

# Becoming Bruneian

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*Negotiating cultural and linguistic identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*

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Doctor of Philosophy

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## **Certificate of Original Authorship**

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that this thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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# Negara Brunei Darussalam



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## List of abbreviations and acronyms

A-level	Advanced Level
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AS-level	Advanced Subsidiary Level
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BCGCE	Brunei-Cambridge General Certificate of Education
BIA	Brunei Investment Agency
BICS	Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills
BMA	British Military Administration
BNE	Brunei English (Language)
BNM	Brunei Malay (Language)
BrSE	British Standard English
BSB	Bandar Seri Begawan (Capital City of Brunei Darussalam)
CALP	Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency
CfBT	Centre for British Teachers
D1	Daughter of R1
DV	<i>Deo Volente</i> (God Willing)
EIL	English as an International Language
ELL	English Language Learning
ELT	English Language Teaching
ENL	English as a Native Language
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
H1	Husband of P6
Hj.	<i>Haji</i> (an honorific title for a male who has performed the Hajj pilgrimage)
HM	His Majesty (the Sultan of Brunei)
HREC	Human Research Ethics Committee, UTS

IC	Identity Card
ICJ	International Commission of Jurists
IDB	Islamic Development Bank
INT	Interview
IMF	International Monetary Fund
IRK	Islamic Religious/Revealed Knowledge
KDN	<i>Keselamatan Dalam Negeri</i> (The Internal Security Department)
KP	<i>Kad Pengenalan</i> (Identity Card)
L1	First Language
lit.	Literally
MIB	<i>Melayu Islam Beraja</i> (Malay Islamic Monarchy)
MIM	Malay Islamic Monarchy
MoRA	Ministry of Religious Affairs, Brunei
MTeach	Master of Teaching
NAM	Non-Aligned Movement
NEST	Native English-Speaker Teacher
NNEST	Non-native English-Speaker Teacher
NNST	Non-native Speaker Teacher
NST	Native-Speaker Teacher
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
O-level	Ordinary Level
P	Adult Participant
PP	Pilot Participant
PC	Privy Council
PCE	Primary Certificate of Education
Pg.	<i>Pengiran</i> (a Bruneian honorific title of nobility)
PR	Permanent Residency / Permanent Resident
R1	Researcher

RP	Received Pronunciation
RTB	<i>Radio Televysen Brunei</i> (Radio Television Brunei)
SLA	Second Language Acquisition
SP	Student Participant
SPL1	Student Participant Liaison
SPN-21	<i>Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke 21</i> (21 <sup>st</sup> Century National Education System)
St.	Saint
STE	Standard English
STM	Standard Malay
TEML	Teaching English as a Missionary Language
TESOL	Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages
TL	Target Language
UBD	<i>Universiti Brunei Darussalam</i> (University of Brunei Darussalam)
UFO	Unidentified Flying Object
UN	United Nations
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNISSA	<i>Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali</i> (Sultan Sharif Ali Islamic University)
UK	United Kingdom
USA	United States of America
UTS	University of Technology, Sydney

## Glossary of non-English terms

<i>Bahasa</i>	language
<i>baju kurong</i>	a long, loose tunic worn over a full-length skirt, usually in bright, floral fabric
<i>Berangin</i>	windy or lacking in conviction
<i>biar baringgut dicabut inda mau</i>	although pulled, cannot be shaken or swayed (lit. Let [it] shake, but pulled out it cannot be)
<i>biawak punggung</i>	monitor lizard or lazy man
<i>Bibiran</i>	lips and lips or too talkative
<i>budi bahasa</i>	manners and etiquette (culturally linked to Malay)
<i>Bumiputra</i>	a Malaysian of indigenous Malay origin (lit. sons of the soil)
<i>calak Brunei</i>	Bruneian identity
<i>Campur</i>	mixing
<i>cara Brunei</i>	the Bruneian way
<i>cara Melayu</i>	a two-piece outfit consisting of a long tunic and loose pants worn by males
<i>Cina Muara</i>	a Chinese person who exhibits Malay culture and qualities, but invariably lives in or originates from the Muara area
<i>Daerah</i>	district
<i>darjah</i>	form class
<i>dwibahasa</i>	bilingual

<i>fatwa</i>	a ruling on a point of Islamic law
<i>gharbzadegi</i>	west-struckness; occidentosis; westoxification
<i>gnothi seauton</i>	know thyself
<i>go maire tú!</i>	may you have a long life!
<i>go raibh mile maith agaibh</i>	thank you very much
<i>junjung ziarah</i>	a ceremony for a royal visit
<i>kain tenunan</i>	Bruneian brocade featuring gold and silver thread
<i>kaling</i>	a pejorative word for a person of Indian origin
<i>kampong</i>	Village
<i>Kampong Ayer</i>	Water Village
<i>kemukaan</i>	face or reputation
<i>Keselamatan Dalam Negeri</i>	the internal security department
<i>nom de plume</i>	pen name
<i>Negara Brunei Darussalam</i>	Nation of Brunei, the Abode of Peace
<i>Melayu</i>	Malay
<i>Melayu Islam Beraja</i>	Malay Islamic Monarchy
<i>Mufti</i>	Islamic scholar
<i>Muslimah</i>	female Muslim
<i>orang puteh</i>	white person

<i>orang puts</i>	anglicised plural slang version of <i>orang puteh</i>
<i>Pengenalan</i>	identity
<i>Perambahan</i>	proverb
<i>Poklen</i>	member of anti-establishment group associated with Brunei's Water Village
<i>pra sekolah</i>	pre-school
<i>Sabar</i>	restraint or reserve
<i>seperti kacang lupakan kulit</i>	like a peanut that has forgotten its shell
<i>sinjang</i>	a short decorative sarong-type garment, featuring traditional Bruneian motifs, worn by Malay males
<i>temet nosce</i>	know thyself
<i>terima kasih</i>	thank you
<i>Titah</i>	speech by His Majesty the Sultan
<i>tudung</i> (alternative spelling: <i>tudong</i> )	headscarf
<i>Yang Di-Pertuan</i>	Head of State (lit. he who is lord)
<i>Wawasan</i>	vision
<i>Ziarah</i>	royal visit when cash gifts are distributed
<i>Zikir</i>	chant (lit.); strong adherence to Islamic ideals

## Abstract

As the world has become increasingly globalised, long-held understandings of ethnic, national, religious, cultural, and linguistic identities have been uprooted and diffused. This has resulted in a 21<sup>st</sup> century re-engagement with the nebulous concept of identity. This ethnographic study explores how the competing forces of essentialising and hybridising social constructs impact the personal identities' construction of a group of 16 young people in Brunei Darussalam – a sultanate on the island of Borneo. It juxtaposes identity-as-performative with identity-as-assignation in light of the country's powerful ideology of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB), translating as Malay Islamic Monarchy. This state apparatus seeks to confer and promote a triad of politically desirable identities on all Bruneians in an attempt to preclude the need for agentic identity construction at an individual level, something that is regarded as potentially destabilising. MIB emphasises Malay language and cultural norms as assertions of ethnicity and nationalism. However, Brunei has a rich linguistic ecology in which English, as one of its languages, plays a key role as the dominant medium of education, posing a linguistic dilemma. Drawing on qualitative data, generated by extended participant observation, informal interviews and content analysis, this study seeks to uncover how participants negotiate their multiple identities amid such contradictory influences. What emerges from four-fold thematic analysis (politico-economic; linguistic; religious; socio-cultural) is not a coercion of fixed identities, but a complex dynamic web of accommodation and reconciliation. Participants reveal how they actively calibrate their levels of commitment to or subversion of their many selves to achieve personalised local-global synthesis. In this way, they perform Bruneianness using all of their cultural and linguistic resources.



# CHAPTER 1

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*Into the Identity Vortex:*

*an introduction*

*...the self is not given to us... we have to  
create ourselves as a work of art*

Foucault, 1984:351

## Chapter 1: Introduction

*P*engenalan, identity, 身分 (*Shēnfèn*), هوية (*huia*), *féiniúlacht* are all words for the same concept, one that is central to this study. Malay, English, Mandarin, Arabic, and Irish are the linguistic codes that impact on and feature to varying extents throughout the research process because of their influences on the lives of the participants and the researcher. These are the languages in which we live. Our exposure to them has contributed to making us who we are now and are becoming by colouring the ways we think, speak and communicate. The Irish Gaelic word *féiniúlacht* begins with the word *féin*, meaning ‘self’ and translates as selfhood, the state of having a distinct, singular identity, but this is problematic if we accept the view that we are perpetually becoming; who we are at any given moment is ephemeral and therefore difficult to define. Consequently, the issue of how, or even whether, we can know ourselves or develop a coherent sense of who we are, is one that has become ever more pertinent of late due to accelerated globalisation. Yet the notion that there are distinct worldviews, qualities and practices that differentiate us and make us distinctively ourselves, and that this is somehow linked to the places we inhabit and the languages we speak, prevails. Hence, this research explores what a group of young people in a Southeast Asian nation called Brunei Darussalam say about the process of becoming themselves in a very particular set of circumstances.

From an official standpoint, people in Brunei are frequently reminded of the importance of “upholding and preserving national identity” (OneBrunei.com, 2004; Kon, 2012). The local expressions *Calak Brunei* or sometimes *Cara Brunei* are defined by a onetime director of the Academy for Brunei Studies, Pg. Dr. Hj. Abu Bakar bin Pg. Hj. Sarifuddin, as meaning,

[...] identity or image.

It is related to the Brunei way of life from the perspective of language, the way they dress, culture and religion.

The concept of a uniquely Bruneian identity is one that should be imparted at an early age, not only through the family, but also through educational institutions.

BruDirect.com (2004).

An eminent historian in Brunei characterises it as “the ‘Bruneian way’ of conflict resolution through dialogue and compromise” (Hussainmiya, 2002:16). Succumbing to this has resulted in Brunei’s contemporary citizenry being malleable in his view. This has major implications for my study because of its suggestion that Bruneians will identify according to the dictates of the country’s pervasive national ideology or whatever has been suggested or prescribed to them. One of the main foci is the impact that this ideology exerts on the participant Bruneians on an individual level, given its ubiquity and educationally-wielded power on a macro level. By recording what they say about their own identification processes, the study seeks to uncover whether in fact they are as tractable as has been suggested or as they may seem outwardly.

### **1.1 The search for self: then and now**

In the 1999 science fiction epic ‘The Matrix’, the ancient Greek aphorism *gnothi seauton* or ‘know thyself’ is inscribed on a plaque above a door in the Oracle’s house. It is rendered in the film in non-traditional Latin as *Temet Nosce*. This dictum has been variously attributed to ancient sages, including Pythagoras, Socrates and Thales, and it is open to a multiplicity of interpretations. Knowing oneself means venturing into the veritable vortex that is identity and it is clearly an issue that has preoccupied some since time immemorial. In recent times, however, it has taken on a new urgency as we now live in an “era of identity... full of sound and fury” (Bauman, 2001:129) as we seek to locate, discover and create ourselves amid the maelstrom of life in the complex 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Life today is characterised by an accelerated rate of change and unprecedented innovation; by-products of our human ingenuity. As a result, many longstanding, erstwhile, stable, defining constructs have fallen victim to the globalising and individualising forces that

abound (Bauman, 2001:129). Among these are markers previously regarded as ‘given’ or indisputable, such as nationality and ethnicity. The predicted decline or even simply the interrogation of these, so widely accepted as to go unnoticed, identities has triggered a crisis resulting in a “veritable discursive explosion” (Hall, 1996:1) around the whole concept of identity. The issue is being problematised, denaturalised, thrust into this era of flux where it is undergoing reconceptualisation based on changing conditions. Identities are no longer only regarded as fixed ascriptions, but are increasingly being regarded as dynamic, evolving, often unexpected, to an extent almost unknowable or indeterminate, requiring higher levels of tolerance for ambiguity and plurality.

Contesting their long-standing indisputability and status in the first place, Lin argues for a deeper problematization of the very existence of identity-as-concept, given that it is not “innocent”, but rather based on a presupposition of certain “cultural forms of knowing, acting and orientations towards social relations” (Lin, 2008:2). These are not necessarily neutral or universal, though they are often portrayed as being so due to their being embedded in dominant discourses. Identity favours those who are in privileged positions and who are consequently equipped to partake in its construction to their own advantage (Lin, 2008: 1-2). High levels of education in general and the English language as its main mediator have placed all of the research participants in this study in such a position. Engagement with conscious identity building may in the past have been the prerogative of such elite groups. However, the disequilibrium of contemporary life is making it more mainstream and of more widespread concern.

Acknowledging Hall’s “discursive explosion” (Hall, 1996:1), Brubaker & Cooper (2000:1) argue that it is time to go “beyond ‘identity’”, regarding the term itself as “too ambiguous, too torn between ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ meanings, essentialist connotations and constructivist qualifiers” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:2). They question its fluidity in the face of “the ways in which self-understandings may harden, congeal and crystallize” and its being constructed in spite of “the sometimes coercive force of external identifications” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:1). These concerns, especially the latter one, are particularly relevant to the Bruneian locality where the national ideology is becoming ever more forceful. It aims

to act as a homogenising agent, prescribing ascriptive identities to avert the possibility that people might construct identities other than those deemed desirable and in so doing raise the risk of social instability, endangering the political status quo.

This is one of the aspects of identity that also concerned Michel Foucault. He saw identity as a kind of trap, “as a form of subjugation and a way of exercising power over people and preventing them from moving outside fixed boundaries” (O’Farrell, 2005:140). He therefore favoured its dissolution as a form of “counter-historicizing” (Landy, 2015:71) or challenging historically-derived constructs, believing that, “ ‘Antiquarian history’ ... seeks the continuity of soil, language, and urban life in which our present is rooted,” but in doing so it can “block creativity in support of the laws of fidelity” (Foucault, 1977:162). Brunei’s ideology is considered by some to be an exercise in historicization, deriving much of its legitimacy from its proclaimed antiquity.

These strong reservations about the deployment of ‘identity’ as an analytical concept, one that is “riddled with ambiguity, riven with contradictory meanings, and encumbered by reifying connotations” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:34), are illuminating. Nevertheless, identity’s discursive ubiquity and currency cannot be denied. Consideration will however be given to the tripartite of alternatives proposed. These are: identification and categorisation, self-understanding and social location, and commonality, connectedness, groupness (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:14-21). They may become useful in combating some of the elusiveness of identity.

This introduction gives an overview of the circumstances and occurrences that gave rise to this research. It introduces the locality which is central to, and co-constitutive of, the identities construction process and outlines the research questions that guided the study. It also marks the beginning of my writing myself into my identity as ethnographer where the acts of writing are performatives in the Barthesian sense (Barthes, 1977) and these also constitute an integral part of the research. This approach and its rationale are explained in more depth later in this Chapter and in Chapter 2.

## **1.2 Identity: Entering the vortex**

Identity is an issue that is at once compelling and elusive. It is abstract, yet lived out daily in the details of our routine lives. From the longstanding essentialist perspective, we betray and express our unitary ‘inner’ selves in the minutia of our everyday lives when we are arguably most ourselves. Essentialism can be defined as, “The position that the attributes and behaviour of socially defined groups can be determined and explained by reference to cultural and/or biological characteristics believed to be inherent to the group” (Bucholtz, 2003:400). Seen from an alternative social-constructivist angle, we become ourselves through our repeated quotidian activities, making our identities performatives in the sense promulgated by Butler (1988; 1990). Although this study veers very much towards the latter position in its orientation and analysis, it does so while acknowledging that old essentialisms die hard. This is especially the case in a situation where essentialised categories are being constantly advocated and reinforced. Thus some accommodation of both positions is required. Writing in relation to the situation in Vietnam, one of Brunei’s southeast Asian neighbours, Phan argues that, “Non-essentialist views alone are insufficient to understand identities” (Phan, 2008:13). She supports this contention using the example of post-9/11 America where the unifying effect of reasserted national identity made this construct “visible, tangible, and real” (Phan, 2008:13).

Traditional ways of looking at concepts such as identity draw power not only from their longevity, but also from their consequent embeddedness and relative definability due to their stability. Much of this is due to their having become naturalised as existing in these forms. The allure of newer ways of conceptualising identity comes from their fluidity and dynamism, but this is also tinged by uncertainty and ambiguity. This research locality has until recently had a slower pace of life and greater insularity than might be the case elsewhere, further necessitating the consideration of both stances. Furthermore, a culture of acceptance rather than problematisation is encouraged. As a result, new ways of conceptualising, regardless of how persuasive they may be, do not easily supersede the old. Instead they tend to achieve an uneasy coexistence, posing not an either/or dilemma, but creating new possibilities in the vacillation between the allure of the former and the longevous power of the latter.

This research study has been inspired by contradictions and my own sense of having become a “Nowherian” (Iyer, 2001:23) or even possibly an ‘Anywherian’. This underscores the importance of place in the construction of social identity and the “unmistakably geographical” nature of the “language of social existence” which connects people to their environment (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010:6, citing Mills, 1993). This / these “discourse/s of place and the place/s of discourse” should not be overlooked (Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010:1). I am drawn to Gee’s comprehensive explication of the term ‘discourse’ for its concord with the research data that have unfolded in this study. For him,

Discourses are ways of being in the world, or forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes. A Discourse is a sort of identity kit which comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk and often write so as to take on a particular social role that others will recognize.

Gee (1996:127)

### **1.2.1 Contradictions**

The world is inherently contradictory – a condition that sustains its constant development. In a microcosmic society like the research locality contradictions are thrown into sharp relief and become inordinately apparent. As a teacher of English in this locality, over time I became increasingly aware of the conflicting forces at play; many of them related to the role of the English language in the lives of young people such as the participants in this research.

Ever since the country regained independence in 1984 and established a bilingual system of education, known as *dwibahasa*, English has been given an increasingly prominent position as the medium of education. The adoption of such a system was motivated by concerns with both its equalising potential internally and its pragmatism in facilitating greater engagement internationally (Jones, 1996:123 and 128). *Dwibahasa* and its subsequent replacement, *Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke 21* (SPN-21, 21<sup>st</sup> Century National



Education System), are in keeping with the National Vision 2035 of having “an educated, highly-skilled and accomplished people,” with the latter having been specifically tailored to actualising that vision. Success in achieving this “will be measured by the highest international standards” (Wawasan Brunei 2035, 2008:12). These external benchmarks have created a need for facility in the international language that English has become. However, those who succeed academically and speak English well are often treated with ambivalence and accused of showing off or seen as being disloyal to their heritage. In a similar vein, the desirability of developing critical-thinking skills is stressed (Roslan, 2010; Kamit, 2014c) against a backdrop of a highly-censored and self-censoring media, as well as a tacit understanding that the political status quo and the national ideology are not subject to question or criticism. Young people are therefore encouraged to acquire these skills, but to apply them only to external or non-controversial internal issues.

The cityscape of Brunei’s capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, is dotted with signs promoting the use of Malay, the official national language (Appendix 1), while its place in the education system continues to be eroded by the even earlier introduction and greater dominance of English-medium instruction. This has taken place under the latest incarnation of the bilingual system, SPN-21, which has replaced the *dwibahasa* system since January 2009.

Paradoxically, the national ideology, *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) which undergirds the entire social framework attempts systematic homogenisation by telling people who they are or should aspire to being, all the while excluding English. Being Malay, Islamic and a monarchist are not identities that are associated with English or performed in English in this locality; though their performance in English is not precluded. Yet even the acronym for this ideology, MIB, is rendered invariably in Malay when it occurs in English language texts. It never becomes Malay Islamic Monarchy or MIM.

Brunei clearly wants its citizens to be able to speak English well, but ideally to do so without being imbued by any of its cultural ‘baggage’. However, culture is one of the key aspects of both language learning and language use along with identity itself and the community in which it takes place. These aspects are “interrelated in complex ways, and

[...] are multiple, shifting and constantly reconstructed (Nunan, 2013:173). Taking the view that “culture and language co-evolve” (Halliday, 1993:11), language cannot be learned or used without some transmission or mediation of its cultural components. Asking young people to learn English and operate educationally in English without being touched by it culturally, is by extension asking the impossible. The research explores how participants negotiate the push and pull of these paradoxes and the extent to which they are aware, even subconsciously, of them and the influences they exert over their lives. It looks at what they say about who they feel they are, since, in Spivak’s words, “Making sense of ourselves is what produces identity” (Spivak, 1993:179).

### **1.2.2 Where is ‘home’?**

As a long-term, expatriate resident in the research locality, I developed a growing desire to belong there; a feeling that was strengthened by the sense of alienation and ‘outsiderness’ I felt increasingly on my trips to my homeland, Ireland. This was tempered by a strong awareness of my eternal ‘strangerhood’ in my adopted home; regardless of tenure, my inescapable status as an *orang puteh* (Malay for ‘white person’) outsider. It has been posited that the whole notion of identity stems from a “crisis of belonging” (Bauman, 2004:20-21). My personal identity crisis sensitised me to similar yet contrary dilemmas being experienced by my local colleagues and students. Although they were at home in the most commonly accepted meaning of the word, this did not make them immune to such quandaries. This fascinated me as it suggested that identity was not necessarily rooted in, or inextricably linked to, one specific place as I had previously accepted uncritically. These people were at home in their country of birth where they presumably belonged, yet they were still seeking themselves. Could it be that, “Perhaps home is not a place, but simply an irrevocable condition?” (Baldwin, 1956:88).

My own sense of displacement at having become a deterritorialised ‘Nowherian’ (Iyer, 2001:23), also made me conscious of how the extended period of time I had spent outside of my birth country had changed me; made me less Irish or more than Irish. These changes had been attitudinal, sartorial, and gustatory. No linguistic change was required of me, except the fortuitous linguistic enrichment resulting from contact with the languages of my various abodes – something that almost always remained optional in terms of my linguistic

performance. However, for those around me, their extended periods of study abroad meant not only all the changes I had experienced, but the necessity of also living through and in the English language rather than their native or first one. According to an oft-cited Czech proverb, “You live a new life for every new language you speak. If you know only one language, you only live once” (10<sup>th</sup> European day, 2011). Living two or more lives simultaneously can be challenging however, especially if and when there are conflicting expectations of an individual exerted by each of them.

I began to wonder what it means to ‘be’ Bruneian; what, if anything, sets them apart from others in the region or in the world; what makes them, to use a favourite local designation, ‘unique’. The word unique is itself a synonym for identity in its most absolute sense which fits with the nature of life in Brunei. Of late, similar discussions have taken place about the nature of, for example, Englishness (Kenny, 2010; Tombs, 2014); Englishness versus Britishness (Harris, 2014); Irishness (Cheng, 2003:28-61; Zenker, 2013); and Malaysianness (Gabriel, 2011:349). Some around me were returning from sojourns overseas where they had spent time studying and relating affectively to their new environments. It seemed that their privileged mobility (Pennycook, 2012:25) had changed them and altered their perceptions of their contemporary selves on their return to their original abode (Pennycook, 2012: 17). Others were eager to embark on such journeys, to embrace new possibilities on faraway shores that are simultaneously alien and familiar through longstanding political association and the past scholarship of compatriots from the locality.

