



# Ethnic Dynamics in North Sumatra

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## Ethnic Dynamics in North Sumatra

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11

### Abstract

The mention of ethnic group in the North Sumatra was constructed by outsiders. The concepts of "Batak" and "Malay" are given by the outside world as labels. When used to refer to the population combined with this unity, these labels become evasive identities. Architecture is based on natural, cultural and religious fortresses and the social changes surrounding them. Although unification was rejected, it still appeared in various social science literature. This fact had an impact on the truth and error that was considered essential, especially in the second decade of the third millennium. Recent studies and various empirical evidence confirm that mentioning the ethnic groups in North Sumatra and stigmatizing them is an external construction, avoiding identity, and it is now widely rejected.

### Keywords

evasive identity; uniformity;  
ethnic groups in North Sumatera



## I. Introduction

There are errors or inaccuracies in the categorization of ethnic groups in North Sumatra, especially regarding 'Batak and Malay'. These two concepts appeared simultaneously in the 15th century in the writings of foreign ethnographers who visited northern Sumatra. For the first time, the concept of 'Batak' (called Bata, Battak, Battas, Batech) appears in the writings of Pires (1940) and Pinto (1991) to refer to the people who live in the interior of Aceh and North Sumatra. While 'Malay' is called Polo (1958) to refer to the settlers on the coast. A history of foreign ethnographers' trips to northern Sumatra was compiled by Reid in 1995. The inaccuracy concerns the homogenization of inland society into a category called 'Batak' and the categorization of coastal society called 'Malay'. It must be understood that the two concepts are not intended to refer to ethnic groups (ethnic groups) but instead refer to the general characteristics of settlers in the interior (inland) and on the coast (coastal). The critical question that must be answered is the question of membership and the basis for the construction of the two categories: who are the real members of the 'Batak and Malay' society, and on what basis are these two categorizations constructed? Isn't the concept of 'Batak and Malay' an evasive label when it is used to refer to a population that is uniform in both concepts?

One more thing, referring to Perret (2010), a community group located in the Bukit Barisan mountains north of Panyabungan Mandailing Natal, called the 'Orang Lubu' or 'Siladang' people do not fall into these two categories. In fact, in the Indonesian Anthropology literature, including in North Sumatra itself, the existence of this community group is rarely mentioned. In fact, referring to Dutch sources such as Kremer (1912) and Adatrechtbundel (1919), the Loeboes (Lubu) people live in Padangtawas and Mandailing. The 'Batak' ethnicity as called Bangun (1980) is said to consist of sub-ethnics namely Mandailing, Simalungun, Toba, Karo, Pakpak and Angkola, while the Malays are mainly Simalungun and Karo people who adhere to Islam (Perret, 2010). Later, in 2004, Syamsul Arifin, who at that time served as Governor of North Sumatra, established the 'Central

4

Tapanuli Coastal ethnic group' as the 9th host ethnic group in North Sumatra. Until now the name 'Central Tapanuli Coastal Ethnic' has not been recorded in the Indonesian anthropological literature, but the determination is a form of construction that has a political tone and invites polemics. Who is called an ethnic member is really confusing, because in it there are Toba, Nias, and Minangkabau people who unite and form coastal languages and a number of attributes resulting from the acculturation process that occurs.

Writers such as Sinar (1986: 2006) mention that people in Langkat, Binjai, Deli, Serdang, Asahan, Batabar, Labuhanbatu and even Riau are Malay. The same statement was made by writers Lah Husny (1978), Said (1961), Pelly (2015) and others. Uniformity as 'Malay' in North Sumatra raises crucial questions about its relationship with Malays in Riau, Kalimantan, Sulawesi or even in Malaysia. In Kalimantan, for example, they can identify their ethnic origin as Iban or Banjar, even though they call themselves Malay. Likewise in Sulawesi, where ethnic Malays can identify their ethnic origins, such as Mandar and Bugis and others. Malays in North Sumatra are like Malays in Riau or Malaysia who cannot designate their ethnic 'origin'.

