trustworthy in keeping their business promises.

Conclusions

In this paper I have tried to show that ethnicity among the Sakai was expressed in response to the defined structure of power in the local setting. Expressions of ethnicity vary to reflect the potential for and the capability of manipulating cultural symbols and ethnic attributes for identification and in making and taking position and in their competition for resources within a defined interethnic and social relationships. It is through their ethnicity that they were being transformed into Indonesian society or nationality. It is exactly as stated earlier by Bruner (1974), that being an Indonesian cannot just be an Indonesian but implicit within this category is also being a member of one of the ethnic groups of Indonesia.

Muara Basung and Sialang Rimbun resettlements for the Sakai are two different environments or structures of power for the Sakai. The environments of Muara Basung include the Sakai resettlement and the non-Sakai community, with public spheres dominated by the non-Sakai of the Malays and the Minangkabau and other ethnic categories. The Sakai in the resettlement lived traditionally as they did in the forest, and thus strengthened the stereotype as backward and forest people in their relationships with the Malays and the Minangkabau. An effort by the Provincial Ministry of Social Affairs to install Amir Tigo as village head of Muara Basung, a bottom level of national administration, was challenged by members of the non-Sakai community. The Malays and the Minangkabau were persistent in categorizing Amir Tigo as a Sakai who should remain living in the forest. As they dominated the public spheres they were able to create public opinion in their favor, leading to the replacement of Amir Tigo as village head.

The Sakai as an ethnic minority was not a monolithic entity. Their life in the resettlement was characterized by feuds and conflicts among different locality of origins and different kin groups. To resettle them in Sialang Rimbun was similar to containing their life in absolute control of the national agency. However, since none of the programs of the Ministry of Social Affairs, for their welfare and their nationality, were executed accordingly, the Sakai in Sialang Rimbun lived up by their traditional ways of life as they did in Muara Basung resettlement, and the program failed.

Through their experience in Muara Basung and in Sialang Rimbun they redefine their concept of their ethnicity and nationality. They learned that Sakai ethnicity is a stigma, and since they have to live up with this stigma in order to avoid being stigmatized their choice were either to become forest people who lived isolated from any contacts with the non-Sakai, or to make use of the Sakai identity to gain benefit by enrolling as residents of other resettlement projects for the isolated groups, or to defer one’s self and become a regular member of the community, or to change one’s Sakai identity into another by marrying Javanese. They also learned that to become Indonesian national does not mean that they can erase their
Sakai identity and its stigma. The stigma, from the experience of the successful businessmen, could only be erased when they are successful in their business, trustworthy, and have alternative ethnic identity as they do, i.e., through their Javanese wife.

As the government failed to transform them into Indonesian society, some of them were able to transform themselves into Indonesian society by their own efforts. Some successful efforts were accomplished through education and through business activities.

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