### **1.2.3 The unshelled peanut**

I recall a critical incident (Flanagan, 1954) involving a young, local colleague who sat next to me in the English staffroom for a number of years. At the time she had recently returned from an extended period in the United Kingdom where she had completed her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. On her first day she came to work dressed in a traditional *baju kurong* (a long, loose tunic worn over a full-length skirt, usually in bright, floral fabric), but without a *tudung* (headscarf) which is compulsory for all Muslim female teachers as well as all Muslim females employed in any government workplace. She acted as if she was unaware of, or perhaps indifferent to, this regulation. This ‘transgression’ did not go

unnoticed among the rest of the staff; locals and expatriates alike. However, nobody said anything to her. Such silence can be a “rich and powerful tool of communication” that should be recognised as “a legitimate part of the communicative system” (Jaworski, 1993:xii). It is also very much in keeping with Malay norms when silence is maintained to show respect and adherence to the concept of *sabar* (restraint or reserve), especially in potentially confrontational situations (Teo, 1996:372 and 376-377). Verbal directness is considered uncouth and indicative of low breeding, but is tolerated better when coming from non-Malays. In fact, it is almost expected of expatriates, giving me licence to ask.

On her second day, she was still without a *tudung* and, as we were walking along together, I tentatively enquired if she was a Muslim. She told me that she was, but seemed puzzled that I had asked. I explained that her not wearing a *tudung* led me to ask. Silently, I was impressed and a little bemused at what I considered her audacity. She was both amused and slightly defensive. By this time, word about her and her ‘errant’ behaviour had spread throughout the campus. Since she and I shared an office, others began to ask me about my impressions of her. One male teacher from another department remarked that she was “*seperti kacang lupakan kulit*” which, literally translated from Malay, means ‘like a peanut that has forgotten its shell’. He felt that she had abandoned her own culture and her origins due to her exposure to western ways while overseas that she had somehow lost or had deliberately shrugged off her identity as a Bruneian, if indeed this is even possible. It may be that participants “experience the kinds of identity transformations associated with the naturalistic contexts” (Block, 2007:6) of the British or Australian locations they have inhabited or will inhabit while studying outside of Brunei.

My colleague’s position as a teacher of English could only have exacerbated the situation since it meant that much of her professional interaction was in that language rather than her Malay first language (L1). Reporting on research carried out in neighbouring Malaysia, Lee recounts a similar reaction communicated by one of her participants. She (Mariam) feels that anyone who uses English in local contexts “may give the impression that one has embraced western culture or is ‘westernized’, therefore rejecting one’s identity, which directly or indirectly means one’s language and religion” (Lee, 2003:148). Another

(Azlina) refers to the association of the English language with Christianity (Lee, 2003:148), inferring that the habitual use of English could only be detrimental to Islamic fervour. This sensitivity is suggestive of a binary conceptualisation of identity as an either-or rather than allowing for multiples where the presence of one necessarily compromises the other. The perceived temerity of my colleague in neglecting to don the required *tudung*, the most outward sign of Islam for a female, in direct contravention of well-known workplace ‘rules’, may have stemmed from similar fears and associations in Brunei. Her ‘western self’, performed over her many years abroad, came back and tried to exist as her local self without negotiation or compromise. She belonged “yet seemed foreignised” (Phan, 2008:1). This suggests that, despite the considerable reaches of globalisation, local places can still determine and/or curtail identity performances. The same behaviour (not wearing a *tudung*) that gave her high visibility as a non-conformist in her home country conversely had enabled her to blend, to be invisible in the UK where wearing it would have ‘marked’ her as a *Muslimah* (female Muslim). Now years later, the said individual has reclaimed her Bruneianness; one of her many selves within the self. While we can now laugh together about this incident, it has had a lasting impact on me and on the direction my research has taken, allowing me to see close up, and through our friendship to become involved in her struggle to somehow perform her new changed self back in her homeland.

#### **1.2.4 Bilingual policy coming of age**

From an English language teaching (ELT) and learning (ELL) standpoint, I was also witnessing an unfolding situation in which English was becoming more widespread and local. My first teaching position in the country was back in 1992 during the early years of the bilingual system. Then I experienced firsthand a feeling of total disconnection from the outside world, relying on letters to keep in touch with friends and family. In those pre-mobile-telecommunication, pre-Internet days, the country guarded its insularity fiercely, allowing only the state-run Radio Television Brunei (RTB) to broadcast. There were only two channels at that time and satellite dish installation was prohibited. Then English seemed more like an obstacle, something students had to overcome and master in order to access the English-medium curriculum from Year 4 (primary) onwards with little support or reinforcement available through exposure to the language outside of the classroom.

Consequently only a small number succeeded academically, usually those from privileged backgrounds or those with a strong natural linguistic facility.

When I returned in 1997, the education system was a teenager that came of age during my stay and Brunei was opening up to the world due to the advent of the Internet, advanced telecommunication systems, and somewhat reluctantly-allowed access to international television channels. The position of English had also changed; it had become much more organic and ‘normal’ in everyday life there. It was also becoming the norm that anybody who could succeed academically was enabled to study abroad; it was no longer an elitist prerogative. This led to the issue of how this now commonplace engagement with English is impacting the self-concept of young people and colouring their sense of who they are. They had grown up with English in their lives; all striving to achieve high levels of academic British Standard English (BrSE) in order to qualify for tertiary education, preferably outside of Brunei. They routinely perform their student and professional identities in the English language; something that grants them a privileged position in Bruneian society where, “Knowledge of standard English is related to power and economic status, and levels of educational attainment” (Saxena & Sercombe, 2002:258). Motha (2014) reminds us that while the existence of any form of Standard English (STE) is generally presented and taken as a fact, it is merely hypothetical, a theoretical construct. Nevertheless, in post-protectorate Brunei, continued reliance on external British assessments means BrSE is the privileged variety. This highlights the deep-rootedness of language ideologies within frameworks of race and empire (Motha, 2014, Chapter 5, The invention of standard English, para.1). English has by now also become a local language, so entrenched that a nativised variety, Brunei English (BNE), has emerged (Cane, 1994; O’Hara-Davies, 2010). This variety is “often the more appropriate choice in the case of oral and social interaction,” as it would be less likely to “alienate them from those around them as STE might do” (O’Hara-Davies, 2010:415). Speaking BNE allows them to identify with fellow Bruneians whilst still speaking English.

This all took place against the backdrop of the ever-increasing global interconnectivity and tolerance that characterised the first decade of the new millennium; a time when the

discourse of the ‘global village’ emerged and seemed slightly less utopian. Whilst being very much concerned about the specific dynamics at play in Brunei-as-locality, the research may have given rise to data that are transferable or suggestive to other localities, their implications possibly stretching beyond Brunei’s borders. The study may be of particular relevance to those involved in education policy planning in nearby countries that are also living coloniality and where the choices of which languages to instate can be fraught with both politics and emotion.

### **1.3 Ethnographically writing**

In deference to the complexity and circuitousness of the issue under study, a qualitative approach is clearly indicated. This allows for the plumbing of the depths, given that every utterance conveys much more than its constituent words embody. The very act of engaging in research of this kind is a feature of participants’ lives in and through English and is an indication of how our (their and my) experiences have become interconnected and mutually influential.

Data emerge primarily from the informal interviews, capturing what participants say about themselves as Bruneians at one point in time. Initial readings of the transcripts, accompanied by careful listening, suggested a thematic approach to textual analysis. Combined, the emergent themes construct a holistic sense of life in Brunei, impact directly on identities’ construction, and also address the three tenets of the MIB ideology. The four broad themes to categorise data are: politico-economic, linguistic, religious, and socio-cultural. Interview data are supported by in-depth knowledge of the day-to-day lives of participants gleaned from long-term observation and participation in the locality. Some content analysis is also deemed necessary to give a sense of what is being disseminated, reinforced, or prohibited in public forums there. This is ongoing throughout the research writing phase of the study, mirroring the momentum of my construction of my own ethnographic-writer identity.

In keeping with the ethnographic orientation, data analysis is inductive. Emergent themes are broadly categorised into four key identity areas as part of the ‘writerly’ task of constructing a coherent narrative, characterised by “creative synthesis” (Patton, 2002:41). This in no way seeks to suggest that the selected categories are delimitative, rather their overlap and interconnectedness is repeatedly indicated and their use is in the interests of clarity, not a validation of their extant reality. The writing itself is “part of the process of qualitative investigation” and “becomes very much an unfolding story in which the writer gradually makes sense, not only of her data, but of the total experience of which it is an artefact” (Holliday, 2007:121-122). In this way the account departs from the traditional avoidance of the first person aimed at creating disembodied academic prose. Although my own simultaneous performance of researcher-writer identity is central to the work, nonetheless I depart from that particular convention somewhat timorously. As is the case of many essentialist constructs, it has become embedded in my academic consciousness and requires deliberate effort to dispel. Paradoxically, I am more naturally drawn to reflexive texts, the use of vignettes, and auto-ethnographic elements. Therefore, the incorporation of occasional auto-ethnographic vignettes that tell some of my “relational and institutional stories” (Ellis & Bochner, 2000:739) is aimed at enriching the ethnography and making the methodology more reflexive (Humphreys, 2005:853). However, I remain mindful to the point of wariness of the danger of the writing becoming self-indulgent or, even worse, narcissistic. This dilemma is one facing any writer who engages in qualitative writing, as flouting what has long been accepted is not without some risk.

Acknowledging this risk, Starfield calls for the interrogation of the tacit “rules” that have long regulated academic writing, since these may only become apparent when a transgression or defiance of expectation has occurred (Starfield, 2015:260). She also stresses that even experienced authors whose credentials are well-established can have their authorial identity challenged when producing texts that “blur distinctions between the personal and theoretical” (Starfield, 2015:260, citing Kleinsasser, 2000:156). This is an issue that has been receiving more attention of late as the volume of more personalised qualitative research writing grows and demands ‘validation’ or acceptance. This is not always forthcoming, although there is a sense that its proliferation and gathering



momentum make it inevitable. Even among its proponents there are some caveats being applied. Canagarajah cautions that adopting a reflexive tone should never be regarded as “an end in itself” and should not be chosen merely because it is a current trend (Canagarajah, 2005b:309). Instead, he advocates the use of “thick-description” to produce prose that is ‘writerly’, enabling “readers to make their own inferences and read behind the lines by seeing surprising connections between the context and the researcher” (Canagarajah, 2005b:312-313). This is the approach that this study has sought to follow. Accepting that, “All researchers fall somewhere within the space between complete insiders and complete outsiders,” and need to be responsible for their positioning within this space (Kerstetter, 2012:101, citing Serrant-Green, 2002) means remaining ever mindful of their own impact on the research process and its outcomes. Of the four positional categories put forward by Banks, that of the “external-insider” is the most appealing, especially in terms of the conferring of the status of “‘adopted’ insider” by the research community (Banks, 2016:141). I, however, refute Banks’ suggestion that this requires a rejection of the researcher’s own cultural “values, beliefs, and knowledge claims” (Banks, 2016:141) as this is both unnecessary and is open to misconstrual, bordering on charges of being patronising or of ‘Othering’ of the group concerned. Doing so could also construct the researcher-writer as an ‘imposter’ in the discourse (Blair, 2012:11). What is clear above all is the importance of maintaining the centrality of “the ideas being discussed, not the person producing the text” (Nelson, 2005:315).

Discussing the use of the first person ‘I’ in academic writing, Pennycook warns that this in itself does not guarantee reflexivity (Pennycook, 2005:299). He proposes going beyond this towards “understanding the centrality of writing **as** research” [emphasis added] (Pennycook, 2005:302). He calls for “*constitutive reflexivity*” (Pennycook, 2005:300, citing Macbeth, 2001:49) wherein the research writing is both a part of and a creator of the research as well as simultaneously writing the researcher into being textually, making the ‘I’ a performed identity (Pennycook, 2005:301 and 303). In this way, the researcher-writer is born with the research text, with its becoming a “showcased self” (Casanave, 2002:12) encumbered by all the pain and uncertainty that this entails. I draw comfort from the words of Allan Luke, “Writing hurts.” It is a “lonely” pursuit that can be “intrinsically fraught,

insecure and always contingent.” It is risky and, for some, including me, needs “a kind of wilful suspension of disbelief in one’s own incapacity.” Then by “*acting as if*” and playing “a game of creative pousseurship, of mistaken identity debliberately fashioned,” the identity of academic writer can be performed (Luke, 2010:135-137).

### **1.3.1 Becoming consciously writerly**

The ‘writerly’ (Barthes, 1974:4) approach adopted means that terminological choices have been deliberate based on their connotations and adjudged contribution to the research. The term ‘locality’ has been chosen to refer to the site where the research takes place instead of the more normative ‘context’, Pennycook (2010:35) explores the notion of locality as inclusive of the spatial and dynamic ways in which we relate to place. Since a key concern of this study is the relationship of the participants to their home place and the ways their being of this place contributes to their identity construction, the use of this term is considered more fitting. Likewise the word ‘portrayals’ has been chosen instead of ‘descriptions’ in keeping with the ethnographic goal of painting a portrait of the participants, allowing others to glimpse how they imbue their actions with meaning (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:516). The dynamism and ever-evolving aspects of identities construction are expressed in the choice of ‘becoming’ in the title which replaces the earlier title choice ‘being’ which could be regarded as connotative of relative stasis and completion.

Other terms such as Native-Speaker Teacher (NST), Native English-Speaker Teacher (NEST), and their corresponding Non-Native Speaker Teacher (NNST), and Non-Native English-Speaker Teacher (NNEST) are used because of their widespread deployment in the discussion and problematisation of this dichotomy. My use of them serves both the interests of clarity and acknowledgement of their prior academic exposition rather than any suggestion of endorsement of or subscription to their continued use. Although their existence may be lamentable, divisive, and ultimately unhelpful, it cannot be denied. In this study I am positioned as a white English L1-Speaker Teacher whose very presence in the locality is determined by my identity as an overseas English language L1 teacher. Motha alerts us to what she calls the “messy intertwining of English and whiteness” (Motha, 2014, Chapter 1, Looking at the light, para.1) due to the foundational effects of

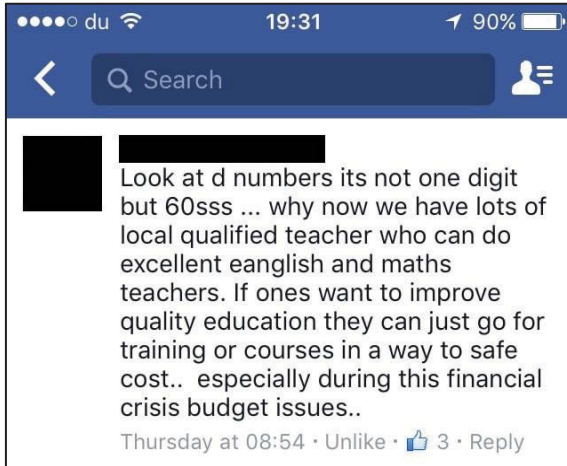
empire and race on the ELT profession. While a number of participants also consider English as their L1, I am alone in being considered as ‘monolingual’ by prevailing standards. Yet the very existence of true monolinguals is questioned by Canagarajah and Liyanage, given that, “Even so-called monolinguals ‘shuttle between codes, registers and discourses’ ” (Blackledge, Creese & Takhi, 2014:193, citing Canagarajah & Liyanage, 2012). The current relevance and appropriacy of the traditional terminology used to describe language facility and use is also being challenged by the ways languages, or rather “linguistic resources, are deployed in our societies” (Blackledge, Creese & Takhi, 2014:193).

Pursuant to this challenge, of late the focus has switched to what has previously been referred to as ‘multilingualism’ in acknowledgement of and response to the ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec, 2007) of today’s globalised world. The concept of languages as “bounded, unitary, and reified” (May, 2014:1) is being increasingly problematised in the face of the realities of fluidity and linguistic interfusion, variously expressed as “Rampton’s (2011) ‘contemporary urban vernaculars’, Canagarajah’s (2011) ‘codemeshing’, Creese et al.’s (2011) ‘flexible bilingualism’, Pennycook’s (2010) ‘metrolingualism’, García’s (2009) ‘translanguaging’, and Jørgensen’s (2008) ‘polylingual languaging’ ” (May, 2014:1). If we consider that the English language itself “has been contact-derived from its very beginnings onwards” (Schreier & Hundt, 2013:1), the notion of languages as discrete, enumerable entities has always been flawed, but it has nonetheless dictated linguistic theory and scholarship. The most exciting consequence of its problematisation is that in time it may render divisive, socially constructed labels, such as ‘native speaker’, ‘non-native speaker’, ‘monolingual’, ‘bilingual’, and so on, redundant. However, the theoretical consideration of these issues in the field of critical applied linguistics has not yet influenced to any great extent what actually happens in language classrooms around the world. May points to the fact that both SLA (second language acquisition) and the TESOL (teaching of English as a second language) industry “continue to treat the acquisition of an additional language [most often, English] as an ideally hermetic process uncontaminated by knowledge and use of one’s other languages” (May, 2014:2). In educational settings, such as Brunei, where stringent assessment of English language proficiency is a key determinant of the life path a

young person will follow, an ‘English-only’ deficit mentality prevails. There is also “an obsession with correctness” and the notion of language mastery (Canagarajah, 2007:237-238). Such preoccupation with form and accuracy may have contributed to the invisibility of the English language’s complicated history (Motha, 2014, Chapter 1, Looking at the light, para.2). Therefore, while the idea of moving away from counting and listing languages is seductive for its valuing of all language as resource, it is unrealistic in a situation where documented linguistic prowess is needed for success. This perpetuates the separation of Malay and English languages in people’s minds, with Malay regarded as the ‘heart’ language and English as the utilitarian means to an academic end.

Ironically, in pre-colonial days Brunei was likely characterised by “rampant multilingualism and inveterate hybridity” and Canagarajah advocates drawing on the wisdom of the language practices of these past communities (Canagarajah, 2007:238). An approach that enables learners to negotiate difference and “shuttle *between* communities” rather than joining a particular language community would better suit Bruneian learners’ needs, avoiding the creation of tension between their language choices. Arguing that permanent insiders and outsiders no longer exist, Canagarajah urges language educators to prepare students to be able to engage and disengage with various speech communities based on specific objectives rather than pursuing some kind of elusive insider status in one community which, in the case of Brunei, would likely be an English language one (Canagarajah, 2007:238). This would run the risk of alienating them, sometimes even from their own family members. The adult participants in this study do shuttle between speech communities as they work their teacher identities into being. In doing so, they shatter the native-speaker-as-the-ideal teacher tenet of ELT so long decried by Phillipson (1992:185) among others. However, that does not necessarily mean that native-speakerism “the chauvinistic belief that ‘native speakers’ represent a ‘western’ culture from which spring the ideals both of the language and of language teaching methodology” (Holliday, 2006:49) no longer exists there.

Figure 2: Social media post (2016, August 18) re. outside 'expert' recruitment reaction

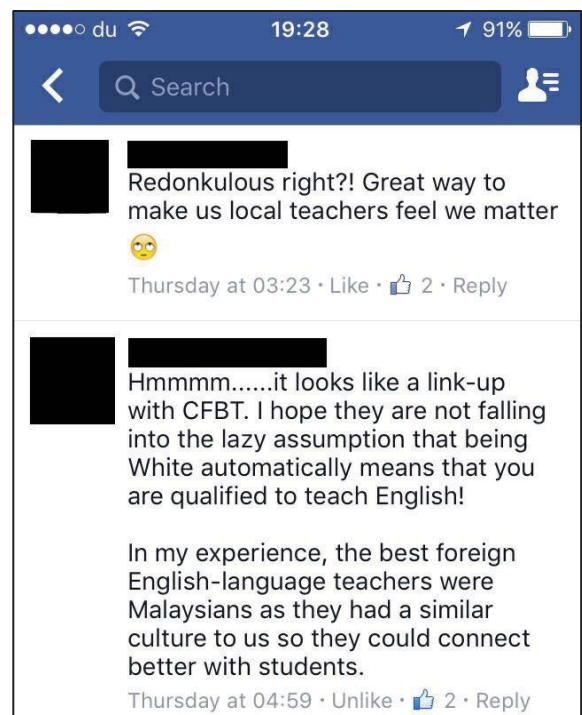


The spectre of native-speakerism is reawakening in the form of “a new multi-million pound project reforming the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in Brunei Darussalam’s primary and secondary schools” (Appendix 2). A newspaper headline reporting this reads, “60 foreign coaches to train local Maths, English teachers” (Piri, 2016). Holliday cautions against modelling “‘best practice’ which is ideologically embedded” instead of encouraging “spaces for reflection on and scrutiny of existing practice (Holliday, 2006:59), given the danger that externally calibrated schemata be superimposed in a location where they do not fit.

The response on social media from former colleagues, including some participants, and other local teachers was one of indignation that budgets are being deployed in this way when resourcing is far from adequate, even resulting in teachers having to purchase school supplies themselves (Figure 1 and Figure 2). This decision makes them feel undermined and undervalued and their responses hint at some resentment. This

The issue of whether “the tyranny of native-speakerism” that has long been a salient feature of the discourse around ELT (Swan, Aboshiha & Holliday, 2015:1) is in evidence in the research locality warrants attention. Back in 2009 at the time interviews took place, I would have said it was on the decline and there was a sense of its being challenged by the new generations of highly qualified Bruneian teachers. However, the

Figure 1: Social media post (2016, August 18) re. reaction to continuing native speakerism



project is also a contemporary attestation to the perdurable reliance on Britain or ‘outsiders’ in general for affirmation. Furthermore, it highlights the lingering coloniality embedded in the ELT industry with organisations such as the British Council and CfBT (Centre for British Teachers) continuing to act as the arbiters of English, its teaching and learning. The education ministry in Brunei is complicit in this by continuing to seek and pay for such ‘expertise’.

Coloniality “refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism.” However, it has long outlived colonialism and “is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, [...] in common sense, [...] in aspirations of self” (Maldonado-Torres, 2007:243).

The implementation of bilingual policy and its perpetuation in the earlier years required that English-speaking teachers in all subject areas, not just English language, be brought into the country to deliver the English-medium curriculum. In recent times, localisation policy, known as Bruneianization, means there are declining numbers of expatriate teachers in subject areas, but not in ELT. Becoming teachers of English language has proven to be less appealing to young Bruneians.

This necessitates the ongoing presence of expatriate teachers like me to make up the shortfall. Even among the participants who did actually become teachers of English, there are tales of having been pried from their natural inclination towards the sciences in which they excelled and tempted by generous scholarships to pursue degree courses in English Literature or English Language, but never TESOL, in universities abroad. This is done in order to meet the country’s need for ‘home-grown’ English teachers. In the process, the identity of English-language-teacher is foisted on some who would never have naturally identified as such. Ironically, in Brunei these sometimes reluctant English teachers are cast as ‘identity-makers’. For example, in his 2008 Teachers’ Day *titah* (speech), His Majesty the Sultan and *Yang Di-Pertuan* of Brunei (henceforth, HM) referred to teachers as “the shapers of this nation’s youth” (A prayer for, 2008:6). In this he reminded officials of the need to increase the number of local teachers, but acknowledged that in the interim, “We do

not have any other choice but to continue hiring foreign resources” (A prayer for, 2008:6). HM’s use of the word ‘foreign’ here is an example of the openly othering discourse that is commonplace. Locals, particularly Malays, are very much ‘us/we’ and everybody else is an outsiderly ‘them/they’. As local teachers in Brunei follow their individual trajectories in constructing professional teacher identities, they are constantly being reminded of the moral dimensions of their teacher roles as they become key cogs in the identity-conferring mechanism that the national ideology and national education system seek to be.