Based on the problems above, this manuscript was written as a way to reject the uniformity of ethnic groups in North Sumatra. However, this uniformity has denied ethnic diversity (diversity) in North Sumatra, especially compared to the results of recent research. Therefore, ethnic uniformity, especially 'Batak and Malay', is a labeling from the outside as an evasive identity. Likewise, in today's decentralized environment, ethnicity issues do not only occur in North Sumatra but almost all of Indonesia. Instead of demanding recognition, they are often wrapped in interest in both election and regional expansion. It must be admitted that this uniformity does not necessarily answer the problem of ethnic groups in this plural and multicultural society, but instead creates an atmosphere of ethnicity that can lead to explosives.

## II. Research Method

The writing of this manuscript is based on research on rereading journals, theses and dissertations that write (study) about ethnic groups in North Sumatra. This writing was driven by the fact that in North Sumatra, they refused to be called 'Batak' and withdrew from Malay by referring to their 'origin' ethnic origin. In order to write about themes that are considered 'sensitive' but crucial to be answered, then a rereading of the manuscripts owned by the author in the form of ethnograph travel treatises, journals, theses and dissertations is carried out. The manuscripts are writings or studies based on ethnohistory, archeology, history and anthropology. With various empirical and scientific evidences, then a manuscript was compiled that tried to describe the emergence of ethnic homogenization in North Sumatra.

The main text used as a reference in this manuscript comes from the compilation manuscript of Reid (1995) containing all ethnograph records to northern Sumatra (North Sumatra and Aceh). Similarly, manuscripts written by Perret (2010), Miksic (1979) and McKinnon (1984) are based on archaeological artifactual findings in Northeast Sumatra. Next are the texts of anthropologists such as Geertz (1963), Bruner (1961), Naroll (1964), Barth (1969), Nagata (1981) and Hirouse (2009). Historical and religious works such as Pardede (1975), Castels (2002) and Linguistics such as Voorhoeve (1929; 1955) and Kozok (2009) are also referred to in order to form a way of thinking that rejects the uniformity of ethnic groups in North Sumatra.



### III. Results and Discussion

A number of writers can not escape from the construction of ethnic groups 'Batak and Malay' ethnograph and colonial heritage. Call it dozens of writers with the subject of 'Batak' such as Viner (1980), Smith and Kipp (1983), Bruner (1961), Castels (2002), Parkin (1978), Singarimbun (1975), Bruner (1961), Liddle (1970), Simanjuntak (2002), Pedersen (1969), Oudemans (1973), Hasselgren (2008), Aritonang (1988), Clauss (1982), Hutaeruk (1993), Jansen (2003), Penny (1964), Kozok (1999) and others. These writers 'imitate' the writing habits of ethnographers or previous writers who uniformly 'Batak', especially Loeb (1981), Hutagalung (1991), Vergouwen (1986), and Lumbantobing (1957). Later, a number of Toba writers tried to reconstruct the 'Batak uniformity' as written by Hutagalung (1991) which was first published in 1926 and repeated by Vergouwen (1986) which was published in 1935. Such writers are like Lumbantobing (1957) when writing about Sisingamangaraja I. -XII, Gultom (1992) when writing about Dalihan Na Tolu, Situmorang (2004) when writing Toba Na Sae, Sijabat (1982) when writing Sisingamangaraja, Simanjuntak (1977) when writing Batak History, Siahaan (1964) when writing History of Batak Culture and Harahap (1960) who wrote about Bangsa Batak, and others. It seems that they seem to have been indoctrinated that 'Batak' is the uniform as it was written.

They ignore the differences between ethnic 'Batak' as written by Marsden (2008) which was first published in 1778 or Anderson (1971) which was first published in 1826. They also ignore the writings of Viner (1980) or Vorhoove (1929; 1955), which distinguishes the 'ethnic Batak' in terms of linguistic and social organization. They also ignore the writings of Pires (1944) which mentions that the 'Batak Land' in 1515 is on the east coast of northern Sumatra between Aru (Medan) and Lholu-sumawe, or also Pinto's (1991) writing which states that the 'Batak Land' in 1539 was on the West coast, North Sumatra with the capital Panaju. In fact, 'Tanah Batak' once covered the areas of Labuhanbatu, Kisaran and Asahan as shown on the Bamed map (1912). 'Tanah Batak' as an administrative area, was only formed in 1842 when the Bataklanden Afdeeling was formed at the Governor of West Sumatra with the capital city of Padang. Then, since 1887 the Bataklanden Afdeeling was formed and became one of the areas in the Tapanuli Karasidenan which was formed in 1915 (Castels, 2002).