English is the language that has been used throughout the data collection process because it is the medium that expresses participants’ identities as language teacher professionals and language students. It is also the language in and through which we have habitually communicated. However, many words and discourse markers from other languages were uttered during interviews and where these are reproduced they are translated into English. The informality of the interviews and the high levels of familiarity I enjoyed with most of the participants allowed them to draw on their “repertoires of linguistic resources” (Pennycook, 2012:100) as locals, in their locality to express their understanding of the world and of their roles in it. Since *campur* (mixing) is characteristic of everyday language practices, its occurrence underscores the naturalness of our exchanges. It also distances this project from traditional purist insistence on language ‘correctness’ or adherence to now almost mythical standards such as BrSE and Received Pronunciation (RP) which reportedly was once a desired facility for employment as an expatriate teacher in Brunei. It also showcases the increasing linguistic dexterity of young people whose ‘languaging’ (Swain, 2006:98) reflects the necessarily accelerated dynamism and fluidity of languages, characteristic and reflective of our times. Swain uses the term ‘languaging’ to go beyond merely providing coded output. Instead, it seeks to convey a “means to mediate cognition,” leading to the “process of making meaning and shaping knowledge and experience through language” (Swain, 2006:96 and 98). In addition, words in Malay, both Standard Malay (STM) and Brunei Malay (BNM), are interspersed throughout the text whenever it is deemed that too much would be lost in translation if the words or expressions were rendered solely in English. This is particularly the case when exploring the cultural aspects of traditional clothing and local dishes, among other identity markers.

## 1.4 Performativity

The Aristotelian aphorism, ‘We are what we repeatedly do’, lends age-old credence to the existence of a performance element in identity studies. The theory of performativity attributed to Austin (1962) is at its core anti-essentialist (although expressing it as such is provocatively inconsistent), putting emphasis on process rather than form or structure. Austin’s, and later Searle’s (1969), conceptualisation of performativity centred around speech as action in and of itself, giving it a strong linguistic bent. It has been adopted and widely promulgated by Butler as a means of de-essentialising gender identity by positing that gender emerges from “a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance” (Butler, 1990:33). These repetitive acts are therefore integral parts of the identity that call it or perform it into existence instead of being merely expressions or representations of it. In this study performativity theory will be harnessed and applied to identities in general for its antithetical position to the notion of fixed, bounded identities that can be imposed or assumed at will – a particular concern in the research locality. It will explore the possibility of participants’ performing identities, especially at an individual level in ways that sometimes challenge, sometimes conform to those deemed desirable at societal level. One of the chief ways these identities are performed is through speaking, putting language at the fore. The ways that the English language enables identity performances is the main focus since this research is in English and English is the language in and through which the participants construct identities of student, graduate, and teacher among others. Their English language learning can “be conceived through an ideology and identity lens” (De Costa, 2016, Chapter 2, Section 2.1, para.1) since it is ideologically loaded and interacts with the other ideologies at play in the locality. Participants’ “investment” (Darvin & Norton, 2015, citing Norton Peirce, 1995; Norton, 2000, 2013) in English has also positioned them and allowed them to position themselves to pursue their desired imagined identities (Darvin & Norton, 2015:45).



## **1.5 Identifying the research questions and the structure of the thesis**

This research study seeks to explore how places, languages, and cultures interact and impact the construction and negotiation of personal identities. In doing so, it needs to consider how Brunei's national ideology, MIB, interfaces with modernity, given its boundary-setting agenda set against the antithetical tendency of globalising forces to break down or, at the very least, fluidise such categories. Since it is unlikely that anyone living in the locality could remain untouched by MIB, and since teachers and students in particular are in the roles of its disseminators and assimilators respectively, this is one of the "foreshadowed problems" (Malinowski, 1922/1966:9) that directs this study. It also gives rise to the first research question:

Q1: How does the MIB ideology with its strong emphasis on Malay language and cultural norms impact the identity construction and self-ideation of the participants as individuals?

The second question stems from the fulcral position that the English language has been given in Brunei as a result of language policies enacted since independence in 1984. In a seemingly contradictory move for a newly (re)formed nation, and one which distanced it from some of its regional neighbours, like Malaysia and Indonesia which are both Malay-speaking, Brunei opted for a bilingual system of education, featuring STM and BrSE. But the English language has assumed or has been given an increasingly prominent role over the ensuing years. This leads to the second of the directional questions:

Q2: In what ways does the English language as deployed through the educational system impact or shape the identities construction of these young Bruneians, given its position as both a long-time local language and as a gatekeeper for educational progress?

This chapter (Chapter 1) identifies the central concerns of the thesis and seeks to justify why identity matters in the chosen research locality, especially in terms of how it impacts and is impacted by the widespread use of the English language and its dominant role in the

education system. Chapter 2 identifies the methodological stance taken and is divided into three sections. The first deals with the overall ethnographic design and its paradigmatic roots. The second details how the research process unfolds on a practical level; and the final section considers the ethical ramifications involved. The research locality is identified and written into life in Chapter 3. The research takes place in *Negara Brunei Darussalam* (Nation of Brunei, the Abode of Peace), a tiny sultanate on the northern coast of Borneo island in Southeast Asia. It is centred around a government sixth form college there; the site where I worked for twelve years and came into contact with all of the participants, making it a ‘natural’ setting for data collection (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:4). Since 2001 the country has branded itself on the international tourist market as “The Kingdom of Unexpected Treasures”. This is the identity chosen to project the desired image of the country abroad. Chapter 3 provides an in-depth account of this locality and its many distinguishing features. It explores motifs in the Bruneian psyche, such as that relating to what it means to be local to, and in, that place and a noticeable assertion of ‘uniqueness’ evident among its people. It analyses the choice of the word ‘unexpected’ in the marketing slogan as possibly suggestive of an awareness that the country may be perceived differently by those who do not know it.

The following four chapters (Chapter 4 – Chapter 7) are data discussion chapters, wherein the discussion of emergent themes is integrated with theoretical reviews. Each chapter showcases a major theme; Chapter 4 dealing with the politico-economic realm; Chapter 5 exploring the roles of language ideology and language learning in identity construction; Chapter 6 considering religion as a badge of identity; and Chapter 7 focusing on the socio-cultural manifestations of identities. The closing Chapter 8 summarises by re-visiting the research questions in light of the data that have surfaced and seeks to synthesise what has unfolded.

In keeping with the vortex metaphor outlined earlier, and with the nature of the topic itself, reviews of relevant literature are interwoven throughout the data discussion chapters. This ensures that the theoretical framework for each of the emergent themes is addressed in tandem with data discussion. It also reflects the spinning momentum and concentricity

involved in identity construction which makes it maddeningly yet essentially difficult to capture even momentarily. Each theme is treated discretely in the interests of achieving greater clarity, while always acknowledging that each is inextricably linked to, and interdependent on the others to varying degrees; like the individual rings are part of the wider whirlpool, each separate but impacting on and being impacted by the motion of the others and all part of the whole in perpetual motion.

### **Conclusion to Chapter 1**

This chapter has begun the trek along the researcher trail by briefly tracing the issue of identity. It outlines some of the particulars of the locality, raises some of the key concerns, and presents the questions that provide guidance. Identity matters in Brunei because, in addition to being subject to the vagaries of 21st century life in common with others all over the globe, their education through English could be seen as putting them on a collision course with their own country's ideological paradigm. This endeavours to narrowly define exactly who they should be rather than risking who they might become otherwise. The chapter also positions me as a novice ethnographer and identifies the theoretical foundation of the study. Chapter 2 continues the journey by providing a comprehensive account of the research process from methodological, practical and ethical standpoints.

# CHAPTER 2

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*Identifying the Methodological Stance and the Research Methods Adopted*

*Every author in some degree portrays himself  
in his works, even if it be against his will*

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, 1749-1832

## **Chapter 2: Introduction**

This chapter follows my journey as a nascent researcher and identifies both the methodological approach chosen for this study and the various methods used in data generation. Due to the expansive nature of these issues it is divided into three sections.

Section 2.1 deals with the overall design of the study and the theoretical considerations that have informed this. In doing so, it explores the interplay between my own emerging identity as a researcher and the choices made and also seeks to justify the approach taken in terms of its appropriacy for the topic under study.

Section 2.2 recounts the research process by providing details of the various methods used to collect data as well as the ways in which participants were chosen. It charts the actual unfolding of the theorised model presented in the previous section on a practical level.

Section 2.3 outlines how ethical considerations are handled at both institutional and interpersonal levels throughout the research process.

Combined, these sections aim to provide the reader with a comprehensive view of how the study was conducted from conception through to execution.

### **2.1 Methodological stance**

In this section the focus is on the methodological approach chosen for the study. My choice of the qualitative paradigm is outlined, discussed and justified as being the one best suited to both the subject matter and to my orientation as a researcher.

#### **2.1.1 Identifying with the qualitative research paradigm**

Historically the field of research has been dominated by two major opposing philosophies of knowledge. Each has given rise to a methodological approach with its own signature methods or research practices. These methodological approaches are variously known as ‘positivistic’, ‘scientific’, ‘experimental’ and ‘quantitative’ on the one hand, and ‘naturalistic’, ‘interpretive / constructivist’, ‘phenomenological’ and ‘qualitative’ on the

other (Mertens, 1998:7). For the purposes of this study I have opted to use only the terms ‘positivistic’ and ‘quantitative’ when referring to one paradigm and the terms ‘naturalistic’ and ‘qualitative’ in relation to the second; the one which undergirds and guides my research.

The positivistic paradigm has long been the dominant one and quantitative data “rule the roost” (Silverman, 2006:35), especially outside of the social sciences. Evolving within the natural sciences, this approach was later applied to areas of social science such as educational research. It is premised on a worldview that regards the ‘real’ world as being external to the individual and as being subject to discovery through scientific experiments aimed at uncovering an “objective truth” (Cassell and Symon, 1994:2). This involves “breaking complex phenomena down into manageable pieces for study and eventual reassembly into the whole” (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:432). The researcher metaphorically carves ‘reality’ into jigsaw-like pieces and then reassembles them to make a pre-known picture (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998:6-7). It is also concerned with formulating laws to account for events leading to the ability to predict and control future events (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:10). Throughout the research process the researcher assumes the role of “disinterested scientist” (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:432), remaining detached and outside of the actual process.

Essentially the alternative qualitative paradigm seeks “to understand the subjective world of human experience” (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000:12). For this reason it is considered to be best suited to the world of social phenomena because of the fact that it is preoccupied with “complexity, authenticity, contextualization, minimization of illusion and the shared subjectivity of researcher and researched” (Cassell and Symon, 1994:2). These are all elements of the social world wherein we are all actively involved in interpreting our experiences and in constructing theories about ourselves and the world around us (O’Hara-Davies, 2002:14). Nowhere is this more true than in the case of identity construction and negotiation which lie at the heart of this study. This renders the choice of the qualitative paradigm as a guiding framework practically indisputable.

In recent times the dichotomous, polarised position long-held by these two paradigms has come to be regarded as counterproductive and somewhat antiquated. This may have been influenced by the emergence of newer, competing paradigms which have entered the fray, such as the “Transformative” and “Pragmatic” paradigms (Mertens, 2010:8). It may also be attributed to the growing recognition that some issues are best researched using a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Silverman, 2006:34). In fact it could be argued that the methods associated with each of the two paradigms are, in and of themselves, neither positivistic nor naturalistic, but rather become imbued with the basal epistemological assumptions of their associated paradigms. In other words they become positivistic or naturalistic through their deployment in data generation and in the ways that subsequent data analysis is managed (Bell, 1993:5-6; Hartley, 1994:208-229). Nevertheless one cannot ignore that the fundamental differences in assumptions that have long divided these two worldviews.

Many scholars and theorists have sought to characterise qualitative studies by outlining their salient features. Miles and Huberman (1994:6-7) and Bogdan and Biklen (1998:4-7) suggest a number of recurring features that are found to varying degrees in most types of qualitative research. These relate to setting, methods of data collection and analysis, the role of the researcher and the perspectival position adopted. Whilst such aspects are useful in mapping out a blueprint, they do not provide sufficient detail to support the novice researcher. A much more comprehensive framework is provided by Patton (2002:39-41). He enumerates twelve principles of qualitative inquiry which are subdivided under the headings ‘Design Strategies’, ‘Data Collection and Fieldwork Strategies’, and ‘Analysis Strategies’ (Patton, 2002:39). This strategic framework encompasses all the elements of the more general descriptors while going further by outlining in detail how and why each of the principles contributes to the qualitative integrity of the research effort. Their categorisation under three process-related headings further aids the clarity and utility of this model. I will now elucidate how Patton’s model informs and impacts all stages of this study from a paradigmatic perspective.



### **2.1.2 Principles of qualitative inquiry: Design Strategies**

The umbrella heading of ‘Design Strategies’ covers three of the guiding principles. These are: firstly the naturalistic nature of the inquiry; secondly its emergent design and enduring flexibility; and thirdly the use of sampling that is purposeful and based on a quest for meaning and insight.

This study is naturalistic in focus because it explores the identity construction of modern-day Bruneians in real time and in the everyday situation of college life. Participants are either students or teachers in this College and my own engagement in the ‘field’ that it becomes has been long-term and sustained. Having worked there for many years I am attuned to the cycles and routines that constitute ordinary living in this locality. I have not only seen things unfolding here, but that unfolding has been part of my own realities.

My research design could be likened to an as-yet-unexplored trail through the rainforest. As a trekker I start at the entrance, but then give myself up to a combination of the trail itself and instincts honed by other similar treks I have taken. I may at times be led or diverted towards wondrous sights or sometimes pursue seemingly promising paths only to find myself on impassable terrain. Regardless, the walk is energising and endorphin-stimulating and I emerge tired, but invigorated. Research of this type is intrinsically and essentially open to possibilities, allowing the process itself to assume a kind of organic momentum that responds to whatever emerges.

Sampling was purposive in keeping with the qualitative preoccupation with meaning and understanding (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:440). Participants were selected because they were deemed to be “information ‘rich’ and illuminative” and able to “offer useful manifestations of the phenomenon of interest” (Patton, 2002:39); in this case, identity construction and negotiation. Other factors in their selection include my established relationships with the majority of those chosen and my knowledge of their varied ethnic and experiential backgrounds. Gender was also taken into account. All criteria in the selection process are outlined and explored in greater depth in section 2.2.

### **2.1.3 Principles of qualitative inquiry: Data Collection and Fieldwork Strategies**

A further four of the guiding principles fall under the heading ‘Data Collection and Fieldwork Strategies’. These are qualitative data; personal experience and engagement; empathic neutrality and mindfulness; and dynamic systems.

“Qualitative data are sexy” (Miles and Huberman, 1994:1). They are usually in the form of words and consist of detailed descriptions derived from observations as well as direct quotations, revealing participants’ perspectives in their own words (Patton, 2002:40). In this study data are generated mainly from longitudinal observation and interviews, keeping them in line with this guiding principle.

The second principle in this classification calls for the researcher to engage intimately with participants and the research topic itself regarding his or her own experiences and insights as integral parts of the inquiry and are crucial to full understanding of the research issue (Patton, 2002:40). I had established close personal friendships with almost all of the adult participants prior to the start of this study. Furthermore, I also, for the most part, selected student participants with whom I had strong rapport and with whom I had worked closely either in a teaching or co-curricular context. As for the issue of identity, my own identity crisis, stemming from my long-term presence in the research locality and my concomitant exile from, what was once, home, could be regarded as the well-spring of my fascination with the phenomenon that identity has become in recent times, making me personally invested in its exploration.

I had become increasingly aware of myself as a perpetual outsider which led to a poignant sense of exclusion. Being somewhere that I wanted to belong to, but knowing that I never could, led me to question what it means to be ‘of a place’, to be Irish or to be Bruneian, and whether this comes from continued interaction with that location over time. Is it a constant, or does it ebb and flow, or even disappear with extended exile?

The next principle advocates that the researcher adopt an empathic stance during interviews aimed at reaching vicarious understanding (Patton, 2002:40) whilst suspending judgement

and striving towards neutrality. It also calls on the researcher to be “fully present” when observing. In seeking to follow these guidelines, I draw on both my high natural levels of empathy and on the fact that my being open, sensitive, respectful, aware and responsive (Patton, 2002:40) to this educational setting has always been a requisite condition of my employment here. In a sense then it has become the norm for me and is not something I consciously have to muster when I conduct interviews as part of the research effort. As for being “mindful” (Patton, 2002:40) in the context of observing, I believe that I have become much more attuned to fortuitous utterances and incidents since constructing my own identity of researcher. I have endeavoured to remain on high alert for anything that relates to my research topic in the workplace and, on a wider scale, in the local media, including radio, television, webpages and newspapers.

The last principle in this category requires that dynamism propel the entire research process and that change be regarded as perpetual at all levels from individual through organisational and cultural (Patton, 2002:40) to national and global. This is in keeping with the overall thrust of qualitative research which acknowledges the multiplicity of realities and elevates flexibility and fluidity whilst eschewing rigidity and fixed, deterministic modes of thinking.

#### **2.1.4 Principles of qualitative inquiry: Analysis Strategies**

Of the twelve themes featured in Patton’s (2002:39-41) framework five remain. These are related to the analysis phase of the research process. Patton designates them as follows: (i) unique case orientation; (ii) inductive analysis and creative synthesis; (iii) holistic perspective; (iv) context sensitivity; and (v) voice, perspective and reflexivity.

Unique case orientation requires that the researcher accord the particulars of each case due respect and that eventual analysis across cases be built on such a foundation. The open nature of the interviews conducted in this study mean that this principle is easily upheld since each interview contributes original data this is peculiar to the participant(s) involved.

At no time does the researcher seek to superimpose preconceptions or manipulate data to fit prior hypotheses. As Malinowski (1922/1966:9) warns, “Preconceived ideas are

pernicious.” Instead s/he remains open and responsive to whatever emerges for the duration of the research effort. The research itself is directed by “foreshadowed problems” (Malinowski, 1922/1966:9; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:434) with the caveat that these are never allowed to become restrictive or controlling. Data analysis is therefore totally inductive, resulting from deep engagement and preoccupation with the “specifics of the data to discover important patterns, themes and interrelationships” (Patton, 2002:41). It is guided by analytical principles and culminates in “creative synthesis” (Patton, 2002:41) that is partly accomplished through writing (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:193). Consequently, every qualitative research study is self-determining, evolving out of its own particular information set. In this case I am seeking to create a picture of identity construction and negotiation as they pertain to a particular group in Bruneian society. At the outset I have no idea of the form this picture will take; only the analysis and melding of the data generated can determine its eventual aspect (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998:7).

An obsession with the complexity of social phenomena sets qualitative research apart. It is essentially concerned with the interpretations and multiplicitous possibilities data represent as opposed to facts arising from data or their reductive transmutation into “monocausal model[s]” (Oppenheim, 1992:13) or “linear, cause-effect relationships” (Patton, 2002:41). Emphasis remains on the whole story, the complete picture that is “more than the sum of its parts (Patton, 2002:41).

In qualitative research data are invariably located in their generative “social, historical and temporal” (Patton, 2002:41) settings and these are regarded as integral to, and constitutive of, the information that emerges. My study takes place in a somewhat elitist educational setting in a relatively neophyte state with a colonial legacy, set in a twenty-first century globalising world. It is not overly concerned about making generalisations, preferring to focus on “extrapolating patterns for possible transferability and adaptation in new settings” (Patton, 2002:41). Such an orientation is much more in keeping with the overall qualitative thrust which regards transferability as the qualitative equivalent of the quantitative criterion of external validity or generalisability (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:241).

The last of the twelve guiding principles is concerned with the researcher's voice, perspective and levels of reflexivity (Patton, 2002:41). It serves to cast the qualitative researcher in the role of eternal tight-rope walker poised precariously between unattainable objectivity and prejudicial subjectivity. The resultant balancing act requires that due acknowledgement be given to the "difficulties inherent in intermeshing our 'researcher' voices with those about which we are writing" (Ramanathan, 2005:292). Indeed, Holliday (2010) expresses the view that everything we do is ideologically encumbered and he argues that "researchers can never claim to be speaking for anyone but themselves and cannot claim to be representing the voices of others" (Holliday, 2005:307). He regards texts as "researcher-led" and holds that their constituent connections born of thick descriptions are expressed in the "larger authorial voice" (Holliday, 2005:308). These texts house the author's interpretations for which s/he is responsible, even as s/he remains accountable to those whose voices s/he appropriates.

Barthes challenges the ongoing relevance of the very concept of an 'author', regarding our common image of literature as being "tyrannically centred" on the personages, lives, tastes and passions of such individuals (Barthes, 1977:143). He replaces the author with a "modern scriptor [who] is born simultaneously with the text" (Barthes, 1977:145) and is without a past. He goes on to insist that,

[...] writing can no longer designate an operation of recording, notation, representation, 'depiction' [...]; rather it designates [...] a performative, [...] in which the enunciation has no other content than the act by which it is uttered.

Barthes (1977:145-146).

The need to begin "to understand research writing as a performative rather than representational act" is echoed by Pennycook (2005:300). He goes on to emphasise the "centrality of writing as research", since writing acts to create our observations and produce our research (Pennycook, 2005:302-303). In Barthesian tradition, the researcher / scriptor becomes a performed identity, replacing the pre-existing individual who carried out the

research. Therefore, instead of having to write himself or herself into the text, the researcher engages in what, according to Wiseman (2009:160), Barthes regarded as the “quintessential human activity” of writing. This writing itself then produces “a writing subject” (Pennycook, 2005:303). Thus the personal is performed in the very act of research writing (Pennycook, 2005:297).

All the while this ‘writing subject’ must remain conscious of, and self-analytical about, the way s/he is constructed in and by the text. S/he may be omnipresent, but this cannot be allowed to detract from the issues under discussion which should always remain paramount (Nelson, 2005:315). Similarly, s/he must be wary of producing a text that creates more knowledge about the author (or scriptor) than about the research participants and their locality, running the risk of being regarded as narcissistic and insufficiently critical (Canagarajah, 2005b:311).

The challenge then is for the scriptor to perform this identity, all the while remaining critically engaged with the personal impact s/he and his or her conceptual frameworks and attitudes may be having on the research process and outcomes. Such awareness and reflexivity also enhance the possibility of his or her producing a text that is “writerly” (Barthes, 1974:4) in that it makes readers active and unsettles them. This prepares them to read between the lines and to make connections and “observations that might contradict and exceed the author’s expectations, at times critiquing the author” (Canagarajah, 2005b:313).