Perhaps what he wants to achieve is to form a 'Batak diaspora' as Hutagalung (1991) did in 1926, which was then followed by Vergouwen (1986) in 1935. Hutagalung is a bombastic writer. In his work entitled: *Pustaha Tarombo dohot Turi-turian ni Bangsa Batak*, he mentions that the origin of the 'Batak' people came from Pusuk Buhit whose diaspora reached Simalungun, Mandailing, Karo, Pakpak, Angkola and even Gayo and Nias. It is also said that, when Siraja Batak was born, he formed an early settlement in Sianjur Mula (Situmorang, 2004). However, the results of excavations in the village in question, the withdrawals obtained based on carbon dating refer to the number 600 (+400) years ago. That is, the village in question has only been inhabited since the 16th century and the longest in the 11th century AD (Wiradyana, 2014).

Apparently, this writing pattern made Bangun (1980) say that 'Batak' is ethnic while the 6 groups that are uniform are called sub-ethnic. It should be noted that, in anthropological literature, the term 'sub-ethnic' (sub-tribe) is not known but only 'ethnic' (tribe). Sources such as Bangun (1980) were later edited by Koenjtaraningrat (1980) in his book *Society and Culture in Indonesia*. This book, becomes a kind of juridical legal basis that the 'Batak ethnicity' in North Sumatra consists of the equated sub-ethnic. Actually, the concept of 'Batak' in ethnograph sources does not refer to ethnic names but rather to the

character of the people who are said to be unreligious or pagan and tend to live in the interior (inland).

Writers such as Reid (2009) have mentioned that since 1926, the Toba people have carried out 'self-destruction' and are proud of that title. Reid's opinion (2009) is in line with Pardede's (1975) statement which states that 'Tanah Batak' and 'Batak people' are the creations of foreigners (*die Begriffe Batakland und Batakvolk wurden von Ausländer geprägt*). The striking difference between the six ethnic groups that are uniformed in the 'Batak' label as called by Viner (1980) can be seen in the language or dialect as well as its social structure. Viner (1980) mentions: these different Batak peoples speak closely related languages that can be arranged into two mutually unintelligible groupings. The social structure is based on patrilineal with cross-cousin marriage where each individual categorizes himself against agnates such as wife-givers and wife receivers.

Regarding language, for example, Vorhoeve (1929; 1955) has mentioned the differences between 6 (six) ethnic 'Batak' which are divided into: Karo language, Pakpak language, Toba language, Angkola language, Mandailing language and Eastern language (Simalungun). These languages according to Vorhoeve (1929; 1955) were divided into northern groups, namely Karo, Alas, Pakpak with the subdialects of Kelasen, Simsim, Pegagan and Boang; the southern group consists of Toba, Angkola and Mandailing, and the middle group consists of the Simalungun language. Then, from this grouping, three main language groups were formed, namely the languages of the southern group consisting of Mandailing, Angkola and Toba, Pakpak and Karo languages in the north and Simalungun languages in the Northeast.

Regarding physical appearance, clothing and customs, Anderson (1971) on his visit in 1823 mentioned that there were striking differences between the Karo, Simalungun, Toba and Malay people. Similarly, Loeb (1991) distinguishes the national color of Karo, which is blue, and the national color of Toba, which is brown. Another difference is seen in 'religion', where each ethnic group has its own special belief system. Perret (2010) also mentions that research on ancient manuscripts among the 'Batak' ethnic has never written or recorded the concept of 'Batak'. This means that the concept was actually given by someone else, namely the ethnographers who photographed the people of northern Sumatra from the sky. Furthermore, referring to Castels (2001), apart from Simalungun, none of the ethnic groups uniformed with the 'Batak' has a stateless system of state socio-political organization. Furthermore, Kipp (1983) mentions that each uniformed 'Batak' ethnicity has its own unique class: Batak society is so unique. Toba kept the extended written family tree and erected a monument to their ancestors. In contrast, Carlo emphasized kinship, the domination-subordination relationship of the wife-giver/wife-receiver relationship, and rarely knew that their ancestors were more than three or four generations. Between the two, obviously in terms of social structure and geography, is Pakpak.