As a white, female, Christian, European researcher working in an overtly patriarchal, ‘non-white’, Muslim, Southeast Asian locality, I can be regarded as contributing to the perpetuation of an interdisciplinary research tradition in which “ ‘we’ study ‘them’ ” (Cameron et al, 1992:3). Regrettable though this tradition may be, its existence is incontrovertible and enduring and has come to be perceived as natural due to its protraction and lack of challenge. Part of my effort at reflexivity must involve the problematising of this position. I have to acknowledge that my orientations are shaped by my own socio-historical roots and the values and interest conferred by these (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:15). Despite the extended length of time I have lived in the research location and the

extent to which I have become acculturated, to pretend to “have been totally converted to the foreign approach is dishonest” (Canagarajah, 2005b:314). Rather, what is more desirable is the communication of a sense of respect for local mores and practices that is still capable of being critical coupled with an awareness that to romanticise the local in any way by emotionally extolling its virtues in itself constitutes a form of discriminatory ‘otherising’ and reduction, regardless of its being well intentioned. This dilemma is discussed by Street (2001:14) in the context of literacy studies, but it is also applicable to other areas of research and is particularly relevant in the consideration of identities construction. Overall, the complexity of the research issue is reflected in the complex labyrinth of concerns that underlie its production as a written treatise.

#### **2.1.5 Researcher identity**

Ever since my initial exposure to the scholarly exposition of research models used in social research I have been able to unreservedly identify myself as a ‘naturalist’ rather than a ‘positivist’. Naturalists exhibit a preference “for fostering multiple interpretations of events” based on the perceptions of those involved (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:433) whereas for the positivist there exists a reality independent of us that awaits discovery (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:432). Acknowledging this instinctive inclination has helped greatly in guiding me towards a methodological approach that allows me to operate within my preferred research modality. For the purposes of this research I am assuming the identity of an ethnographer which allows me to remain “flexible and responsive to local circumstances” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:x). It is also an identity that is in keeping with the choice of methods used to generate data such as interviews and participant observation (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:516-517). I am conscious however that calling myself an ethnographer is merely a nominal exercise and that it is only through repeated acts of ethnographic research that I can lay claim to this identity in a true sense. “We are... as we are... because of what we do” (Pennycook, 2007a:13, 70). My identity as an ethnographer is contingent on my engagement in “ritualised social performatives calling the subject into being” that are “sedimented through time” (Pennycook, 2007b: 110, citing Butler, 1999:120). Therefore, I become an ethnographer by acting like one within a “highly rigid regulatory frame” (Butler, 1990:33) and my related iterative actions “congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance of a natural sort of being” (Butler,

1990:33). Although Butler was referring specifically to gender identity, the notion of acting an identity into being or becoming through performativity can be arguably applied to any kind of identity construction. So, although I have chosen my ethnographer identity I need to prove myself based on prescribed notions (Pennycook, 2007a:70) of what is required of an ethnographer.

The 'ideal' ethnographer "needs to be intellectually poised between familiarity and strangeness" and in cases where his or her researcher status is open rather than covert s/he hovers between stranger and friend (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:89, citing Powdermaker, 1966 and Everhart, 1977) becoming in Freilich's words a "marginal native" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:89, citing Freilich, 1970a). Driven by such an orientation s/he may then adopt a number of roles as s/he constructs "a working identity" (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:69) in the research setting or 'field'.

#### **2.1.6 What is ethnography?**

Ethnography means different things to different people, suffering as it does from the same nomenclature problems encountered by its paradigmatic parent, the qualitative paradigm. This is variously known as the 'naturalistic', 'interpretive / constructivist' or 'phenomenological' approach (Mertens, 1998:7). Similarly, ethnography is sometimes regarded as synonymous with " 'qualitative inquiry', 'fieldwork', 'interpretive method' and 'case study' " (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:1). Notwithstanding this labelling confusion, it is possible to outline the conceptual framework that undergirds and guides this method in order to appreciate what is involved in carrying out an ethnographic study.

#### **2.1.7 Identifying ethnographic concepts in this study**

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003:514-515) identify eight concepts that serve to guide the ethnographer as s/he conducts his or her research. These are culture, a holistic outlook, contextualisation, an emic perspective, multiple realities, thick description, member checking and lastly a non-judgemental orientation. Following is a brief exposition of each in which they are treated discretely. This is done purely to enhance clarity and does not intend to deny the high levels of interconnectedness and overlap that exist between them.



## *Culture*

Culture is central to ethnography. However, yet again its definition is a veritable minefield that has been and continues to be widely debated and variously interpreted. Neither is this a recent phenomenon; back in the 1950s Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952) compiled a list of more than 150 different ways in which the term ‘culture’ could be defined. These were the subject matter of their book *Culture: A critical review of concepts and definitions*. It is a work that has stood the test of time, remaining a valuable oft-consulted source even today. Perhaps the existence of an online version could be taken as further evidence of its enduring relevance despite its relative antiquity. The intervening years, far from clarifying the issue of what culture is, have complexified it even more, giving rise to new and novel exegeses that mirror the globalising forces at work in today’s world and make it even more fiercely contested. Rosaldo reports Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s somewhat surprising expectation that the term would settle “into scientific precision and consensus” (Rosaldo, 2006:x), finding such an assumption both groundless and improbable. Instead he suggests that “there is not a single, eternal definition of culture, but rather provisional definitions that will be revised as debates unfold through time (Rosaldo, 2006:xii). Indeed, definitions appear to have grown exponentially, giving rise to an update of Kroeber and Kluckhohn’s seminal work. Entitled *Redefining cultures: Perspectives across the disciplines* (Baldwin et al, 2006), this work features in excess of 300 definitions. The existence of such a multitude of explanations alerts us to the reductiveness inherent in our normative tendency to use the term ‘culture’ to simply reference folklore and customs (Long and Richards, 1999:ix) or to confine it to the “foods, fairs, folklore and statistical facts”; what Kramsch calls “the four Fs” (Hinkel, 1999:5, citing Kramsch, 1991:218) of a particular group. Nevertheless, in the face of such expansive explication some circumscription and selection seems desirable and even necessary. This however is not intended to be either exclusionary or delimiting.

In this study, culture is conceptualised as a “dynamic process rather than a static entity with a stable existence” (Kachru and Smith, 2008:32). Many scholars concur with this notion of culture as being active rather than passive, as creating practices and being itself created by these self-same practices. Some influential voices, past and present, include those of

Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952), Tylor (1920a, 1920b), Said (1993), Appadurai (1996), Holliday (1998, 1999) and Bhabha (1994). While such concepts are extremely useful in describing this view of culture, it is also desirable to articulate more clearly what culture *is*. For that I rely on Tylor's famous definition because of its inclusiveness and ethnographic foundation. According to him,

[...] culture [...] taken in its broad ethnographic sense is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.

Tylor (1920a:1).

He also regarded culture as being progressive, calling the science of culture "a reformer's science" (Tylor, 1920b:453).

#### *A holistic outlook*

The holism referred to in Tylor's definition of culture must become the guiding principle of the ethnographer. S/he "should deal with the totality of all social, cultural and psychological aspects of the community, for they are so interwoven that not one can be understood without taking into consideration all the others" (Malinowski, 1922/1966:xvi). Such advice, coming as it does from the eminent early 20<sup>th</sup> century Anglo-Polish anthropologist, Bronislaw Malinowski, is as relevant today as it was almost a century ago. Indeed, obtaining as holistic a picture as possible of the target group with all its attendant nuances and subtleties is regarded as one of the distinguishing tenets of ethnographic research. The ethnographer is on a quest for connections propelled by the "ethnographic belief that an isolated observation cannot be understood unless you understand its relationship to other aspects of the situation in which it occurred (Agar, 1980:75).

My long-term employment in the field enables me to portray a complete picture. I have been in the research locality for over twelve years and have been actively engaged in educational research for half of that time, with participant observation for this study beginning in earnest in January 2008.

### *Contextualisation*

Allied with a holistic bent is the need to achieve an insight into the meanings of emergent data from a wider perspective. This involves linking them with the research setting itself as well as with the wider societies of which it is a constituent part. These data cannot be interpreted well, much less fully understood, in isolation. Our comprehension of the meaning of events, action or utterances are always context-driven (Miles and Huberman, 1994:102). In contextualising this study I will attempt to identify how it relates and is connected to historical, political, social and economic elements in Bruneian society and to wider regional and global contexts.

### *An emic perspective and multiple realities*

An ‘emic’ or ‘insider’s’ perspective lies “at the heart of ethnographic research” (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:514). Fraenkel and Wallen regard this as essential for understanding and describing faithfully all that the ethnographer has seen and heard. The man regarded as the founding father of participant observation as we know it, Bronislaw Malinowski, agrees. He urged ethnographers to “grasp the native’s point of view, his relation to life, to realise *his* vision of *his* world” (Malinowski, 1922/1966:25). I am using the term ‘emic’ in its original Pikean sense (Pike, 1954) meaning the ways in which people categorise themselves, or perhaps more significantly reveal their own basal, possibly esoteric, classifications through the active use of them since such categories may have become imperceptible through familiarity and an absence of conscious scrutiny. They are the ‘taken-for-granted’ aspects of life, the “imponderabilia” (Malinowski, 1922/1966:24) of ordinary living.

Pursuit of an emic perspective implies that the ethnographer subscribes to the view that realities are multiple and mutable rather than there being a singular stable reality that awaits discovery. This latter notion is fundamental to the positivistic worldview wherein science is charged with discovering the nature of this reality and its workings (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:432). Conversely ethnography, governed by the qualitative worldview, focuses on the “quality of relationships, activities, situations or materials” (Fraenkel and

Wallen, 2003:430) as these pertain to the research issues so as to gain a holistic impression of these phenomena.

However, as Agar (1980:191) points out, most ethnographic statements are a ‘blend’ of both an emic and an etic or ‘outsider’s’ point of view. This casts the ethnographer in the roles of insider and outsider simultaneously. S/he must endeavour to understand the points of view of the participants based not only on what they say, but also on how they act since their own practices may have been rendered opaque to them through their constant, habitual use (Gil-White, 2001:239). Armed with this emic understanding of their realities the ethnographer then proceeds to link it to a wider, more objective framework of analysis, being careful never to impose his or her own categories. Thus, the emic perspective and its “native parsing of the world” (Gil-White, 2001:240) always remains paramount.

### *Thick description*

Ethnography relies on ‘thick description’ or comprehensive data treatment (Silverman, 2006:298, citing Mehan, 1979) to capture the lived realities of the participants being studied. It seeks to convey their actions, attitudes and statements in all their complexity as they occur and reveal themselves in the everyday setting of their own locality. Such description requires “sufficient generosity” and candour (Malinowski, 1922/1966:3) on the part of the ethnographer as s/he attempts to bridge the yawning gap between the “brute material of information” (Malinowski, 1922/1966:3-4), the wealth of generated data in their various forms, and the ultimate academic text that portrays them.

The ‘credibility’ of the account partly depends on this richness of description which must extend to the research process itself as well as to the data derived from the participants and other sources. Any hint of artifice or non-disclosure on the ethnographer’s part could seriously jeopardise its standing. Credibility can be regarded as akin to the concept of internal validity in the positivistic paradigm (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:236-241). Yet again, Malinowski sets the standard, advocating that research should be written in such a way that the reader is able to

[...] clearly draw the line between [...] the results of direct observation and of native statements and interpretations, and [...] the inferences of the author.

Malinowski (1922/1966:3).

Thus the actual writing is a key part of the ethnographic research process (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:191).

### *Member checking*

A preoccupation with capturing the participants' perspectives of their realities as faithfully as possible should dominate any ethnographic study. One of the proposed strategies for ensuring this is called 'member checking' (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003, 515; Guba and Lincoln, 1989:238). This is also referred to as "respondent validation" (Silverman, 2006:291; Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:181). It involves giving participants opportunities to verify that the ethnographer has not misrepresented their views, actions or the attitudes they expressed during the research process. It goes some way towards ensuring the account produced is not dismissed as being absolutely anecdotal.

Scholars are divided in their evaluation of this strategy. Its proponents regard it as invaluable in strengthening the credibility or 'internal validity' of ethnographic accounts (Guba and Lincoln, 1989:238-239; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:515). However, Silverman (2006:291-293) disputes its appropriacy. Citing Bloor (1978; 1983) he casts doubts on both the interest of participants in the final research report and on their capacity to appreciate it fully (Silverman, 2006:293). Silverman also cites Abrams's 1984 contention that respondent validation only works if the ethnographer's analysis is in accordance with the way respondents regard themselves (Silverman, 2006:293).

Whilst remaining mindful of the reservations put forward by Silverman, Bloor and Abrams, I am still drawn to the intrinsic value of member checking, especially for its ethical element. Participants should be allowed the chance to confirm or refute the analyses of their input made by the ethnographer. If they are denied this, the emic status of the perspectives portrayed is compromised, as is the overall transparency of the research

process. In any case these responses can be treated as additional data or insights even if they cannot be relied on to validate what the ethnographer has deduced (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:183).

### *Non-judgemental orientation*

Absolute objectivity is an unattainable goal, but working towards ensuring one's own biases or preconceptions do not unduly influence what is 'seen' or interpreted from conversations is essential for the ethnographer. In order to achieve this s/he has to firstly interrogate his or her own cultural practices and value systems and then try to suspend these and focus on the practices and value systems of the culture being studied, which should only be judged on their own terms. Ethnocentric evaluations must be regarded as anathemas. However, biases are sure to persist and these need to be acknowledged and explicated fully to explore the extent that they may impact the ethnographer's perceptions (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:453). As Miles and Huberman (1994:245) warn, people have a natural tendency to look for meanings, we are "meaning-finders". The issue becomes whether the meanings a researcher extracts from or reads into qualitative data are "valid, repeatable and right" (Miles and Huberman, 1994:245). Furthermore, we all tend to find "confirming instances far more easily than disconfirming instances" (Miles and Huberman, 1994:253, citing Nisbett and Ross, 1980). In other words we see what we want to see and blinker ourselves to anything otherwise. The ethnographer must guard against this tendency through full disclosure of the entire research process and procedures, stringent data analysis using established tactics for generating meaning (Miles and Huberman, 1994:245-287) and ethically-grounded self-interrogation.

The sections that follow will fully explicate my attempts to keep to these lofty standards in order to be or perform as a principled ethnographer whose research is honest and transparent. Section 2.2 deals with the practical execution of the research, detailing the methods used while rationalising their appropriacy to both the research design and the issue being explored. It is followed by Section 2.3 wherein ethical concerns and provisions are duly expounded upon in detail.

## **2.2 Research methods and procedures**

This section catalogues the actual procedures involved in the enactment of the research. It illustrates how data were generated primarily by the chosen methods of longitudinal participant observation and informal or unstructured, open-ended interviews (Noaks and Wincup, 2004:79-80) and, to a lesser extent, the analysis of texts and images from the research location. In doing so, it aims to provide a fully chronological and situational account of all that transpired in order to fulfil the disclosure and transparency criteria of principled research. It begins with a rationale for the chosen methods in the context of this study and goes on to detail their deployment in the field. It also introduces the participants, explaining why they were chosen and how they came to take part.

### **2.2.1 Identifying the best methods**

It has been suggested that ethnographic portrayals are particularly suited to the realm of education due to their capacity to create vivid pictures of research localities and of the participants involved. They are also credited with being able to gain a deeper, more nuanced understanding of the issues being explored (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:513-514). Since this study focuses on a group based at an educational establishment at the time of the research, an ethnographic approach was deemed the most suitable. Methods such as participant observation and informal interviews are regarded as the methods of choice in ethnographic research.

#### *Participant observation*

Early participant observation is critical, forming the “bedrock” on which the developing research will stand (Agar, 1980:117). My engagement in the field has been long-term and sustained as I have worked in the College for many years (more than 12 to date). However, I cannot claim to have been actively observing or attuned in terms of this research issue before January 2008; the earliest date in my field notes being 25<sup>th</sup> January of that year. By then I was committed to exploring the issue of identities construction among my local colleagues and students.

Since then I have done my utmost to remain vigilant, to notice classroom or staffroom incidents, to be alert for spontaneous utterances and to interrogate these more than I might

have done before my own construction of a researcher identity. I have also been careful to record details of these conscientiously lest such rich, fortuitous, naturally-occurring data be lost. As well as providing me with a stronger basal understanding of how identities play out in this locality, this period of ongoing observation has yielded a number of thought-provoking incidents, some enlightening discussions and has suggested possible new avenues the research might take as it unfolds. I have an omnifarious sense of being at once an involved participant and a trenchant observer. I am simultaneously entrenched and removed as I view my own professional reality through my researcher's lens. This position, though seemingly ambivalent, allows me to problematise the normal and to study ordinary 'folk' in one of their everyday environments.

#### *Informal interviews*

Unstructured, open-ended interviews require an interviewer who is flexible, capable of establishing rapport with interviewees and of listening actively (Silverman, 2006:110). This may seem deceptively easy amounting to no more than a casual conversation, in fact it is anything but and requires an underlying systematism in order to learn about the participants' lives. Such interviews are useful when the researcher is not aware of what is known and is reliant on the participant for this information (Lincoln and Guba, 1985:269). Interviews are also regarded as an important ethnographic tool that help the researcher to contextualise data gleaned from observation and experience (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:516-517).

In total, 13 digitally-recorded interviews involving 16 participants, eight adult professionals and eight students, were carried out. These took place in the period from late October 2009 to mid-February 2010 (Appendix 3). Prior to this, a pilot session involving two potential participants took place in mid-October. Whilst the two individuals involved declined to be interviewed themselves, they indicated that they were happy to be involved on a consultative basis. This meeting which lasted for more than three hours over lunch proved very useful in suggesting topics for the subsequent interviews. Some of this was taped using a tiny, unobtrusive digital recorder placed between us on the table. I listened to it in



full before doing the first data collection interview and made notes to supplement those I had taken on the day itself.

All interview locations were chosen by the participants themselves. Their choices are revelatory and in themselves constitute data in that they provide insights into the kinds of environments in which participants feel comfortable. The majority opted for restaurants in Bandar Seri Begawan; outlets with which they were familiar and habitually frequented. Luckily, these were also, for the most part, conducive to the interview process being quiet and discreet. Two interviews took place in the home of one participant as I frequently call on her there. She also offered to host a second interview as the participant involved feels at ease there and felt that the background presence of the host was reassuring. It was notable that, despite knowing me very well, only two of the adult participants felt comfortable being interviewed alone; one male and one female. In the case of the male who is Muslim, I was accompanied by my teenage daughter (D1) so that our being together in a public place was less likely to be misconstrued; something that could tarnish his reputation or, at the very least, attract negative attention. Similarly, in the case of the student participants, only two, both males, were interviewed alone. In all other cases participants chose to have either a fellow participant or my chosen student participant liaison (SPL1) present. Further details of his role will be provided in the sections dealing with participant selection and ethical concerns. All interviews were later transcribed in full. The conventions used are detailed in Appendix 4.

### *Content analysis*

In addition to extended participant observation and open-ended interviews, some content analysis was considered both necessary and desirable in order to convey a stronger sense of the influences participants are exposed to in their locality. This mostly consists of selected newspaper articles spanning the entire research period, edicts from the monarch and policy documents, especially those relevant to language, religious issues and the national ideology. Although content analysis is often characterised as having a quantitative orientation, its use is not precluded in qualitative studies (Silverman, 2006:19). In keeping with the essentially qualitative thrust of the study with its focus steadfastly on the quest for greater insight and a

deeper understanding of the issue of identity, my use of content analysis as a technique rendered it qualitative in orientation. No categories were set in advance and enumeration was not a major concern. Iteration of items was treated as indicative of a local pattern or category rather than as evidence based on frequency or recurrence. The aim was always to better understand the types of texts that participants experience in their locality and the roles these might play in their identities' construction.

### **2.2.2 The participants**

I have chosen to refer to the individuals involved in my research as 'participants' because of this word's connotations of involvement and interactivity. It is also suggestive of agency and collaboration as opposed to passive subjectification. This choice is deliberate and is part of an attempt to conduct research that is empowering rather than merely ethical or advocative. Cameron et al (1992:13-18) make the distinction between research *on, for* and *with* those taking part. Research that is *on* people or is *on* them and *for* them has links with positivistic assumptions whereas research that is *on, for* and *with* them is potentially empowering.

A total of sixteen participants were recruited for this research study. Of these eight were young adults in their twenties who are all early career teachers. Two males and six females agreed to take part and I had known and worked with all except one of the males for a number of years. They were selected to fulfil the "expert informant" criterion of good qualitative methodologies (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:431). Sampling of this kind is known as purposive sampling and is a likely choice for qualitative researchers due to its potential for yielding the best understanding of the issues being researched. Other criteria which were applied included age (being under 30), tertiary educational background, ethnicity, gender and our pre-existing rapport. I spoke to each participant in person about my research project, inviting them to be involved. In order to minimise any sense of coercion or duress I followed up with an email, attaching an Information Sheet (Appendix 7) and bilingual English and Malay copies of a Consent Form (*Adult Participant*) (Appendix 7.1 and 7.2). I stressed that if they did not respond to this I would not broach the topic again in conversation and that our relationship would not be affected. Three of the eleven approached initially declined to be interviewed. Two of these (both female, PP1

and PP2) did however offer to take part in the pilot interview where they suggested directions I might take in interview questioning. The other (a male) politely declined to be involved and communicated with me via text message to this effect.

Eight former students of the College also consented to take part; four female and four male. They had all completed their Advanced Level (A Level) examinations prior to being interviewed. Although most were over eighteen by that time, I chose to ask for parental consent in deference to Bruneian family norms and to also minimise the risk of my recruiting them being considered as exploitative in view of my position as their former teacher. I had worked closely with all except one of the female students either as a subject teacher or as a co-curricular activity facilitator. As was the case with the adult participants, ten individuals were approached in the first instance. Two females declined to be involved; one for personal reasons, the other, a local celebrity, was represented by her agent / guardian who declined on her behalf. The potential student participants were first contacted by a popular peer of Egyptian descent whom I had appointed as my SPL1. This was one of the requirements of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). He contacted all the potential participants via email, attaching an Information Sheet (Appendix 6) and two versions of a Consent Form (*Student Participant*); one in English and one in Malay (Appendix 7.3 and 7.4). This was done in order to allow students the space to turn down the invitation and to prevent their feeling pressurised to participate which might have been the case had I asked them directly. In addition, this person was well known to all students in the College due to the high profile he maintained throughout his tenure there. He was also responsible for scheduling interviews, negotiating venues and sitting in on interviews if requested to do so by participants. In fact he was present for four of the seven interviews involving student participants at their bidding.

My decision to recruit both students and early career professionals stemmed from a desire to garner the views of those on the cusp of adulthood, likely experiencing the first stirrings of identity interrogation prior to leaving home and embarking on new chapters in their lives as well of those who 'have been there and done that' and have now come back and moved

on to the next phase as independent professionals with perhaps various, more evolved identities. Involving both is in keeping with a youth focus, successful graduates of Brunei's now-more-established bilingual education system.

The 13 interviews were conducted through the medium of English since I was aware that all participants speak the language regularly and for some it is their first language. Another factor is that all my previous interactions with them have been in English and the use of any other language (with the assistance of an interpreter) would have detracted from the 'naturalness' of our exchanges. In addition, the presence of another person acting as an interpreter might have had an inhibiting effect on the participants. When participants used other languages (usually Malay) they either provided translations themselves or, in one case, turned to the SPL1 for help. Furthermore, since the role of language in identity construction is one of the key motifs in this study, the use of English in the interviews enabled participants to claim and perform at least one of their identities – that of English language speakers – through their 'linguaging' (García, 2007:xi; Pennycook, 2010:8) or 'Englishing' (Joseph, 2002:44). These interviews varied in length from 1 hour 12 minutes to 2 hours 50 minutes (Appendix 3).

### **2.3 Researching ethically**

In this section my attempts to adhere to strict ethical standards will be outlined in detail. In addition to delineating the most important considerations involved in upholding such standards, it will show how each pertains to, and is addressed in, the study. All steps taken in this regard were guided by the stringent requirements set by HREC at UTS. Every attempt has been made to meet, and if possible, surpass basic requirements.

Any consideration of the ethical implications of social research must begin with the ethnographer himself or herself. I have outlined my desire to identify as an ethnographer in Section 2.1.5, p.38. S/he has undertaken the study and chosen the research topic for a reason and is almost sure to be motivated by a degree of self-interest. This must be duly acknowledged, quantified and cast in the wider perspective of the other nobler forces that

drive the research. A study driven solely by self-interest runs the risk of being regarded as exploitative and unprincipled (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:60). This study is driven by self-interest to the extent that it is part of a quest to secure a higher academic qualification. The choice of topic, however, speaks to nobler, more altruistic motives. I want to contribute to the body of research centred on Brunei, especially that of a qualitative nature. I also feel compelled to explore the contradictory forces that I have seen and felt around me in this locality and to examine how they impact on the way local participants see themselves and pursue their identities in a contemporary setting.

Ethical concerns are of particular importance in any qualitative research, given the personal, often sensitive nature of the issues being explored. In the case of ethnographies, these concerns become even more heightened due to the insider status and strong rapport possibly enjoyed by the ethnographer with its consequent potential for betrayal and negative exposure. Hammersley and Atkinson (2007:209) identify five key considerations that should govern ethically conscious research. These are: informed consent, privacy, harm, exploitation, and consequences for future research.

### *Informed consent*

From an ethical perspective it is desirable that participants are made fully aware of the research agenda and then freely agree to take part in the study based on this knowledge. However, such absolute discretion is utopian as other considerations almost invariably impinge on this fragile freedom. Participants may feel obliged simply because they have been asked or may feel compelled by their existing relationship with the researcher. Furthermore, even in the case of overt research the ethnographer may not be able to reveal everything s/he is studying, often because even s/he does not know at such an initial stage how the research process may unfold and the directions it may take (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:210). Despite these difficulties, it is nonetheless worthwhile pursuing the ideal of informed consent no matter how elusive it may seem.

In the context of this study I chatted informally to all the adult participants and explained what I was trying to explore. Almost all agreed to take part and two of the three who did

not agree still wanted some involvement. I feel that some distance was created by the fact that I followed up with email correspondences which required a reply in order to be included; though I cannot dismiss the possibility that some may have agreed to participate because they wanted to support me in my academic endeavours. In the case of student participants, I am now glad that one potential participant refused to be involved despite our good relationship. She declined on the basis that she felt I knew her too well, having read her creative-writing assignments. We maintain a good relationship via Facebook. All student participants were contacted only by my appointed SPL1 in order to minimise any possible sense of coercion, obligation or ‘face-saving’ – a particular concern in this locality. Furthermore, all students had left the College by the time they were approached so they would not have been in the position of meeting me on a regular basis. Nevertheless, my knowledge of Bruneian students leads me to believe that elements of deference and loyalty to a former teacher may have coloured their decisions to participate. In the case of student participants, parental consent was also sought since many had only recently turned eighteen and all are still dependent on their parents. I was also mindful of exploiting my role as their teacher and wished to remain fully accountable to parents for the time they spent in the city with me being interviewed. In the interests of full disclosure and to guard against misunderstanding, bilingual versions of both Consent Forms were sent.

### *Privacy*

Ethnographic research by its very nature puts things that were once said in the relatively private setting of an interview into some kind of public domain, even if it is only a limited scholarly one as might be the case with an unpublished PhD dissertation. This compromising of privacy is amplified by the often sensitive, highly personal nature of some of the issues discussed and further compounded by the possibility that participants may not have been fully conscious of the impact their utterances could have. They may be subsequently alarmed at the power these remarks assume when rendered in written form in the research report. This can lead to feelings of violation, betrayal and anger if it is not handled ethically by the ethnographer. One of the strategies that can be used to guard against this to some extent is that of member checking. This is when participants are encouraged to read the final draft version of the report prior to its submission so that they

are aware of how their data have been construed and have an opportunity to verify, clarify, extend or refute assumptions or analyses made based on their input.

This was carried out during the latter stages of preparing the research report in June 2016. All 16 participants were contacted by e-mail and invited to read the draft data chapters (Appendix 8). I corresponded with the eight adult participants directly and four of them replied, expressing interest in reading the drafts, which were duly sent for their feedback. My SPL1 contacted the student participants, five of whom responded positively and had the drafts sent to them. In both cases a lack of response was interpreted as indicating that the participant did not feel the need to refute my account.

The issue of privacy is far from simple. It is customary for participants to be cursorily assured of both confidentiality and anonymity (Miles and Huberman, 1994:293); such clauses being features of all consent proformas issued at the outset. However, delivering on these promises can prove problematic even for the most well-intentioned researcher. Names may be removed and codes applied, but such measures may prove futile especially if the research is read in the locality in which it is situated (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:212; Miles and Huberman, 1994:293).

In this research study participants' names have been removed from transcripts and codified based on their adult [P1 to P8] or student [SP1 to SP8] status (P = adult participant; SP = student participant). Others present at interviews are codified as follows: R1 = researcher; SPL1 = student participant liaison; H1 = husband of P6; D1 = daughter of R1. When their utterances are reproduced in the research text, they are followed by the individual's coded identifier and the numbered speech turn(s) involved. Access to data in its original form has been restricted to me as the sole researcher and to the appointed SPL1 to the extent that was necessary for him to perform his role. Otherwise any knowledge of who participants were was divulged only by the participants themselves who discussed their involvement with fellow participants or opted to have joint interviews in some cases. However, despite these safeguards, I am conscious that the microcosmic nature of the research locality itself and its location within a relatively close-knit society such as exists in Brunei makes the

participants vulnerable to being identified by other local people as well as by each other; even, if only, surmisedly.

### *Harm*

Closely linked to the protection of participants' privacy, the requirement that they be safeguarded and protected from harm, the principle of non-maleficence (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:58-59) must always remain a key consideration (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998:43; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2003:57; Miles and Huberman, 1994:292). At face value this may seem unproblematic in ethnographic research when contrasted with medical experiments or clinical trials conducted in the name of quantitative research. Nonetheless, in ethnographic research the potential for harm does still exist and needs to be elucidated and addressed. Undesirable consequences could arise from the actual research process itself or, more likely, from publication and dissemination of the results. This is perhaps an outcome participants do not anticipate when they agree to take part in the first instance. Having participants read the finished report in advance of its being submitted or published can mitigate against this to some extent, but once the results are out there in the public domain, regardless of how small and restricted that domain might be, all control over their effects and repercussions are relinquished. Therein lurks the danger. Such danger is not confined to the participants. It also extends to the researcher, especially if s/he operates in a society which exerts strict censorial control over the publication of academic work. In this research locality, authors are held highly accountable for their work. Any public utterances or written statements considered controversial may lead to disciplinary action or even outright dismissal. Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) requires that its academics enshrine the "values of stewardship and service to the country" (Universiti Brunei Darussalam, 2011). This suggests an element of self-censoring of reporting any data that could be contrary to the official image the authorities wish to project.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:58-60) suggest that the social researcher remain consistently fixated on treating participants with utmost respect and that their dignity and welfare always be at the fore. They also point out that research behaviours are often neither clearly ethical nor unethical, but fall somewhere along the continuum between these



polarities (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:58, citing Kimmel, 1988). Furthermore, the issue of what constitutes ‘harm’ is both contentious and context-specific and is often highly unpredictable. What is clear however is that in cases where ethical dilemmas arise the ethnographer be driven by his or her obligation to participants and be committed to protecting them even if the integrity and impact of the research are jeopardised by doing so (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:59).

Beneficence (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:58) is the other side of the non-maleficence coin and is concerned with what participants stand to gain from their involvement. However, it does not always follow that the absence or curtailment of harm will automatically lead to the bestowal of advantages. Participants may have little or nothing to gain from taking part despite the time and energy they expend by doing so. If benefits do exist, they are usually intangible and difficult to unearth or express in anything beyond a surmisable manner since they are likely to remain latent and unarticulated even within the participants’ own consciousness.

It could look very much as if all the beneficence accrued is unidirectional and stacked in favour of the researcher who is the one that either gets paid, gets published, becomes famous or perhaps gets a dissertation approved, all the while extending his or her knowledge and, presumably, enjoying his or her work. Miles and Huberman (1994:292, citing McLaren, 1991) refer to this as “ethnographic vampirism”. Though written two decades ago, this analogy is particularly apt in the contemporary world due to the recent obsession with anything vampiric among young people. However, its chilling connotations remain and, despite the prevailing cachet vampires are enjoying, I am confident in asserting that no ethical ethnographer would wish to be cast in such a role.

The interview phase of the research process was enjoyable and went smoothly for the most part. In terms of what might constitute ‘harm’, the only things I sensed were mild initial feelings of awkwardness, shyness and possible embarrassment at being together out of our comfort zones of the college staffroom or classrooms. These feelings were mutual and were stronger with the participants with whom I have the closest relationships which I

found somewhat surprising. It may have been the relative formality of our conversations being recorded that gave rise to this unease. It helped that the participants themselves had chosen the venues and that food was available in all cases though some opted to have drinks only. The presence of the SPL1 and the choice of being interviewed in pairs also helped to ease discomfort and create a relaxed, informal ambience. Great care was taken to protect the reputations of all participants as mixed groups, especially one containing an older, foreign female, can arouse quite high levels of curiosity in some public places in Brunei. Interestingly, many participants' choices of 'western' eateries meant that this possible reaction was distilled by the less conservative environment in such places.

However, due to the sensitive nature of some of the topics discussed, I am aware that the potential for harming the participants does exist and will be at its most powerful in the script of the research report. Issues such as politics and religion are minefields in most contexts, but this effect is manifold in the case of Brunei where a seemingly 'safe' topic like music can be laden with religious taboos and long-held proscription juxtaposed with the reality of a burgeoning local music scene. I intend to remain at all times mindful of my obligation to the participants so that their welfare is safeguarded.

In terms of beneficence (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007:58), the only tangible 'rewards' were food and ice-cream, except for the SPL1 who was paid a nominal fee to acknowledge his invaluable contribution as well as covering the cost of phone calls and text messages sent by him in the recruitment process.

Any other benefits are highly intangible and are likely to be unacknowledged on a conscious level by the participants. They may conceivably have welcomed the opportunity to be the voices of contemporary Brunei through their contribution to a research study on an under-theorised issue in their own locality. From an experiential standpoint, they may also have valued this exposure to the qualitative interview research process, as much of the past research done in the country has relied heavily on surveys which were interpreted quantitatively. Since many of those involved will almost certainly engage in research

activities themselves in the future, it is hoped that their participation will have predisposed them favourably towards qualitative research.

### *Exploitation*

Ethnography by its very nature is potentially exploitative and each study needs to be assessed for its potential in this regard. Some of this danger can be assuaged by adhering to the principles of informed consent and by foregrounding the protection and respecting of participants at all times. Nevertheless, the ethnographer is cast in a dominant role as the orchestrator of the research process. This can be compounded if there is already a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the participants as is often the case. It can be further complicated if the ethnographer hails from somewhere else, especially if s/he can be linked in any way to an imperialistic heritage or is part of a system which is inherently unequal in its principles or actions. Research practices have traditionally been dominated by “white researchers working in non-white communities” where ‘they’ are studied by ‘us’ and such practices have become institutionalised to an extent that they have come to be perceived as natural (Cameron et al, 1992:3). This apparent naturalness needs to be challenged and problematised in order to liberate research from unequal power relationships and to safeguard participants from being treated as “just fodder for research” (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:217, citing Beynon, 1983:47).

In this study each of my positions as a white woman, a non-local, a native speaker teacher of English predisposes me towards becoming an exploitative researcher unless I remain mindful of the myriad ways these incontrovertible facts can impact my research conduct. One of the ways I attempted to lessen this exploitative potential was by discussing participants’ actual feelings about being interviewed with them, even as we were actively engaged in the process. A conscious effort was also made to allow interviews to develop organically so that participants directed and controlled them to a greater extent. Such an approach was reportedly used by Cannon in her quest to parry charges of exploitation (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2007:217, citing Cannon, 1992). These discussions also enabled me to convey again my gratitude for the participants’ willingness to take part, in a further attempt to protect the research from assuming hierarchical dimensions insofar as

this was possible. Nevertheless, interviews with student participants were invariably characterised by a greater level of power imbalance due to their natural deference to my position as a former teacher and possibly to my age.

### *Consequences for future research*

Social research does not exist in a vacuum and, once disseminated, it takes its place between works that have preceded it and those that will follow. In this regard, due care should be taken not to jeopardise future access to the research setting. In socio-political conditions such as those that prevail in Brunei this caveat assumes even more importance than it might in larger, less regulated settings. Despite the high score of six out of a possible seven Brunei was given for political rights (with one being “most free” and seven “least free”) and its ranking of five out of seven for civil liberties as determined by Freedom House in its 2012 report (Puddington, 2012:14), the 2011 U.S. Department of State Report on Human Rights Practices: Brunei, concludes that, “There were no government restrictions on academic freedom” (U.S. Department of State. Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor, 2012:Section 2a). This was followed by a concession that researchers might opt to publish using a pseudonym from outside the country if they consider their findings to be potentially injurious to the sensitivities of the authorities. Locally-based academics suggest that this assessment is only true to the extent that the boundaries of academic freedom are rarely challenged and as such remain opaque and uncontested (see, for example, a web forum comment by Jerambak, 2012). These conditions make the self-censorship mentioned previously become the norm, potentially compromising both the value and integrity of research efforts.

## **Conclusion to Chapter 2**

This chapter has continued the journey of my emerging identity of researcher by outlining in detail the methodological stance chosen, the various methods used in data generation and analysis, and the attention paid to ethical conduct throughout. It is followed by an overview of the research locality in the next chapter. This conjures the place that is co-constitutive of the identities formation and performance of the research participants. They

identify with, shape, and are “shaped by their environments, creating distinctive ‘environmental autobiographies’;” the narratives that derive from “memories of those spaces and places that shaped [them]” (Place and identity, 2014). In this way, “place identity” that involves the incorporation of place into the larger concept of self occurs (Proshansky, Fabian & Kaminoff, 1983:59-60). Out of this grows place attachment (Low & Altman, 1992) which individuals feel to varying degrees and which is closely linked to a sense of belonging to and in that location. The insecurity and unpredictability that result when this is thrown into question make identity the issue of our age.

# CHAPTER 3

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*Getting to Know Brunei as Locality*

*I believe that one can never leave home. I  
believe that one carries the shadows, the  
dreams, the fears and dragons of home under  
one's skin*

Angelou, 2008:6

### Chapter 3: Introduction

This chapter will endeavour to evoke the locality in which this research was done. The place called Brunei Darussalam and how the research participants relate affectively to it and feel about being from there are central to their identities' construction and performances. It is their abode where it can be expected that they feel most 'at home' or 'in place'. However, this is not necessarily so and cannot be taken prima facie without at least some interrogation or problematisation. Being born somewhere is not always automatically accompanied by a sense of belonging there. My personal sense of feeling very much at home in Brunei, and my geographically-induced anomie on finally leaving, are a case in point. Pennycook explores the possibility that some people may feel most at home in a state of actual or seeming outsidersness (Pennycook, 2012:162). Thus, the participants' birthplace may or may not have bestowed a deep sense of rootedness or belonging in them. Pennycook also reminds us that, "Locality has to do with space and place," (Pennycook, 2010:3). In the pages that follow, the place that is Brunei will be written into being and the space it affords its sixteen young citizens to become themselves will be explored from geographical, politico-economic, linguistic, religious and social perspectives, bearing in mind that they are the success stories of Brunei's language and education policies.

#### 3.1 Locating Brunei geographically

*Negara Brunei Darussalam*, the country's official name in Malay, translates as 'the country of Brunei, the abode of peace'. It can be found on the northwest coast of Borneo island in Southeast Asia, occupying a physical space of only 5,765 square kilometres (Figure 3). Its size is significant because it has the effect of giving the country microcosmic qualities which influence the way it is governed and how society there conducts itself. It is surrounded on three sides by the East Malaysian state of Sarawak, which is more than 20 times bigger. Its northern coastline of approximately 161 kilometres stretches along the South China Sea.

Figure 3: Location of Brunei Darussalam

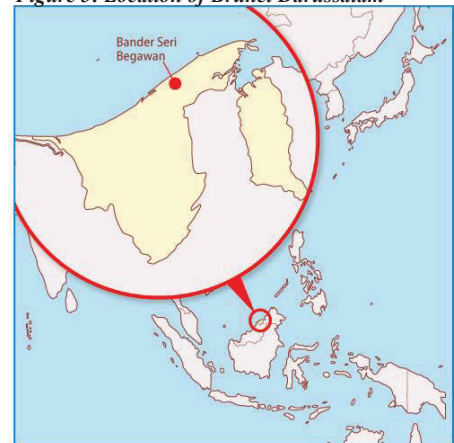




Figure 4: Districts of Brunei



Brunei is divided into four districts or *daerah* (Figure 4). Temburong district to the East is cut off from the rest of the country by a previously disputed tract of land belonging to Sarawak. This district is home to *Ulu Temburong* National Park which takes up about 40 percent of the district. It features pristine virgin rainforest that is protected under a 2005 trilateral initiative with Malaysia and Indonesia, the two other countries which share the island of Borneo. This initiative which is a source of great pride is known as the ‘Heart of Borneo’ (Heart of Borneo Rainforest Foundation, 2013). Brunei’s abundant natural resources and small population mean that there is negligible risk of encroachment on rainforest areas. The country is consequently often cast as a ‘saviour’ of virgin rainforest and an eco-destination – two of its identities that it seeks to promote internationally (Shahminan, 2015). The western area is divided into the three districts of Brunei-Muara, Tutong and Belait. Of these, the Brunei-Muara District is the most populous, despite being the smallest in area. The capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan, is located here and is the locality wherein the research took place. All participants are residents of this district and all are connected to the sixth-form college which can be found in a central part of the city.

### 3.1.1 Climatic conditions

Brunei’s lush tropicity is due to its position between the Equator and the Tropic of Cancer at latitude 4° 30’ north and longitude 114° 40’ east. Its hot, humid climate is significant because of the way climate interacts with the human psyche and cultural practice, and its influence on concepts of personal and national identity (Hulme, 2008:5, citing Golinski). As humans, our experience of climate is complex and primordial, contributing to a deeper experience of place. Though this may be mostly subconscious, it can create in people a sense of “embeddedness, a tacit, implicit awareness that their lives are part of a vast web of perceptions and sensations, of a tidal inherency that makes up a living, breathing landscape or, in many ways, a ‘mindscape’,” (Howard, 2013:7). This is part of what constitutes feeling at home in, or at one with, a place, in a symbiotic relationship with the natural

conditions in which we find ourselves. It is also something that impacted participants when they moved to cooler climes and it previously contributed to the exoticification of Malays and other Asians in colonial times.

### **3.2 Brunei as a political domain**

The sovereign nation state of Brunei is a relatively neophyte one which only regained full independence as recently as 1<sup>st</sup> January, 1984. Prior to that it had been a British protectorate since 1888 though it had resumed self-government of internal affairs since the late 1950s (Hussainmiya, 2001:1). Contrary to the anti-colonial rhetoric that characterised the struggles of other nearby countries, including neighbouring Malaysia, against their colonial powers, Brunei's prolonged status as a protectorate was orchestrated by the then Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin II and helped to preserve the absolutism of its monarchy (Sidhu, 2010:175-176; Trend, as cited in Ashton and Louis, 2004:381-382). In total contravention of the ostensible British desire to leave developing democracies in their colonial wake the Bruneian monarchy emerged from colonialism fortified and ready to assert itself (Schottmann, 2006:115), adding legitimacy through appeals to both its ancient Malay past and Islam; two of the three pillars of its national ideology which will be expounded on later (see 3.2.2). In this way they were able "to project their power backwards in time, giving it a history and legitimacy that only tradition and longevity could impart" (Said, 1993:16).

The absence of antipathy towards the British meant that strong trade and social links were perpetuated and the two countries remain closely linked to this day. Of particular relevance to this study is the ongoing reliance of the educational system on the British one for standardisation and validation. This is part of a wider tendency to attach itself to external 'standard bearers' such as the UK and neighbouring Singapore. However, after a century of British 'protectionism', Brunei also needed to invoke an identity that was distinctive and reflective of its own traditional and cultural values, while remaining overtly Anglophile in many respects. This likely emanates from the Sultan himself. Like his father before him, he is widely regarded as an Anglophile, enjoying a particularly close relationship with the British royal family ("Brunei Darussalam", n.d., section 7). This lack of anti-colonial, anti-

British rhetoric paved the way for Brunei in terms of the direction it took when it regained autonomy. Brunei seems to have contradictorily poised itself to straddle the contiguities of asserting its own identity and remaining closely aligned to its former protector, particularly in a linguistic and educational sense.

Brunei's interrupted nationalism needed to be reasserted at a time (early 1980s) when many of the world's powerbroker countries were stumbling "hesitantly towards post-nationalist ways of understanding identity" (Reid, 2001:295) in the pursuit of the notion of a 'borderless' world. In a sense this put Brunei on an oppositional trajectory at a time when it was also seeking to forge new international ties and establish itself on the world stage. The notion of monolithic nation states looked like it was fast becoming outdated, though time has since proven otherwise. The opportunity for greater liberation and democratisation that came in the wake of imperialism and that was the legacy ostensibly desired by the British, was lost. Instead, in Brunei, newfound independence seemed to inspire an almost frantic, exaggerated drive to forge a unique national identity based on, what Anderson in his analysis of nationalism described as, "imagined communities" (Anderson, 1991:6) emerging from embellished, sanitised antiquity and tradition (Said, 1993:16-17; Gunn, 1997:210-216; Friedman, 2006:617). This is the kind of historicization that Foucault decried for its stultifying effects on creativity (Foucault, 1977:162) and by extension on identities' construction.