Between these two tendencies, the Pakpak ethnic prioritizes its geography (territorial) called *suak* (subculture) which is a territorial unit based on five Pakpak sub-ethnics (Pakpak *silima-suak*) and does not care about the assessors. The Simalungun ethnic group tends to emphasize the territorial unity of the clan and pay less attention to its ancestor. It is the same with Mandailing who use the clan (clan) as the basis for their interaction and marriage, but they do not care about the ancestor. Another difference can be seen in the clan (clan) system which is much more complicated for the Toba ethnic group than the Karo, Simalungun, Pakpak, Mandailing and Angkola ethnic groups. In addition, other differences that are more striking seem like the description of attitudes by Joustra (1910) as follows:

The Karo people have a calmer, more refined attitude and way of speaking than the Toba people. Although the Karo can quickly become aggressive as well, he is more restrained. He is less courageous and especially much more diligent [...] They (the Simalunguns) are calmer in speech and action compared to the Toba people who are more rude [...]. Unlike the Karo, Angkola and Mandailing people, the Toba people could not hold back. However, it differs from other groups in terms of its initiative and fiery spirit. It should also be noted that they are thirsty for learning.

Likewise, North Sumatran Malays. Who is the Malay ethnic membership? Even though they mention one people, for example, the Malays in Deli do not want to be equated with the Langkat, Serdang, Batubara, Asahan and Labuhanbatu Malays. And vice versa. Of course, rejection will arise if North Sumatran Malays are equated with Riau Malays, Bugis Malays, Iban Malays, let alone Malaysian Malays. In fact, they are quite different in terms of objective boundaries as Royce (1983) calls them. Likewise, they differ subjectively, such as the rejection of the Deli Malay which is equated with the Langkat Malay.

A number of recent studies have tried to reject the mention of 'Malays' as ethnic. A number of authors can be mentioned such as Miksic (1979), McKinnon (1984), Milner (1978), Reid (1979), as well as Langenberg (1977) and others. In fact, Perret (2010) explicitly states that the Malays in Deli and Langkat are Karo people who converted to Islam. This fact can be seen in Guru Patimpus (supposed to be the opener of Kampung Medan), Datuk Sunggal of Surbakti clan, Datuk Brayan (Surbakti clan), Datuk Denai, Datuk Senembah, Datuk Kota Bangun and others who are all Karo people. Likewise, the names of villages in Deli tend to indicate Karo-style mentions such as Sukapiring, Tendua Kuta, Sunggal, Magosta, and others.

Likewise, the Malays in Serdang came from the Simalungun and Karo people who converted to Islam. The history of Serdang as called by Sinar (1981) cannot be separated from Simalungun which is located in Polog Silau. Furthermore, the Malays in Serdang Bedagei, Tebingtinggi, Batubara and Asahan are Simalungun people who converted to Islam. Tebingtinggi, for example, is an area opened for the first time by Tuan Bandar Kajum Damanik, who is currently the name of the terminal in the city. Likewise, many village names in Bedagei, Tebingtinggi to Asahan still reflect the strong Simalungun version of naming. If Perret's (2010) way of thinking is continued, then the Malays in Labuhanbatu are Padangbolak people who entered the area before the entry of Islam and pre-colonialism.

If so, then 'Malay' in Northeast Sumatra, as Perret (2010) calls it, is a mixture of indigenous ethnic groups (origin) such as Karo and Simalungun with foreign cultures brought by foreign traders who are Muslim in coastal areas. These meeting areas are called 'pertumukan' (busy places to trade in Karo) or 'bandar' (busy places to trade continuously in Simalungun language) are cosmopolitan areas that change the original identity to a new identity namely Malay to express differences themselves with their previous ethnic origin. When referring to Perret (2010) it is stated that Islamization has taken place since at least the 15th century, and relations with other trading places in the Malay Peninsula as well as in the western part of the archipelago, accelerated a cultural space on the East coast that may have developed from a small group of immigrants from various regions. In this space, everyone becomes part of a large space of Malay culture that is based on Islam, the Malay language and the same customs. The advantages of adopting this new identity for the indigenous people are that they have the opportunity to cultivate land in coastal countries and act as intermediaries (brokers) between inland residents and foreign traders.