In describing the "uneasy relationship" between nationalism and liberation, Said (1993:63) stresses that despite their shared contra-imperialism, their coexistence is not always possible and in such cases liberation inevitably falls victim to nationalism. This was the case in Brunei where it manifested itself in the long term suspension of the legislative council in 1984 and the continuance of Emergency Orders (Constitution of Brunei Darussalam, 1959, art. 83, revised edition 2011) first declared in 1962 (Saunders, 2002:174). These were instated in response to a failed republican rebellion. Although the Legislative Council has been reconvened since 2004, Brunei remains under Emergency Orders to this day, allowing political consciousness to possibly die a slow silent death in the intervening years, during which Bruneians' fleeting flirtation with republicanism has

been discursively cast as an unfortunate aberration, a stain on its otherwise glorious monarchical past. Bruneian citizens' politico-economic status is explored in depth in Chapter 4.

### **3.2.1 Identifying the political structure**

Brunei's political framework is nominally that of a constitutional monarchy (Constitution of Brunei Darussalam, 1959, revised edition 2011). This is headed by the Sultan who has total executive authority and a 2004 amendment to Brunei's constitution grants him complete immunity in both his official and personal capacities (Constitution of Brunei Darussalam (Amendment) Proclamation, 2004:2427-2428). This is tantamount to infallibility status. There are five councils to advise him and support his governance. These are the Religious Council, the Privy Council, the Council of Cabinet Ministers, the Legislative Council and the Council of Succession and Regency ("Introduction to Brunei Darussalam," 2005). All members are directly appointed by the Sultan, except for nine who are indirectly elected as village heads, giving them automatic membership of the Legislative Council.

The Religious Council advises on all issues related to the official Shafeite school of Sunni Islam and counts among its members: the Attorney General, the Syariah Chief Justice and the State *Mufti* (Islamic scholar). Its role and influence will be explored fully in Chapter 6 which deals with the primal impact of Islam itself and the Islamic religious authorities on every aspect of life in Brunei, not least on education which is often the vehicle of dissemination and inculcation of value systems.

The Privy Council gives advice on the exercise of clemency, constitutional changes and on the conferring of honorary titles and state recognition. This is peopled by members of the royal family and those whose loyalty and allegiance have been proven over time. Recent appointments to this Council include three of the Sultan's sons (Shahminan, 2011). The word 'privy' means private or secret and the term Privy Council (PC) dates back to 15<sup>th</sup> century-England (O'Connor, 2009:9). Brunei's political structure is based closely on the British one. It is perhaps idiosyncratic that such "archaic forms of power" (O'Connor, 2009:36) continue to exist in a modern democracy like Great Britain today. However, in

Brunei its existence as “an instrument of feudal rule” (Smith, 2009:1) is less of a contradiction since ultimately the Sultan is omnipotent and Brunei’s monarchy remains much closer to its feudal roots.

The Council of Cabinet Ministers consists of twelve ministries, two of which are presided over by the Sultan himself. He is the Defence Minister, the Minister of Finance, as well as being Prime Minister (“Introduction to Brunei Darussalam,” 2005).

The Council of Succession and Regency deals with succession issues when the reigning monarch dies or abdicates the throne (Sidhu, 2010:67-68).

The Legislative Council which had previously been envisaged by the British as a foundation for an eventual parliamentary democracy was reconvened in 2004. It then consisted of 21 members all appointed by the Sultan. A year later this was dissolved and replaced by a 29-member council. The current 36 Member council has been in place since June 2011 and meets annually in March (Oxford Business Group, 2013:13; “Freedom in the world: Brunei,” 2013). However, as a result of constitutional amendments made in 2004 legislative powers are limited to being advisory. Any executive powers intended by its initial foundation have been reduced to a consultative level.

In practice Brunei is an absolute monarchy. The country’s 21<sup>st</sup> century political reality incorporates many of the principles promulgated by the notable 17<sup>th</sup> century political philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. He infamously concluded that “we ought to submit to the authority of an absolute – undivided and unlimited – sovereign power” (Lloyd and Sreedhar, 2013). This is what happens politically in Brunei. Yet, unlike other such regimes which are labelled as ‘repressive’ from a western democratic perspective, Brunei is not often subject to the same levels of censure or ostracism. In fact, the reverse is usually true; Brunei has a “special relationship” with Britain (BBC News, 1998, citing Prince Mohamed of Brunei), the United States (The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 2013) and Australia (Sultan of Brunei heading to Australia, 2013).

### 3.2.2 Brunei's national ideology

The need to reassert an independent identity led to the renaissance of what is promulgated internally as the age old national ideology of MIB. The genesis of this is debated. Official sources in Brunei claim that it dates as far back as 100A.D. (Government of Brunei Darussalam, n.d.), though it is more widely stated that it coincides with the adoption of Islam in the 14<sup>th</sup> century. However, Braighlinn (1992:18-19) and Gunn (1997:218-222) are sceptical and contend that it is a much more recent construct in the guise of an ancient indigenous one. They view it as a social control mechanism that simultaneously imbues the current leadership with absolute moral and political power and sanctity. Noor Azam alludes to its **re-emergence** [emphasis added] in 1984, having previously been included in the Brunei Constitution of 1959 (Noor Azam, 2005:27). Kershaw presents it as a device to reconcile absolute monarchical rule with modern Islam, while at the same time subduing ardent Malay nationalism. MIB succeeds in this by “depicting a shared ethnic identity of kings and people in the remote past, infused with patriotism to forestall and disqualify the ‘aberration’ of selfish nationalist politics under non-royal leadership” (Kershaw, 2001a:24). It is from this notion of a close ancestral relationship that the current trope of “caring Caliph” (Kershaw, 2001a:24) or “caring monarch” (Thambipillai, 2011:49) draws its sustenance. MIB’s systemisation coincided with independence and it is now “deeply entrenched” and conceptualised as “the Brunei way of life” (Kershaw, 2001a:26). Regardless of how or when it actually began, it has been the guiding philosophy of the country since independence. However, although it was included in the 1984 Declaration of Independence, it was not until 1990, six years later, that the concept was officially instated by the Sultan during his birthday *titah* in July of that year (Saunders, 2002:187). At the time MIB was designated as a national ‘philosophy’ and it was only in the following years that it “was elevated to its status as an ideology” (Talib, 2002:143). Whilst it is debatable whether this is actually an elevation or even a conscious reappellation, it is important because of the fundamental differences between these two designations.

A philosophy consists of general conceptions, “overarching principles or maxims” (Blattberg, 2009:4) that have little to say about specific political issues. An ideology, on the other hand, is “more programmatic” (Blattberg, 2009:4), predetermined and

prescriptive. It seeks to guide people on the positions they should take on issues. While a philosophy can direct people in a certain direction, it remains open to discussion, new developments or contrary evidence. However, an ideology is closed to counter-evidence and does not countenance interrogation. Furthermore, it is problematic in that it discourages thinking (Clinton, 2006). In the case of Brunei, this may be the desired effect.

Although there is no real evidence that the shift in nomenclature was deliberate, MIB is clearly much more of an ideology than a philosophy. It is presented as being rigid, dogmatic and totally intolerant of contradiction, advocating a fixed set of beliefs that aspire to a particular vision of the future. This vision encompasses continued adherence to Islamic values, the preservation and prominence of Malay culture and the perpetuation of absolute monarchical rule. It acts as a “powerful tool for shaping the country’s social reality and for instilling a collective conscience within the nation” (Black, 2008:2). In the 2004 amendment to the constitution it became an offence under the Sedition Act for any member of the Legislative Council to criticise any member of the royal household or the national ideology (Constitution of Brunei Darussalam (Amendment) Proclamation, 2004:2416).

### **3.2.3 Brunei’s economy**

Brunei is and has long been a welfare state courtesy of its natural resources of oil and gas. In the 1970s it became known as a “‘Shellfare’ State” (“‘Shellfare’ state awash”, 1978) since, at that time, its oil industry was controlled by the Anglo-Dutch oil company, Shell. The “cradle-to-grave welfare program provides most of the population with free schooling at home and abroad, free medical care, low cost loans, subsidized food and generous retirement pensions” (Mahoney, 1985). Furthermore, there is no personal income tax. Since the country regained independence in 1984, the provision of these generous welfare benefits has remained a top government priority (Leong and Tan, 2006:65). The Sultan in the role of benefactor continues to honour a promise he made to his citizens to safeguard their wellbeing and happiness at that time. The participants in this study have all benefited greatly from such generosity. All the adult participants have enjoyed free education to graduate level with the majority having degrees from overseas universities in the UK or Australia. The student participants were, at the time of research, poised to embark on

similar academic pursuits, with all of them indicating a preference for institutions outside of Brunei.

#### Brunei as a rentier state

Brunei is often confused with states in the Middle East such as Bahrain and Kuwait. This could be more than a coincidence borne out of geographical nescience. Its political and economic systems have a lot in common with those that exist in these and other countries in that region. Colclough (1985: 29) suggests that Brunei could be classified as a rentier state. A rentier state is defined as one that depends largely on external sources of income, derived from the export of a valuable commodity or commodities. In Brunei's case oil and liquefied natural gas account for over 90 percent of the country's revenue (Brunei Economic Development Board, n.d.). The articulation of the concept of a rentier state is attributed to Robert Mabro (1969) and Ruth First (1974) in relation to Libya, and Hossein Mahdavy (1970), referring to the Iranian economy. These economies receive regular payments from outside of the country classified as 'rentals'.

There are a number of pertinent features of rentier economies that have wide-ranging effects on the social structure and development of the countries in which they operate. One of these is that a disproportionate number of people are employed by the government and private sector employment is regarded as either a temporary measure or a last resort. Attempts are being made by the Sultan and his government to change this mindset. He went so far as to devote his birthday *titah* of 2015 to this issue, underlining its importance. However, the identity of a civil servant is one that all Bruneians aspire to performing and dissuading them from this preference is likely to be difficult in the extreme. It is something that has been instilled in them throughout the generations for at least the past 30 years. Whilst a significant gap continues to exist between the salaries and benefits accrued in private sector jobs and those in the public sector, this mindset may well persist despite government attempts to dispel it. The culture of dependence that has been created over the decades is now viewed as a barrier to future development and prosperity in light of the country's growing population, dwindling resources and less certain fortunes.



### **3.3 Brunei – the linguascape-glottoscape**

Brunei is surprisingly diverse linguistically, given its small size. Many languages are spoken here, each forming part of the local practices of the various ethnic groups who populate the country. The languaging (Swain, 2006:98) that takes place within and between these groups is complex and any attempt to assign different codes according to ethnicity or location would be reductive. Code-switching, code-mixing and multi-directional lexical borrowing are the norm, as people draw on their often extensive linguistic repertoires according to interlocutor, context and/or communicative needs. All of these languages are salient features of Brunei as locality, collectively constituting its language ecology. The hyphenated terms, linguascape-glottoscape, aim to capture both the existence and the active usage of the many languages that can be found and heard there. A linguascape “encompasses all the various codes that are of communicative and cultural relevance within a space” (Liebscher and Dailey-O’Cain, 2013:35). Glottoscape is a term coined by A. Suresh Canagarajah to capture the interactions between languages in use that accompany and actuate all the other transcultural flows and mixes that are part of our modern world (Canagarajah, 2005a:17). It is an addition to an earlier model devised by Arjun Appadurai to explain the evolution of geopolitical relationships in recent years (Appadurai, 1996:53).

#### **3.3.1 Languaging in Brunei: Forms of Malay**

The official language of Brunei is STM. This is a supraregional code reserved for formal speeches, written texts, media broadcasts and as a language of instruction in schools (Noor Azam, 2005:46). It coexists in the Brunei speech community with BNM, which is used as a lingua franca by most Bruneians. Whilst Nothofer believes it to be 84 percent etymologically cognate with STM (Nothofer, 1991:158), others consider its degree of divergence phonologically, grammatically and lexically almost sufficient to classify it as a separate language (Clynes and Deterding, 2011:259). All of the participants of this study can draw on both of these forms of Malay from their linguistic repertoires. Proficiency in STM is required to successfully negotiate the educational system and is also a prerequisite for citizenship by registration (Brunei Nationality Act, 2002:7). All of the participants in this study can be numbered among the academically successful Bruneians who qualify for a post-secondary education, first at local sixth form colleges and later at universities, either at

home or abroad. On the other hand, BNM use signifies insider status or belongingness due to its role as a “marker of solidarity, prestige and identity” (Martin, 1996:34). It is also recognised as vital for safeguarding Malay culture since, “Maintenance of a culture is impossible without maintenance of its language” (Fishman, 1989:471).

### **3.3.2 Linguaging in Brunei: Chinese languages**

Mandarin is taught at the Chinese schools of Brunei, although it is rarely the first language of the Chinese students who attend (García, 2008:275). Brunei’s Chinese community established its first independent school as early as 1916, not long after Malay-medium education was made available. Mandarin is also likely used as a lingua franca between Hokkien speakers, centred around Brunei-Muara and Tutong districts, and Hakka speakers in Belait district. Furthermore, it facilitates communication with neighbouring Chinese communities in Malaysia and Singapore, while simultaneously reasserting Chinese identity (Dunseath, 1996:286). Recent statistics from 2011 estimate that, as a group, the Chinese now comprise only about ten percent of Brunei’s population (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). This represents a decline from the figures of 17.8 percent to 20 percent reported in the mid-1990s (Dunseath, 1996:281). While there has been an intermittent Chinese presence in Brunei, dating back to the ninth century, modern settlement patterns can be traced to the flourishing oil industry from the 1930s onwards when their presence rose from approximately nine percent in 1931 to 26 percent in 1960 and up to a high of 29.5 percent just prior to independence in 1981 (Dunseath, 1996:282, citing Niew 1991 and Tan 1992). Their declining representation in the country is thought to be linked to the relative difficulty in obtaining Brunei citizenship for anyone who is not Malay (Suryadinata, 2013:285; Dunseath, 1996:283). Mandarin is significant in this study because it not only features in the lives of some of the participants who are Chinese, but also in the lives of those who choose to learn it by attending Chinese schools. Two of the student participants can be numbered in this group. It is a growing trend among Malays, coinciding with China’s growing prominence in world affairs (Jin, 2009). This also serves to elevate the position of Chinese languages in the country. It also means that English is not the only additional language people wish to study and speak.

### **3.3.3 Linguaging in Brunei: English language**

The English language has been part of Brunei's linguistic ecology since the mid-nineteenth century. At that time Brunei was much larger than it is now. Its relationship with the British, and consequently 'their' language, began with James Brooke, the 'White Rajah' of Sarawak, who inveigled his way into the then Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin II's favour by quashing a protracted rebellion in Sarawak (Hussainmiya, 2006:6-7). However, this seeming ally soon turned foe and began expanding Sarawak's territory at Brunei's expense. By the late 1880s, Brunei was in danger of disappearing. This led to the signing of a Protectorate Agreement with Great Britain in 1888 that would last for 96 years. During the years directly after this, little protection was forthcoming, leading to the need for a further Supplementary Protectorate Agreement in 1905/1906. This began the period of British Residency (1906-1959), during which English was the language of administration in Brunei (Hussainmiya, 2006:44-61). In this way the English language became, for a time, the only language of law and bureaucracy in Brunei, since all executive power lay with the British Resident. Thus, English became embedded in Brunei's linguascape well in advance of independence. When this period came to an end in 1959, the 1959 Constitution provided for the continued official use of English for a transition period of five years, after which it was likely envisaged that all official documents would be rendered in Malay, the official language of Brunei (Ozóg, 1996:156).

This anticipated decline of English use and prominence never came about and its use, both planned and unplanned, continue to the present day. Events conspired to ensure the continued presence and prestige of English. The initial discovery of oil in 1929 had created demand for English language. This also led in 1931 to the opening of the first English-medium primary school, which was privately run. It was in Seria, part of the Belait district, where the oil had been found two years earlier, not in the capital as might have been expected. Malay-medium primary schools had existed prior to this; the first one having opened in the capital in 1914 (Yunos, 2014). However, by 1941 there were still only three private English-medium schools in the country, while the number of Malay-medium schools had grown substantially to 24 (Public Relations Unit, Ministry of Education, 2000:2).

These statistics are suggestive of a British preference for vernacular education for the local populace (O'Hara-Davies, 2006:81), since by then the British Residency was well established. The tendency to exclusify the English language and limit access to it rather than actively promoting its spread among the local populations also occurred in other colonial settings (Brutt-Griffler, 2002:38-39 and 57). In India a mere one percent of Indians were English speakers at the end of British colonial rule there (Sreberny-Mohammadi, 1997:61, citing Altbach 1987). This mitigates charges of linguistic imperialism against the British to some extent; their rule may have been imposed, but 'their' language was not. Joseph contends that, "It is in the interest of the powerful and prestigious to develop means of keeping their language difficult of attainment," because eloquent use of language "almost universally functions as a mantle of power" (Joseph, 1987:43). It is no coincidence that many of those who graduated from the first English-medium school later assumed ministerial positions in the Brunei government, among them Brunei's first Minister of Education.

In the post World War II years, the country's burgeoning oil industry and expanding civil service rendered the English language a necessity. Consequently, a government English-medium secondary school was opened in Brunei Town (former name of the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan) in 1951 (Public Relations Unit, Ministry of Education, 2000:2). This cemented the position of English in the country and led to its later being perceived as a prerequisite for career advancement (Noor Azam, 2005:53). Over time, facility in English also became "associated with wealth, education and success" (Ozóg, 1996:158), since it was the sole prerogative of the elite, while the dual Malay and English systems of education existed between 1966 and 1984. It was only in 1966 that Malay-medium secondary education became available in the country. For the next 18 years the two systems ran parallel, but separate. During that time, pupils who excelled in the Primary Certificate of Education (PCE) examination were channelled into English-medium secondary education, while lower achievers went to Malay-medium schools. This reinforced the "belief amongst many Bruneians that English was a language of higher academic status than Malay" (Cane, 1994:252).

On attaining independence in 1984, Brunei took the progressive and pragmatic step of introducing a bilingual education policy, known as *dwibahasa* (two languages). The factors that led to this decision and its manifold impact on the lives of Bruneians, such as the participants of this study, will be explored at length in Chapter 5. Initially, English was taught only as a subject in the early years from pre-school (*pra sekolah*) to primary 3 (*dajah 3*). Thereafter, subjects such as Mathematics, Science, History and Geography were taught through English, while Islamic Religious Knowledge (IRK), PE, Art, Civics and MIB were delivered through the medium of Malay. In 1993, History changed from English-medium to Malay-medium (Gunn, 1997:155).

More recently, with the implementation of Brunei's 21<sup>st</sup> Century National Education System (*Sistem Pendidikan Negara Abad ke 21* or *SPN-21*) in 2009, all subjects (except for Malay, IRK and Art) are taught through English from the outset. This is likely possible because English tends to be regarded dispassionately and valued for its instrumentality. As such, it is not thought to pose a threat to the position of BNM as a core element of Bruneianness. The oft-used expression, *Bahasa jiwa bangsa* (Language is the soul of the people) encapsulates this quintessence. The Irish expression, *Tír gan teanga, tír gan anam* (A country without a language is a country without a soul) attributed to Irish nationalist leader, Pádraig Pearse (1879-1916), expresses the same sentiment. English, on the other hand, is regarded as "a key to the outside world" (Jones, 1996:128). Using both languages allows for the protection of what is held sacred internally, whilst simultaneously engaging with the external world.

#### **3.3.4 Linguaging in Brunei: Arabic language**

Arabic is the language of Islam, of the Holy Qur'an. It is consequently very much a part of Brunei's glottoscape. Everyday utterances in whatever language they are spoken are prefaced, punctuated and concluded by religious invocations, ranging from the normative greeting '*Assalamu alaikum*' (Peace be upon you) to the most ubiquitous '*Insha'Allah*' (As God wills) which tends to follow any reference to future plans. These are interwoven with both BNM and Brunei English in such a seamless, natural way as to become a feature of both. Arabic is also taught and used as a medium of instruction alongside Malay (both

Standard and Brunei dialects) in a separate, parallel Arabic education system. These schools come under the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) rather than the Ministry of Education. At the time of writing, there are seven Arabic schools throughout the country, some exclusively for males, and others for females. Plans to build more are already underway (Ak Md Khairuddin Pg Harun, 2014). This is a response to the intensification of religious instruction in recent years and may also be linked to the newly enacted *Syariah* Penal Code. There is also an institute (Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Tahfiz Al Quran Institute) which focuses on memorisation of the Quran, Quranic Studies, as well as other academic studies. Two Malay-Arabic-medium universities were established in 2007, the Seri Begawan Religious Teachers' University College and Universiti Islam Sultan Sharif Ali (UNISSA). Students who show an aptitude for Arabic and an inclination towards theological study can pursue this alternative pathway through education.

### **3.3.5 Languages in the environment**

Arabic is also omnipresent in the tightly controlled linguistic landscape of Brunei. It is a regulation that all shops and commercial outlets have signboards that feature their names in *jawi* (Malay rendered in modified Arabic script) as well as Romanised Malay or *Tulisan Rumi*, possibly followed by Chinese and then English. This regulation came into force soon after independence in 1988. It requires that the *jawi* font be double the size of the Roman script and be placed uppermost in the signboard. English is symbolically always placed lowest, below both forms of Malay and also below Chinese characters if any are included (Coluzzi, 2012:6). This is a symbolic reinforcement of the message that it is a language of utility rather than resonance.

The use of languages in Brunei's environment is judicious and supports the assertion that, "Signs are part of ideological social practice" (Sloboda, 2009:181), in that there is a dynamic relationship between the state ideology of MIB and these signs. The enlarged rendering of the official language, STM, in Arabic script dominates, symbolising the centrality of Islam, while at the same time indexing Malay nationhood for those who are able to decipher it. National pride is further fortified by the more normative Roman script for STM which is accessible to all Malay speakers. The inclusion of Chinese means that many signs in Brunei are multi-graphic, heightening the sense of cultural diversity that

exists. It simultaneously asserts Chinese identity in the country, especially in the commercial arena where the Chinese still dominate entrepreneurial activities. Kershaw characterises them as “the shop-keeping class of Brunei” (Kershaw, 2001a: 10) and their shop signs attest to their vital contribution to the country’s economic functioning. The ubiquity of English in signs reflects Brunei’s engagement with modernity and the world at large, as well as being informational. Coluzzi suggests that there may even be an educational element in that English and Malay are juxtaposed, making at-a-glance translation possible. In the same way, *jawi* and Romanised Malay are set side by side, turning signs into incidental language learning resources (Coluzzi, 2012:14).

### **3.3.6 Languages in peril**

The Austronesian languages of the indigenous minorities in Brunei do not feature anywhere on the linguistic landscape. Their invisibility is likely linked to their relatively low prestige and inconsequentiality in language policy (Coluzzi, 2012:9; Landry and Bourhis, 1997:29). Their echo in its soundscape is also becoming increasingly faint. This may to some extent be due to their mainly oral tradition, but it is also in keeping with an acquiescent language shift towards the dominant languages of BNM and English which Noor Azam casts as “duelling aunties” with BNM the closer relative, aligning them to dominant Malays, and the “slightly more distant, but still familial aunt” English, offering advantageous global connections (Noor Azam, 2012:176). He has previously suggested that the shift to Malay language in particular may be due to subtle societal pressure to assert ‘Bruneianness’ over any other ethnic membership. This is part of a drive towards greater homogeneity in the form of a singular Bruneian identity which would strengthen its ideological position (Noor Azam, 2005: 242). Coming from a Dusun-Tutong background himself, he laments the impact this shift is having and will continue to have on Brunei’s future linguistic identity (Noor Azam, 2005:249). This linguistic phenomenon mirrors the wider convergence towards a more unified national identity among the seven indigenous groups, namely the Bruneis, Kedayans, Tutongs, Dusuns, Bisayas, Belaits and Muruts. This could be attributed to higher levels of education, modern employment opportunities, increased urbanisation, as well as a high rate of intermarriage, much of which necessitates conversion to Islam (Kershaw, 2001a:9). The distinct ethnocultural identities of these groups are falling victim to these combined forces, with the differences between them having been

deliberately blurred over time in what Martin designates as “a cultural and linguistic redefinition” (Martin, 2002:182). However, the people involved are both aware of this and are compliant because of the social advantages that accrue from performing a Malay identity and speaking BNM (Noor Azam, 2005:240-243). Their increasing ‘voluntary’ movement towards Malay norms is also evidenced by the increasing number of non-Muslim children attending Islamic religious schools in rural areas who are from Dusun, Murut and other ethnic minority backgrounds (Oxford Business Group, 2010:159). Gunn (1997:6) believes they are succumbing to the dynamic forces of both ‘Islam-icization’ and ‘Malay-icization’.

### **3.4 Religions in Brunei**

Although constitutionally religious freedom is enshrined, the practice of any religion except Islam is tightly regulated and strictly monitored. Formal religious education is only allowed for Islam. According to 2014 statistics, 75.1% of people in Brunei follow Islam; Christians account for 9.4% (4.9% Roman Catholic and 4.4% Protestant); 8.6% are Buddhist; 6.2% adhere to traditional religions; 0.3% are Hindu; and 0.1% have other religious beliefs (Religious Freedom, 2014). The religious backgrounds of the participants in this study reflect this diversity, numbering Muslims, Buddhists, a Christian and a Sikh among them.

Religious plurality is a fact in Brunei. Islam’s position as the official religion is enshrined in the constitution of 1959, as is the right of those professing other faiths to practise them peacefully and harmoniously (Constitution of Brunei Darussalam (Amendment) Proclamation, 2004:2389). The 2004 Amendment sought to clarify that only the “Islamic Religion according to the Shafeite sect of Ahlis Sunnah Waljamaah” is officially sanctioned (Constitution of Brunei Darussalam (Amendment) Proclamation, 2004:2386). Authorities monitor other forms of Islam as they do other religions. For example, in 1991 an Islamic sect from Malaysia called Al-Arqam was considered to be deviant and was banned. Brunei also remains vigilant to the threat of terrorist activities within its borders (Mohamad Yusop bin Awang Damit et al, 2004:8).



### **3.4.1 Other religions**

In a locality where religiosity is such a key element in identity formation and performance, it is important that the participant as member of the dominant creed and the participant of a minority religion are both represented in how they identify as Bruneians. Both groups are heavily impacted by their own and each other's religious identities which render them either mainstream or marginal. Furthermore, religious identities are mediated through the various languages that feature in Brunei. Whilst Islamic identities may be performed through Arabic, they are also influenced by other languages, especially English. The English language gives voice to the discourses of Islamophobia internationally, yet simultaneously it is the vehicle that enables these young people to engage globally and to achieve academic success at home. It has also been a key component of evangelisation efforts in the past. All six Christian churches that exist in Brunei have affiliated schools that were established as mission schools in the protectorate era (Sidhu, 2010:223-225).

These mission schools most likely had a proselytising agenda when they were first established and even today they retain their overtly Christian 'Saint' (St.) appellations. Now they are strictly secular with explicit religious instruction restricted to Sunday school. Anecdotal evidence suggests that they are routinely subjected to covert monitoring, the mere suspicion of which guarantees compliance. Nevertheless, the general notion that the English language is echoic of "a Judeo-Christian ethos" (Mahboob, 2009:272) persists. Mahboob recounts how, whilst previously he had regarded the English language as "areligious", when he moved from Pakistan to the USA he became aware of its religious connotations (Mahboob, 2009:272). This is perpetuated by the "repellent" and "covert" use of TESOL for evangelical ends (Edge, 1996:23). Among those involved in such practice there is an under challenged view that ELT is "a legitimate site for missionary work" (Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003:337) and by the continuing phenomenon of teaching English as a missionary language (TEML) in some parts of the world (Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003:338). Both ensure that English is still haunted by the ghosts of its Christianising agenda from colonial times. Notwithstanding this, Bruneian mission schools' reputations for academic excellence and higher levels of English language fluency mean that many Malay families choose to enrol their children.

### 3.5 Bruneian society

Society exerts a powerful force on individuals as they do on it in a reciprocal relationship. It is a complex and dynamic organism made up of relationships between people who together create and then share a worldview based on their common norms, values and traditions. Bruneian society is at once modern and ancient. The marriage of these two elements is crucial for the ongoing vitality of the national ideology, as its purported antiquity is one of its cornerstones. Bruneians are frequently entreated to cling to their traditions, see for example Shahminan (2010). There is top-down resistance to any changes or developments that could threaten the way of life that has been orchestrated since independence. As Brunei becomes more internationally engaged due to technological advances, the traditional values which have hitherto been mostly preserved are jeopardised. HM the Sultan likened the country's MIB ideology to a "formidable firewall" against the challenges of globalisation (RTB News, 2014). In doing so, he openly articulated one of MIB's key political motives and created a new discursal strand; that of protecting the identity of those within from 'undesirable' influences outside that would be reproduced liberally by his ministers; for example, Hamit (2015). This was said in the wake of unprecedented dissent expressed online by young Bruneians at the proposed implementation of *Syariah* Penal Code. This decision is widely regarded as a retrograde step for Brunei and it has attracted rare censure from international sources. However, this research took place at a time when, although MIB was being noticeably strengthened, Brunei's *Syariah* jurisdiction was much more limited.

Brunei is an ancient kingdom. Its current Sultan is of the house of Bolkiah. His royal lineage can be traced in an almost unbroken line to the first Sultan, Mohammad Shah, in the late thirteenth to early fourteenth century. Today's royal ceremonies remain redolent of the pomp and splendour of bygone days and serve to re-conjure this past in the public imagination (Hasan and Rajak, 2015).

### 3.5.1 Knowing your place in society

Society in Brunei is notably still hierarchical. Mahathir attributes a similar situation in Malaysia to the “feudal nature of Malay society” (Mahathir, 1970:170). As a result, people are very conscious of their own position within that framework. This is something which directly impacts this research process, since it is an important aspect of how Bruneians see themselves and perceive how others view them. Advanced education and consequent facility in English language are two avenues of social mobility. The Sultan and the extended royal family are at the top of the social pyramid, followed by the multi-tiered aristocracy. Below them are the commoners or *rakyat* (Saunders, 2002:47-48). Malays are ranked higher than non-Malays, including the indigenous people, the Chinese, Indian and all expatriate workers from abroad. Among each of these groups there are further subdivisions, some of which are determined by Bruneian citizenship.

This social stratification is indexed by the various titles that precede the names of dignitaries. Names and modes of address are inordinately important in Brunei and etiquette requires that they be totally accurate, especially in correspondence or formal settings (Barr et al, 2008:1204). The Sultan’s full title in Malay is 30+ words long: *Kebawah Duli Yang Maha Mulia Paduka Seri Baginda Sultan Haji Hassanal Bolkiah Mu’izzaddin Waddaulah ibni Al-Marhum Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddien Sa’adul Khairi Waddien, Sultan dan Yang Di-Pertuan Negara Brunei Darussalam*. In a society as status-conscious as Brunei, great offence can be caused if any omission of a prestige-marker occurs.

There is even a special form of Malay reserved for royals that is known as *Bahasa Dalam* (Palace Language). It is a social register that is “used to demonstrate courtesy, good breeding and the supreme cultural values of the Malays” (Fatimah Awg Chuchu, 1996:89). It is the expected code when conversing with members of the royal family or the nobility in order to convey due respect. It relies on innuendo and is highly metaphorical and euphemistic (Fatimah Awg Chuchu, 1996:95). Knowledge of this code and the ability to use it are thought to “strengthen the concept of Bruneian cultural identity and to hinder liberal influences.” Conversely, not being versed in it “reflects ignorance of Brunei’s

traditions” (Fatimah Awg Chuchu, 1996:90). In this way, its continued use both indexes and perpetuates the social stratification of Bruneian society.

In keeping with this, Bruneian society, being predominantly Malay in character, is both formal and inclined towards ritual. Former Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir, himself being three-quarters Malay, contends that this stems from a Kantian sense of propriety, governed by both Islam and *adat istiadat* (ceremonial customs), which leads to an inherent conservatism (Mahathir, 1970:156-157). If such natural conservatism exists in Brunei, it is useful in helping to perpetuate the status quo. However, one problem Mahathir identifies with following *adat* rules is that form is prioritised over substance, “It does not matter if it is not so, as long as it appears to be so” (Mahathir, 1970:158). This can have major repercussions for society if a large number of its members are more intent on keeping up appearances than delivering on their objectives. It also has a profound effect on identity construction as it can lead to performed identities that, though iterated, are not deeply held identities, but are worn lightly, almost facades for public consumption and self-protection. In such cases, identity behaviours may be “subject to external regulation” and “are performed to attain a reward or avoid a punishment,” but when or if these reward or punishment contingencies are removed, “these behaviors are poorly maintained” (La Guardia, 2009:94) and the identity performance may lapse. Alternatively and possibly more in keeping with the Bruneian situation, behaviours can be “regulated by ‘introjection’; people behave in order to avoid guilt and shame, or alternatively to obtain feelings of pride and self-worth in the eyes of others”. Introjection often relies on “the internal voice that the person has ‘swallowed whole’ from others without digesting it and making it his or her own” (La Guardia, 2009:94). MIB in education aspires to nurturing those inner voices in young Bruneians.

### **3.5.2 Theological fatalism**

Malays are often regarded as being fatalistic, likely due to a (mis)interpretation of Islamic dictates, which can lead to self-acknowledged passivity and an abdication of agency. Mahathir (1970:159) bemoaned the negative impact this was having on work ethic in Malaysia at that time, since increased effort was not correlated with greater success or achievement as these were all thought to be predetermined by fate. Although Bruneians at

times appear and may be fatalistic, this cannot be adduced simply based on their tendency to follow any reference to the future with a supplication to God (Allah). By doing so, they are following a Quranic dictum (Littlewood and Dein, 2013:266, citing Qu’ran 18:23, The Cave) that has likely become second nature. However, there is also the possibility that it is “no more than a customary polite self-abnegation or basically ‘meaningless’ polite phrase” (Littlewood and Dein, 2013: 272). Whilst acknowledging this possibility, my experience of its ubiquitous use in Brunei and my own parallel experience of the homologous use of ‘DV’ (*Deo volente* – God willing) as a child in ultra-Catholic Ireland in the 1960s and 1970s, lead me to suggest that it is a sincere solicitation steeped in religious significance laced with superstition, despite its habitude. There is even a suggestion that this reluctance to talk about the future with certitude for fear of tempting fate has permeated Bruneian English, resulting in the substitution of the conditional ‘would’ for the more definite ‘will’ when referring to future events. This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter 5.

### 3.5.3 Family values

The institution of family is at the core of Bruneian society and its strength is a key factor in the country’s stability. In the past families were extended, but in recent years there has

Figure 5: Social media post (2014, April 11) re. family first



been a tendency towards establishing nuclear neo-local families, often in the vicinity of the family of orientation (Monnier, 2010). Malay families are ostensibly patriarchal, in keeping with Islamic rulings on the father’s role as the main provider. Many married women now work, but whether their income is used to contribute to the household is their prerogative as they are at liberty to use it as they wish according to the tenets of Islam. Chinese families are also traditionally patriarchal and in the past were preoccupied with the “patrilineal

principle, the worship of the male ancestral line” (Warren, 1994:80). Indian society is also notably patriarchal. This orientation makes the paternalistic care of the monarch seem all the more a natural extension of what happens at a familial level. A recent fanpage posting

on social media reinforces this, putting the royal family at the centre of national politics (Figure 5). It also ensures that high levels of respect and acquiescence are accorded to parents in this locality. This could be regarded as predisposing people towards a similar disposition towards authority figures in general, especially if they are perceived as being beneficent, which is undoubtedly the case in terms of HM the Sultan.

The size of the country further contributes to the social order. Given the relative intimacy of such a small geographical location, the primacy of family, and the importance of position, going through life unknown is not an option. People are aware of themselves and of each other to a heightened degree due to the conditions that characterise this locality, not least its inherent hierarchy.

#### **3.5.4 Social concerns**

Food, marriage, cars and fabric for traditional clothes are among the other preoccupations in Bruneian society. Food is markedly important, occupying the space typically accorded to weather in the “phatic communion... – a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words” (Malinowski, 1930:315) of some western societies. This is more commonly known as ‘small talk’. Bruneians typically ask if you have eaten lunch, replacing the lament at what a terrible day it is in Ireland amid unrelenting rain. Consequently, this is reflected in budgetary allowances for refreshments at all functions and a general enthusiasm for food-related discussions. Chapter 7 will explore this phenomenon in greater detail.

Sampling a country’s cuisine is often a visitor’s first foray into its culture, making food a powerful conduit of cultural identity. Representative dishes are almost always untranslatable, losing their evocative powers when attempts are made to render them in ‘foreign’ tongues. Brunei’s national dish, *ambuyat* (National dish of Brunei, 2014), is spoken of almost reverentially there. If translated into English, it would become the much more mundane, less appealing ‘sago starch’.

The desirability of marriage from an Islamic standpoint means that there is considerable familial and social pressure on young people who are Muslim to find suitable partners.

Although marriages are not strictly arranged as they remain in some Islamic societies, the approval of both families is a pre-requisite. Elective singledom is not accorded the same levels of social acceptability that it has recently acquired in western societies. Getting suitably married is regarded as the next step following on from graduation and the procurement of a government job for the successful Bruneian. This is further complicated by the desirability of finding a partner who is educated to a similar or higher level and who has equivalent or superior linguistic facility in the dominant languages of BNM and English. This linguistic capital, an important form of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991:51, 55, 61), is significant because of its role in social stratification and social mobility.

Cars are much more than a mode of conveyance in Brunei. They are a status symbol and the country “has the highest car motorisation index in Southeast Asia, according to 2010 statistics (Damantoro et al, 2014:86). People are known by their cars and ownership of a prestige model is one of the markers of success. The Sultan and his brother, Prince Jefri, are both known to have amassed an incomparable collection of luxury cars (Sultan of Brunei: His private automotive empire, 2006).

Traditional Bruneian clothes for both males and females are distinctive and are typically bespoke. Females wear brightly-coloured silk or polyester garments and there is a noticeable preoccupation with shopping for suitable fabric to make these. Since they are worn on a daily basis, this is a significant feature of life as a Bruneian female. The fabric used is referred to as *kain* which translates as ‘cloth’, but its essence would be lost in translation. Synonyms such as fabric, material or cloth do not capture the myriad connotations carried by *kain*. Dressing in traditional clothes is a key component in the performance of a Bruneian identity. Its ordinariness in everyday life means that this identity is subject to regular reinforcement and near constant display.

Weaving is one of the traditional handicrafts of Brunei, dating back to possibly as early as the tenth century (Yunos, 2008). Traditional attire for males consists of a *cara melayu* (a two-piece outfit consisting of a long tunic and loose pants made from cotton or polyester in the same colour) over which a *sinjang* or short sarong is worn (Hamit, 2014). Bruneian

brocade uses gold and silver thread and is known as *kain tenunan*. It is de rigueur at important state functions and acts as a sartorial display of status when worn for Friday mosque visits. In recent years *kain tenunan* production has developed into a thriving industry, possibly due to a growing trend towards “manifesting national identity through dressing” (Siti Norkhalbi, 2005:60), as well as asserting Malayness by wearing traditional attire. This may also be construed as a reaction against or a form of resistance to globalisation (Siti Norkhalbi, 2005:15, citing Cibulka, 2000) since reaffirmation of what is distinctive simultaneously expresses Bruneian identity while upholding and strengthening Malay unity and the MIB ideology. Wearing these garments also indexes an individual’s rank, thereby sustaining the hierarchical societal structure and showcasing it at state ceremonies which remain mired in antiquity, full of the pomp and splendour of yore.

### **Conclusion to Chapter 3**

This chapter has sought to recreate in words the backdrop that Brunei provides for the lives of the participants in order to enable me to provide a clear ethnographic account of “what goes on” (Geertz, 1973:16) in this place. It is a dynamic space in which participants experience life and construct meaning amid the prevailing conditions. Setting its parameters geographically, politically, economically, linguistically, religiously and socially aims at locating and foregrounding the “thick description” (Geertz, 1973:6, citing Gilbert Ryle, 1971) that follows in the data chapters. There the focus will be on the ordinary lives of the local participants, wherein they reveal their “normalness without reducing their particularity” (Geertz, 1973:14), in their words through English – the language of their education.



# CHAPTER 4

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*Negotiating Politico-economic Identities*

*The measure of a man is what he does with  
power.*

Plato, c.428-348 B.C.

#### Chapter 4: Introduction – Into the political fray

“**B**runeians, for a very long time, have been very passive when it comes to politics” [P7:711]. P7 attributes this to the fact that HM the Sultan is “the big boss” and, “Ultimately he has a say, so you know it’s all up to him really to decide what or what should not be allowed” [P7: 703 and 705]. He also refers to “the way things are dictated here” [P7:22], suggesting that he is politically aware. One of the ways that things are ‘dictated’ is through the national ideology, MIB. Two of its desired identities have strong political ramifications. Being Malay, or at the very least Malay-like in behaviour, including Malay language use, is encouraged in order to bolster national unity and foster patriotism. Being a loyal subject is regarded as the only possible political orientation. “Having the monarchy in a Muslim country is a must, right?” SP8 asks rhetorically [SP8:563]. This is the official standpoint. What happens at an individual level, especially following exposure to English-medium education and alternative ways of living, is one of the concerns of this research.

Mindful of the power of words to create worlds, this chapter allows the words of participants to elucidate their political reality. It looks at Brunei from a political perspective and explores how living in a realm where one person wields total power impacts the participants’ political lives and their construction of political identities. It seeks to unearth their feelings about, and reactions to, their regime, presenting these in a manner that is unbiased by either romanticism or censure. Being a Brunei national or long-term resident can be regarded as a socio-cultural axis of differentiation (Vertovec, 2007:1035) and a collective identity, but each individual still needs to construct and live his or her own political identity based on the prevailing political climate as so many aspects of life are touched by politics.

Aristotle’s oft quoted assertion about man’s political nature, “Man is a political animal”, is generally accepted uncritically as a fact. After all, it seems logical that our lives and consequently our performed identities would be influenced to some extent by the political situation into which we are born or wherein we choose to locate ourselves since feelings of nationalism have long played a key role in creating a sense of identity. Does a political

consciousness, which gives rise to a politically engaged self, have to be awakened or conversely sublimated? Or is it something that is inherent and universal? These are questions that will be explored in the context of the nation-state of Brunei Darussalam and her citizens who are involved in this study.

#### **4.1 Brunei's political reality**

The young Bruneians, who are the focus of this study, live within the prevailing political system. They impact and are impacted by it, consciously or sub-consciously, on a daily basis. It is their status quo; their norm. The fact that the political reality of Brunei, being an autocracy, is regarded as an anachronism that needs redress by others outside of the country is of little consequence. The participants' perspectives give us an alternative conceptualisation to the dominant democracy-centric one. They cast their system in different lights, challenging us to see it otherwise. Since much of the world regards democracy as the ideal political framework, any deviation from it tends to be regarded as problematic. Its universality as a value is regarded as one of the most significant developments of the twentieth century when "democracy became established as the 'normal' form of government to which any nation is entitled" (Sen, 1999a:4). This suggests that every nation desires and seeks democracy which does not seem to be the case at least consciously for this group of Bruneians. Democracy's universality as a value may have rendered us blind to other possibilities. Those who live under other systems see things differently and live life accordingly. Thinking otherwise requires a suspension of any insistence on the primacy of democracy and a willingness to consider the viability or even suitability of alternatives in some contexts, or, at the very least, their liveability for the people concerned.

#### **4.2 Nation-state**

National identity is possibly the most invoked of identity inscriptions and nationality is a universal socio-cultural concept. Both centre on the existence of an independent nation-state. A nation can be defined as "an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign" (Anderson, 1991:5-7). However, in today's globalised

world the actual autonomy of the nation-state, even as a theorised construct, is debated. Despite its sovereignty and proclaimed self-determination, by orienting towards the identity of a nation-state, a country has to “adopt other prescribed institutions of modernity” and invariably finds itself “modifying its traditions in the direction of world-cultural forms” (Meyer et al, 1997:159). Meyer et al suggest that it is this “overarching world culture” in which these models are embedded that account for the “observable isomorphism” in terms of institutional structures (Meyer et al, 1997:157). Thus the assertion of a nation-state identity may involve foregoing some existing social structures to become a “rational and responsible actor” – the dominant model within world culture which is “highly rationalized and universalistic” (Meyer et al, 1997:153). This could be an issue in a place like Brunei that seeks to preserve its uniqueness and is guarded about the impact of globalisation, especially when it comes to its polity. Nevertheless, for the past two centuries, “National identity has been the most spectacularly successful modern mode of orchestrating belonging” (Tomlinson, 2003:274) with most people laying claim to at least one such identity. However, the endurance of its unifying power is threatened by the unprecedented mobility, both corporeal and mental, that characterises the 21<sup>st</sup> century, bringing with it the possibility of multiple identities, both real and virtual. In Brunei, MIB, with its insistence on Malayness and monarchy, may be artificially containing emergent cultural forces that could subvert existing political structures.

“I let most people believe I was from wherever they believed I was from” [P2:83]. P2, who is of mixed British and Bruneian heritage, is referring to her reluctance to assert her nationality when she went overseas to the UK to study. This could be regarded as an unusual position since national affiliation is often a source of pride. Referring to one’s country of origin is the normative response to the perennial question ‘Where are you from?’ This question which is rendered innocuous by its frequency can actually mask a more sinister enquiry about where the subject belongs. Its answer goes far beyond the fact in its connotations and inferences, leading to categorisation or even the ascription of stereotypical identities. The question itself is possibly ‘rooted’ in a mythical sense of ‘space’ and ‘place’ (Brutt-Griffler, 2005:15). Being born somewhere and belonging there may seem to go hand in hand, but this is not always the case. It has been suggested that the very “idea of

'identity' was born out of the crisis of belonging" (Bauman, 2004:20-21). Recalling her experiences of identifying herself abroad, P2 explains how others, who were fully Malay, had made her believe that "by being Malay you are Bruneian and anything other than that you're not truly Bruneian" [P2:88]. Earlier she had expressed the sense of not being allowed to feel Malay [P2:83] due to the implied impurity of her mixed ethnicity. As a result, she regards her mixed heritage as "a blessing and a curse" [P2:191]. Here ethnicity and nationality collide. She is a Bruneian by nationality, but is regarded as less than Bruneian ethnically because she is 'only' half Malay.