In the era of colonialism, the Netherlands introduced territorial boundaries (administration) which according to Joustra (1909; 1910) as well as Westenberg (1891; 1897), Kroesen (1897) and Perret (2010) were formed through the fortress of nature and the fortress of culture and religion. According to Perret (2010) the formation of ethnic boundaries and administrative boundaries is carried out in two stages: i) determining the colony area based on topography (mountains), history (the idea of the exclusion of people to the interior) and politics (independent areas that have not been affected), and ii) provide content to the typology of society that is formed as well as the basis for community unity. At this stage, we are diligently looking for the same characteristics in each area, then implicitly seen as an expression of a fundamental unifying consciousness.

The formation of this administrative area is closely related to efforts to control the community. In the administrative places that were formed, new government structures such as controleur, assistant resident and resident were placed. There were also military and police garrisons to 'force' natives to obey the rules of the Colonial Government. In short, the construction of 'community groups' which in its concept is more appropriately called than 'ethnic groups'. This is because in real terms, the 'Inland Community Groups' consist of several ethnic groups such as Toba, Mandailing, Angkola, Simalungun, Karo and Pakpak. Meanwhile, the 'Coastal Community Group', namely Malay, is also inaccurate, because the Karo people in Langkat, Binjai and Medan are categorized as Malay because they adhere to Islam. Similarly, the Simalungun people in Lima Puluh, Tebing Tinggi and Pagurawan are called Malay because they embrace Islam. The construction of ethnic groups, namely 'Batak and Malay' is based on a map of the colonial area with reference to topography, history and politics as well as the content of the 'community group' unit formed. However, this uniformity does not necessarily answer the problem of ethnic groups in this plural and multicultural society. As Perret (2010) admits that, in fact this formation ignores the special characteristics or differences of each ethnic group that is merged or split into one administrative group.

If referring to the boundaries of ethnic groups as done by Koentjaraningrat (1999), ethnic groups are groups of people who are bound by awareness and identity to cultural entities, while awareness and identity are (not always) strengthened by language. Furthermore, Narco (1964) defines ethnic groups as: To a large extent it is a biological self-continuation, ii) sharing basic cultural values, realized in the open unity of cultural forms, iii) forming a field of communication and interaction, and iv) There is a membership, which recognizes itself and is recognized by others as a category that can be distinguished from other categories in the same order.

The reality in North Sumatra as mentioned by Perret (2010) for example, when explaining ethnic consciousness only by proposing the same set of characteristics, the reality is not convincing. Doubts about the existence of traits that were once thought to be shared traits between populations in the interior of northern Sumatra are compounded by other clues emerging from local sources. On this basis, the idea of political unity of populations in the interior was replaced with a map showing many 'clans' living side by side autonomously. The political mosaic still has to be added with economic diversity. Even the principle that is considered to be the basis of the 'Batak Land', namely Dalihan na Tolu, which rests on special ties between the clan of a person, the clan of the giver and the clan of the woman who receives it, also has a number of exceptions. In fact, on the one hand there are endogamous clans, while on the other hand the Malays are involved in traditional ceremonies in the Simalungun area of Serdang and Bedagei.

Ethnic groups are formed when a person uses his ethnic identity to categorize himself with others for the purpose of interaction. In this case, a common sign is needed. The similarity of signs is needed in interaction because of the mutual dependence between the interacting parties. The similarity of these signs shows the cultural characteristics that indicate an ethnic group can change. Likewise, the nature of culture and members can change shape even the order of social groups can change; but the fact that there is a continuing dichotomy of group members with others makes it possible to determine the nature of persistence and from which the investigation is carried out. Therefore, ethnic groups can be recognized as long as they show differences from other groups. The difference, of course, does not only include objective and subjective boundaries, but rather integrates them with socio-cultural dynamics which are certain to affect objective and subjective boundaries.

As mentioned by Perret (2010) in pre-colonial times, the term 'Batak' actually does not exist in the sources in the interior. In addition, some direct observations made by Westerners in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, show that when the category 'Batak' is used in rural areas, the term refers to 'other people' and is never used to describe other people appoint himself or his own clan. Therefore, the term 'Batak' is 'evasive identity' to describe it. The concept of 'Batak' also appears as a general category effort to designate savage, both natives and people from other regions in the archipelago.

The influence of Aceh according to Perret (2010) has taken the form of the takeover of the northern part of the East Coast of Sumatra since the 16th century in its political and cultural space where Aceh is the center. Until the 18th century, the East Coast held the role of intermediary to supply forest products, horses, and rice from the interior to foreign traders. The circulation of the Spanish dollar in the mid-18th century, showed the East Coast to be an international monetary space. It is clear that the East Coast is not an isolated area because the exchange network is two-way, because the coastal people also enter the interior, just as the interior visits the coast. Furthermore, northern Sumatra became a prominent area since the mid-19th century. This area experienced a pepper surplus, prompting Aceh to occupy this region by forming a sultanate to develop a 'cultivation space'. The rapid development of pepper, gambier and cotton plantations in that century, resulted in the shock of the bond system that previously connected the coast and the interior.

However, the ethnic group as referred to by Smith (1982) has at least 6 main characteristics, namely: i) a common proper name, ii) a myth of common ancestry, iii) a shared historical memories, iv) one or more elements of common culture, v) a link with homeland and vi) a sense of solidarity. The characteristics of ethnic groups as referred to by Smith (1982) are in line with the characteristics of ethnic groups as called the Symposium of the Social Sciences Research Council (SSRC) in 1973, namely: Past-oriented group identity, emphasizing differences, ii) some cultural concepts and social categories, iii) the relationship between ethnic groups and the constituent units in the broader social relationship system, iv) facts and transcendence that ethnic groups are greater than relatives or local groups Face-to-face interaction, v) the different meanings of different social environments and different individuals to the ethnic group category, and vi) the assumption of the ethnic group category is a symbol that has both the meaning of name or member and analyst.

The three ethnicity paradigms above, always link an ethnic group linkage with objective attributes or special characteristics that can be demonstrated. However, as has been pointed out above, an explanation of ethnic groups based on specific characteristics alone will close the space for the cultural and social dynamics around them. Thus, the



special characteristics of an ethnic group based on primordial ties must be added to the subjective characteristics that underlie its social and cultural changes. In this section, it is true what was conveyed by Barth (1969) that the Patan ethnicity in Thailand can be divided into two as an effort to emphasize their religious differences, even though their ethnic roots remain the same, namely the Patan ethnicity. Likewise, what was conveyed by de Voss and Romanucci (1967) that socio-cultural changes always influence ethnic groups to maintain the continuity of the identity of the ethnic group. So, the concept of 'Batak and Malay' which was constructed from outside has the same meaning that in fact the construction was carried out solely to categorize the characteristics of people in the interior and the coast but did not mention ethnic groups.

The Malays in Asahan during the Reformasi era withdrew from their Malayness, an identity they had received since the colonial era. The Malays in Asahan moved out by pointing to their origins, namely Toba and Simalungun. That is why, most of the population in Asahan who in Anderson's (1971) writings is called 'Pardimbanan' are Tubba (Toba) and Semilongan (Simalungun) people from Kataran (Timur in Simalungun) who converted from their tribal religion to become followers of Islam (Kroesen, 1897). Likewise with the Malays in Bedagei, Serdang and Batubara who are interesting from the Malays. Many of the population in this region point to their original identities, namely Simalungun and Karo. Comparing this phenomenon with Anderson's (1971) notes on his visit in 1823, that the populations in these three areas are Semilongan (Simalungun) and Karau-karau (Karo) people who are already Muslim.

It's the same in Deli. Deli residents in Brayan, Klumpang, Sunggal, Klambir, Buluhcina, Denai, and others as mentioned by Anderson (1971) are Karau-karau people. It is the same in Binjai and Langkat where the largest population that Anderson encounters is Karau-karau. These people, as Perret (2010), are Karo Jehe who are different from Karo Gugung who live in the mountains. Although they are different due to topographical reasons, and maybe also because of religious factors, they have one common origin, namely Karo.

Regarding administrative boundaries, in 1950 a debate arose over the merging of the Tapanuli and East Sumatra Districts in an area called the Province of North Sumatra. In 1952, Tanah Karo and Langkat were merged into Aceh Province and since 1956, all three were merged into North Sumatra Province. The formation of the Province of Aceh minus Tanah Karo and Langkat from the Province of North Sumatra only occurred after the issuance of Law No. 24 of 1956 dated December 7, 1956 regarding the Establishment of an Autonomous District in Aceh Province. Previously, the Emergency Law No. 7 of 1956 dated November 14, 1956 regarding the Establishment of Regency Autonomous Regions in North Sumatra Province (Damanik, 2018; Drafting Team, 1994).

At the time of the formation of the Province of North Sumatra, there was a rejection of territorial mergers. It's like the former Karasidenan Tapanuli who requested that they remain a separate province from the province of North Sumatra. Likewise, Tanah Karo and Langkat districts refused to be merged into Aceh Province. This condition made the Governor of North Sumatra, S.M. Amin experienced internal shocks because he had to resolve all these territorial issues according to President Soekarno's instructions. It is understandable that such rejections occurred because of administrative boundaries that straddled the cultural boundaries of the colonial government's heritage.

Because of this, ethnic groups are very dynamic, as described by Nagata (1974) and van den Berghe (1967). Ethnic groups are social constructions that are intentionally made (a social construct or a choice to be made) which are formed based on a cognitive process to determine the basis of their identity. Ethnic identity in society is not something 'single'

but tends to be 'plural' (not single but multiple ethnic identities). Constructivists, for example, view that ethnic groups are instruments of personal reference (personal reference) based on a common identity, as well as being a source of motivation and behavior (motivation and behavior source) in the social life of their ethnic citizens. As a social construction, ethnic identity can undergo changes and adapt changes to suit their social identity. In a combinative view, ethnicity is seen as a social radar that directs and guides ethnic groups to understand their social world. This social world is an interest that has the core of social opportunity. As mentioned by Perret (2010), the emergence of the label 'Malay and Batak' simultaneously in the 16th century, departed from the fact that the label 'Batak' emerged as a complement to the label 'Malay'. The 'Malay' space considers itself 'cultured' and includes all non-Malays who are seen as ignorant, rude and even cannibalistic, under the term 'Batak' with a derogatory connotation.

It was in this interior that the Malay community obtained the elements needed to survive such as forest commodities, slaves, workers and also wives. These 'Malays' inland people acted as intermediaries between the hinterland population and foreign traders. Therefore, the terms 'Batak and Malay' simultaneously emerged from the outside (foreign creation), both of which became an evasive identity. Inland people who appeared on the coast, especially traders, met with Islamic traders since the 15th century and converted to Islam. Then, because the new identity was considered to be more 'civilized', it was elegantly developed to distinguish itself from the rural community, which incidentally is also its origin. The main differentiator that is used as the basis is the giving and affirmation of the 'Batak' label to rural communities as uncivilized people.

The term 'Batak and Malay' becomes very vague when it is used to refer to the populations called 'Batak and Malay' itself. The confusion in ethnic Malays is about the membership of the Malays themselves, such as in Deli, Langkat, Serdang, Pegadai, Tebingtingi, Asahan, Batubara and Labuhanbatu. The Malays in this area come from the Simalungun and Karo people who have converted to Islam before the colonialism period. In the period of colonialism, identity based on religion became one of the factors in determining administrative boundaries which were seen as ethnic boundaries. Likewise, the evasive concept of 'Batak' when used in society is said to be part of that ethnic identity. In fact, the Simalungun, Mandailing, Angkola, Karo, Pakpak and Toba people actually reject this label. However, the exception is the Toba people who accept and are proud of the label because of the 'benefits' obtained by putting the label on other ethnic groups.

#### IV. Conclusion

When referring to Marsden (2008) the population of the ethnic groups he mentioned on his 1774 visit to the west coast of Sumatra were: Ankola (Angkola), Padambola (Padangbolak), Mandiling (Mandailing) and Tubba (Toba) consisting of Silindong (Silindung), Butar and Sinkel (Singkil). He also mentions Carrow (Karo) who is different from Tubba (Toba). While Anderson on his visit to the east coast of Sumatra in 1823 mentioned the population of ethnic groups such as: Mandiling (Mandailing), Kataran from Semilongan, Pappak (Pakpak), Tubba (Toba), Karau-karau (Karo), Kapik (possibly Gayo) and Alas. In the end, the methods used such as Marsden (2008) and Anderson (1971) and others and of course the most recent ones such as Viner (1980) and Perret (2010) deserve consideration for mentioning ethnic groups in North Sumatra, plus ethnic groups such as the 'Lubu people' who have never been mentioned in the anthropological literature. On that basis, it is worth questioning the origin of the uniformity of the Batak and Malay ethnicities as in the anthropological literature, because basically it is difficult to



homogenize. In the end, ethnographic research on ethnic groups in North Sumatra is still needed by involving cross-disciplines such as history, anthropology, archeology and also linguistics.

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