This concept of racial or ethnic purity, one that has proved so pernicious in many locations, in Brunei is linked to being of Malay ethnicity, but also to being more traditional. SP4, speaking of his grandparents, claims, "They're pure Bruneians... True Bruneians [...] still retain their traditions" [SP4:661]. In the same vein, SP5 suggests a linguistic dimension, referring to "those pure Malay [...] who speaks Malay basically with each other" [SP5:963]. Any departure from cultural traditions and speaking Malay could then be regarded as having a diminishing effect on such 'purity'. SP7 believes, "More and more Bruneians are ignoring *budi bahasa*" [SP7:772]. Wilkinson translates the phrase *budi bahasa* as, "Good taste and courtesy; tact and breeding" (Heryanto, 2007:45, citing Wilkinson, 1901:136). These are all considered part of performing a Malay identity.

Another participant of mixed parentage spoke of her deep need to blend into her locality; "You want to fit in... to be part of something other than your family" [P1:352]. Both recalled being bullied, especially in primary school and, perhaps ironically, in *ugama* (religious) school for having *kafir* (non-believer) mothers who are "*orang puteh*" (white person) [P1:51 and 54]. P2 spoke of being alienated by her perceived difference; "They make you feel very isolated" [P2:60]. Likewise, P1 remembers feeling ostracised by her own extended family who actively excluded her from excursions; "It's among your cousins you're made an outsider" [P1:351-352].

"I think it's quite natural for us Bruneians who've grown up here [...]. That's one of the reasons to why I wanna go overseas [...] to a place where no one knows you" [SP2:744].

SP2 is referring to what he regards as the Bruneian social norm of scrutinising others and, “They kind of judge you” [SP2:738]. Our concept of ourselves is not formed in isolation, but as a result of social interaction with others and of how we internalise and reflect upon the way they perceive us. Philosophers through the ages have expounded their various theories about these concepts. Some of the more notable include Hegel, Satre, Lacan and Levinas. Hegel, for example, held that, “The relationship between self and otherness is the fundamental defining characteristic of human awareness and activity” (Duquette, n.d.:§4 The phenomenology of spirit). Levinas wrote of our tendency towards egocentricity and “to think of other individuals either as extensions of the self, or as alien objects to be manipulated for the advantage of the individual or social self” (Wild, 1991:12). Combined, these theories help to elucidate our thinking, but their multiplicity also underscores the complexity and circuitry of identities.

Otherness [*l’altérité*] is a fundamental category of human thought.

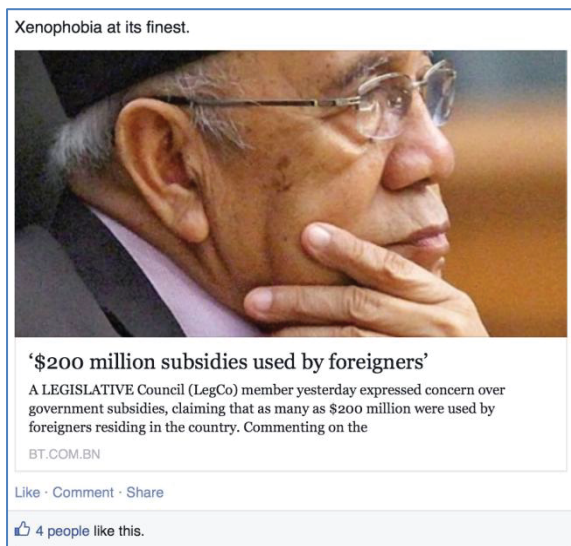
Simone de Beauvoir (1949:9).

If we accept de Beauvoir’s view that we basically think in terms of otherness, the practice of ‘othering’ (Spivak, 1985:252) or ‘otherizing’ (Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2004:34) when we want to create distance between ourselves and a group or individual that differs from us in cultural practices, is not a big departure. This process is often referred to as one of the defining aspects of colonial discourse when the imperialist Self was elevated and the native Other denigrated (Said, 1978). This is suggestive of a one-way construct rather than the reciprocal one it has become due to the shifts in power relations. However, if thinking in terms of otherness is universal, then some reciprocal ‘otherizing’ could be intimated in the current use of words such as *orang puteh* (white person) or ‘foreigner’ which signify differences and create distance between the local ‘us’ and the outsider alien ‘them’. These words could be interpreted as mere statements of fact, but may also be imbued with negative connotations. Their use may be influenced by the discourses of Occidentalism which paint a “dehumanising picture of the West” (Burama & Margalit, 2004:5) and its capitalist, consumerist culture. The hegemonising effect of this has been characterised as ‘occidentosis’ or ‘westoxification’, variously translated from the Persian term *gharbzadegi*

(Ahmad, 1984). This concept of ‘west-struckness’ captures the conflict of awe and rejection, disapproval and embrace, that are part of many ‘non-Western’ countries’ relationships with the western influences spread by globalisation. Anti-western resentment feeds on real and perceived power imbalances (Jacques, 2004), both past and current, and is often harnessed to further politico-religious agenda by promulgating the notion of a godless, immoral ‘West’ as opposed to a virtuous, spiritual ‘East.’ This serves to engender righteous disapproval which in turn helps to keep engagement with ‘western’ culture and language more pragmatic than idealistically gravitational.

One of the participants in this study reacted strongly to what he perceived to be a xenophobic newspaper article, suggesting that subsidies should not be extended to non-

Figure 6: Social media post (2014, March 14) re. political comment by P7



Bruneians who reside in the country. In a politically charged post he captions “Xenophobia at its finest” (Figure 6); he shares the article on a social media platform. Such a move is not without personal risk and suggests unusually high levels of political engagement in this locality.

In a *titah* delivered during the official opening of the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislative Council Meeting, the Sultan called on everyone in the country to “be united as Bruneians

regardless of our race or belief” (“Monarch calls public,” 2014). Despite this rallying call delivered in the face of both internal misgivings and external condemnation of the *Syariah* Penal Code, both race and religious orientation are key determinants of what many regard as true or ‘pure’ Bruneian national identity. Both are fundamental tenets of the ideology of MIB.

Brunei’s national ideology of MIB could be regarded as a “master narrative” – a term derived from *grand récit* or metanarrative terms coined by Jean-François Lyotard



(Bamberg, 2005:287-288). A master narrative “refers to pre-existent sociocultural forms of interpretation” and is designed to underscore and limit “interpretation strategies and agency constellations in individual subjects as well as in social institutions” at a local level (Bamberg, 2005:287-288). MIB suggests to Bruneians that the ideal identities are being of Malay ethnicity, being Islamic and being a loyal subject. In doing so, it legitimises the preservation of the status quo by justifying affirmative action for those who are Malay, upholding Islam as the state religion, and sanctifying the Sultan’s monarchical rule. In an article published in local newspapers reporting on a keynote address at an international Islamic conference held in the country in 2013, “Inter-nation marriages and mixed parentage” were cited as challenges to Brunei identity. The speaker, a former Minister of Education and ex-Vice Chancellor of UBD, posed the possibility of Brunei assuming a more “transnational identity generated by interracial marriages”. He feared this would weaken the Malay component of MIB and make it difficult for young people to “locate themselves in specific ethnic, racial identity or even national identity”. While acknowledging that identity cannot be imposed on young people, he believed they can still be guided, advised, educated and prayed for. He lauded the planned implementation of the Syariah Criminal Code as the foundation for the creation of an Islamic civilisation (Othman, 2013).

The ex-Minister’s words reveal that he is conceptualising identity in a more traditional, essentialised way that involves what people ‘think of themselves’, identifying what their identity is or having an identity or identities that are definable and that determine actions. In contrast, this study conceptualises identity as being constructed, negotiated and evolving, and views all actions, including speaking, as being co-constitutive of these ongoing identity-making processes. The participants are in between, caught in the middle of becoming the *whos* they are told they should be and the *whos* they personally aspire to be. It is also clear from this address that MIB as a dominant ideology is a master narrative which Lyotard believed excludes minorities (in this case, that means anybody who is not fully Malay or who professes a faith other than Islam), and it simultaneously does “violence to the heterogeneous nature of social reality” (Woodward, n.d.: §8) by denying the

legitimacy of its existence and denying the rights of these marginalised groups to live and enact their identities as Bruneians.

### **4.3 Forging an identity as a Malay Islamic Monarchy**

Brunei's national ideology, MIB, translating as Malay Islamic Monarchy, "is what makes us uniquely Bruneian" [P5:125]. This participant suggests that it helps to differentiate Bruneians from other Malays [P5:130]. However, she also proposes reordering MIB to IMB [P5:125], which reflects her prioritisation of the Islamic component [P5:585] as she feels this is also less racially divisive. Having witnessed firsthand the inequity involved in the granting of education scholarships based on ethnicity, she is keenly aware that non-Malay Bruneians do not feel so "lucky" [P5:132]. Another Malay participant was much less reverent, facetiously claiming, "I think of 'Men In Black'" [SP3:522], referring to the Hollywood trilogy of the same acronym, also indexing the inroads 'western' culture has made in his consciousness. However, one of the others who is neither Malay nor Muslim says, "I don't think MIB represents Brunei at all" [SP1:302]. Such diverse reactions suggest that the key variable is the extent to which individuals identify with the ideology from their own personal, ethnic and religious standpoints. They either allow themselves or not to subscribe to the ideology as an identikit. Its existence, active promulgation and dissemination do not therefore necessarily guarantee its assumption. Nevertheless, its influences, both perceptible and subliminal, warrant closer consideration.

Individual agency is a key determinant of the extent to which anyone allows the national ideology to define him or her. Agency "implies the conduct of action under the sway of intentional states" (Bruner, 1990:9). This casts individuals as active change agents rather than as beings who passively receive beneficence (Sen, 1999b: xiii). However, Sen cautions that the freedom afforded by individual agency is also "inescapably qualified and constrained" by factors such as the political, economic and social conditions in which people find themselves (Sen, 1999b:xi-xii). He goes on to list liberty to participate in politics as one of the "*constituent components*" (emphasis in original) of development (Sen, 1999b:5). When applied to the locality of Brunei, these ideas are challenged

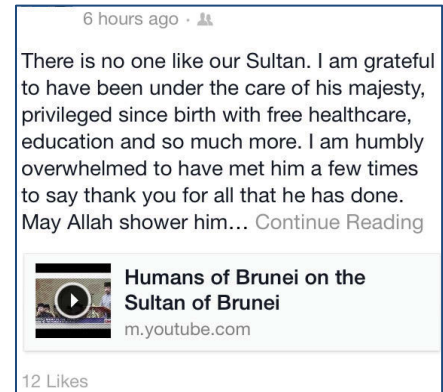
somewhat. Participants present as agentive in their personal spheres, although their capacities to effect change are clearly limited by the prevailing power structure.

There is obvious beneficence, especially in areas such as health and education, but hitherto the relative absence of economic development has not been an issue and any shortfalls in this area have been absorbed by the State. In recent years, this situation is becoming increasingly untenable, leading to efforts to mobilise development and diversification whilst maintaining or even strengthening rigid controls. For example, concerns over the non-return of government-funded scholarship students on completion of their studies, has led to the unprecedented action of preparing to take legal recourse (Palatino, 2013; BruDirect.com, 2014). This is in stark contrast to the way these students are habitually treated. “Every one or two years the Sultan would come... and then like see the students in UK and then give us money. It’s called *ziarah*” [P5:49]. P5 goes on to recount the incredulity of her co-students from other countries on hearing that she could actually greet her ruler in person and that he would give her a cash gift of £150, “And they were like ‘Wow! I wanna be a Bruneian!’” [P5:63]. She recalls that when she compared her situation to that of other international students, she realised she had taken a lot for granted and it was when she “truly became proud to be a Bruneian” [P5:47]. This custom is known formally as *junjung ziarah* (a ceremony for a royal visit) – a term from *Bahasa Dalam* (Palace Language – a variety of Malay). It involves all students who are studying in the country (UK, Australia, New Zealand) congregating in a central location, usually an upmarket hotel such as The Dorchester in London. Incidentally, this hotel is owned by the Sultan, being part of the country’s investment portfolio. There they are treated to refreshments and after a *titah* from HM, he mingles with them and engages with many individually.

One of the main reasons for overseas scholars’ reluctance to return is likely the dearth of opportunities for both employment and career advancement due to the relative stagnation or even decline of the Brunei economy (Cooke, 2012:58-61). Their actions are deemed ‘unpatriotic’ rather than unethical or criminal as might be the case elsewhere. In a *titah* introducing a revised scholarship policy, the Sultan personally addressed overseas students

gathered in London, calling for their “unshakeable loyalty and dedication to their homeland” (BruDirect.com, 2013). Six out of the eight adult participants in this study had been the recipients of government scholarships and had spent time in either UK or Australian universities. Only one expressed reservations about returning to Brunei. Despite wanting to stay abroad, he felt honour-bound to return; “I knew I had to come back coz I’m bonded” [P7:97]. Later, he refers to this as “pretty sly” [P7:101]. This seems to suggest his acquiescence in what he perceives to be a cynical game, but one which he can play to his advantage. However, this knowing cynicism was unique to this participant who was noticeably the most politically minded of all those involved in the study. The overriding sentiment, especially when it came to overseas scholarships, was one of gratitude and a sense of being blessed. The word ‘lucky’ occurs in ten out of the 13 interviews conducted, and in each of Interview 3 (INT 3), featuring P5, and INT 10, featuring SP5 and SP6, it is said a total of four times. This gives rise to spontaneous expressions of gratitude on social media (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Social media post (2014, August 29) re. spontaneous expressions of gratitude



#### 4.4 The power of *titah*

Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know more.

Confucius.

The words of HM the Sultan are another “way things are dictated” [P7:22] in Brunei. *Titah* is the word used to refer to any speech made by the Sultan. The word *titah* comes from Court or Palace Malay; a special register reserved for royalty, known as *Bahasa Dalam* which is literally translated as ‘inside language’ (Gunn, 1997:xviii). This courtly form of the Malay language, many uses of which have become a feature of Brunei English (Deterding and Sharbawi, 2013:90), helps to preserve the “local status honour system” with

its “profoundly hierarchical speech forms and implied codes of behaviour” (Gunn, 1997:225).

Unlike ‘speeches’ made by heads of state in other countries, the word *titah* translates more accurately as ‘command’ or ‘decree’. This is an important distinction because, essentially, words uttered publicly by HM are interpreted as imperatives. His *titah* words and wishes determine what will happen and his displeasure can have far-reaching consequences for individuals who incur it. Every *titah* is a potential policy changer on which careers or even lives can turn. Citizens can find themselves catapulted to lofty heights or, conversely, summarily dismissed and fallen from grace. P5 refers to a notable example; “the one that we were all in a furore about” [P5:467]. This *titah* involves the then Minister for Education who misjudged the designation of IRK as part of the revised national curriculum. Since in recent years strategic measures have been taken to strengthen and reassert the national ideology, MIB, when it came to light that IRK was not listed among the compulsory subjects in the new education system, the *Sistem Pendidikan Negara 21* (or SPN-21), HM was aghast. Instead, IRK was classified with elective subjects such as Drama and Music. In a hard-hitting *titah* delivered on 13<sup>th</sup> July, 2009, HM was unequivocal in his condemnation of this oversight (Jong, 2009). The following day newspapers reportedly sold like ‘*goring pisang panas*’ {hot banana fritters-a favourite local delicacy} and to this day it is remembered as one of the most impactful of *titah* in recent times. Incidents such as this underscore the precariousness of the political climate and the far-reaches of HM’s words.

#### **4.5 Locating Brunei**

The centrality of Brunei in the lives of the participants is clear. Nevertheless, some became aware of the relative obscurity of the country, especially in terms of its geographical location, only when they went abroad. One participant laughingly recalled how her fellow students in the UK were confused about her origin, “Some thought I was from Bahrain because it was close enough to Bruneian” [P2:117]. Even when she explained Brunei’s actual location with reference to the ostensibly more familiar Singapore and Malaysia, “half

of them would still think it was Bahrain” [P2:130]. This ignorance of Brunei as place appears to be keenly felt to the extent that, when Brunei got unprecedentedly negative international media attention in 2014, an online posting puts it in a positive light in that it made people aware of Brunei’s actual existence and location (Figure 8). Another participant referred to the common error of locating Brunei in the Middle East [P8:628].

Brunei is possible mistakenly categorised as a Middle Eastern country due to its reputation for oil wealth and the practice of Islam. A number of participants recall that these were the perceptions of Brunei they most often encountered. P8 found that people she met wanted to verify that Brunei was a rich country [P8:628]. Similarly, P7 noticed that people’s perception of Brunei was related to the legendary wealth of the Sultan [P7:715-717]. The ordinariness of this fact in Brunei society may render it hardly worthy of mention. Its high degree of seemingly uncritical acceptance may also serve to relegate it to the subconscious of those who live with it on a daily basis. Another factor that makes it acceptable is the sense of wellbeing generated by secure, well-paid employment in the government sector for a significant proportion of the working population.

*Figure 8: Social media post (2014, August 29) re. in defence of Syariah law*

**#justsaying** On a bright side, they know where Brunei is. So i don't see any reason to explain them anymore that Brunei is not part of Malaysia, Brunei is not Burma (now is called as Myanmar), Brunei is not in Saudi Arabia, Bruneian is not living in the jungle on the trees but now most importantly they know that Brunei is proudly presenting its Shariaa Law, regardless on what people see us, I am still proud of it. Only if they know Islam. If Bruneians itself find it easy to accept and embrace the law, just to say we are the one who is going to face it, we are the people the law is going to be implemented on, we are the one who is living in Brunei is happily with the new law, why should you?

However, one of the participants was critical of what she perceived as the indolence and disincentive of government employees, “I think they take it for granted... They take as much as they can from it, without thinking further... They don’t really try... They don’t think about how we can build this place, make it better” [SP1:1372]. Her choice of the word ‘they’, reiterated many times, serves to distance herself from such employees. She cannot countenance the notion that she could ever be party to such behaviour and reverts only to the inclusive ‘we’ when expressing her own future aspiration to play a role in nation building.

The workplace inertia to which she is referring may stem from a rentier mentality (Beblawi, 1987:52). This way of thinking develops as a result of a breakdown in the work-reward relationship, where financial reward is not correlated to effort and risk-taking. As Bruneian civil servants, these employees enjoy competitive tax-free salaries, generous housing and education benefits, as well as free healthcare, irrespective of job performance. This may account for the apparent apathy of some.

Alluding to “a sense of paranoia that’s prevailing” [P7:79], another participant sought to explain the lack of audacity and stasis, going on to say, “You’ve got to think twice before doing anything. Like I said earlier, there’s still that sense of paranoia” [P7:201]. These feelings are possibly related to the fact that Bruneian society has traditionally been hierarchical and it is also microcosmic due to its small size. Reflecting on a social media posting he had made stating “I am me,” P7 admits, “I feel strongly as an individual, I feel that you know I’ve certain traits that I believe is who I am” [P7:73]. However, he concedes that in Brunei it is “follow the leader or more of a flock [...] From a very young age you’re taught to think a certain way [...] You may not be able to see it, but that’s how it is. Actually it’s subtle” [P7:75]. In the words of one of the student participants, “It’s quite natural for us Bruneians who’ve grown up here” [SP2:744] to feel that they are “constantly being watched” [SP2:735]. Combined, these elements may have a stultifying effect. In such an environment, risk-taking is not fostered, given the relative safety and comfort afforded by inaction and conformity. In the words of one participant, “It’s very risky to make a decision” [P3:11]. This perception of risk and keen awareness of limits have made caution a feature of Bruneian worker identity.

One of the Sultan’s 2009 *titahs* addressed this issue more forcefully than usual. In an uncharacteristically scathing attack, he accused senior government officials of being akin to robots, devoid of “discretion, initiative or common sense” (Low et al, 2012:596), chastising them for their lack of proactivity and tendency to await his directives. His rebuke underscores the ambiguity inherent in their relationship with him. They have been instated in their lofty positions at his pleasure, making decisions risks incurring his displeasure, if he finds those decisions contrary to his wishes. Therefore, survival depends on keeping

their heads below the parapet as much as possible until compelled or, better still, given the royal command to act. In this case, risk is averted as the required action has been given advanced sanction by the only authority that really matters.

#### **4.6 Colonial visions of Brunei**

Some people “had this preconcept that we lived on trees!” [P5:65]. P5 also recounted how one of her teachers asked, “Do you have email in Brunei?” as recently as 2001. On leaving Brunei many of the adult participants in this study discovered the nebulous notions people had of Brunei are based on its exoticised depiction in literature and tabloid press allusions to their ruling family’s immense oil wealth and extravagant lifestyle. Evidence of the lingering nature of these impressions can be found in the rather bemused accounts given by some participants about the image of Brunei they encountered among people they met while studying abroad. P5 found these misconceptions both funny and ignorant, but was not at all upset by them. This reaction suggests a level of confidence in her own Bruneianness, regardless of how the country was perceived by others. In fact, it had the effect of making her want to educate people by talking to them about Brunei [P5:67]. Adopting such a stance enables her to take back ownership of the image of what is her country and reconstruct it in a way that reflects the Brunei she identifies, giving voice to it in English, one of her languages, thereby replacing the colonially constructed one imprinted on the minds of people outside of the country. Essentially, she could be seen as opposing colonial discourse, albeit inadvertently, by constructing counter-representations (Pennycook, 1998:165). Another participant who has yet to leave Brunei has encountered similar outsider perceptions online, “They think we’re like tropical countries with lots of coconut trees and we’re just dancing around a fire” [SP1:923]. She assured them that this is not the case. Whilst these images may seem amusing in their naivety, they are pernicious in the sense that they are reductive and serve to perpetuate colonial tropes into the present day. However, the lingering impact of such concepts cannot always be countered so positively. Alatas, writing about the stereotyping of Malays in Malaysia, warns of the urgent need to redress the colonial image of the Malays as “easy-going... good imitators, lacking originality in thought and culture... fond of idleness... they lack incentive or



initiative for acquiring wealth” (Alatas, 1977:115). He believes that this image is still influential, leading employers to be loathe to offer Malays jobs, lest they conform to this perpetuated stereotype. There is a danger that this colonial discourse may also have extended to Malays in Brunei, given the geographical and cultural proximity.

The images embedded in western consciousness appear to date back to the early twentieth century. Gunn devotes an entire chapter to the images of Brunei conveyed in western literature over time (Gunn, 2000:129-158), which have led to the formulation of certain visions of the place in the minds of foreigners. The opening page alludes to Edward Said’s seminal text, *Orientalism* (Said, 1978), which resulted in all western writings about the East being viewed “through a colonial optic” (Gunn, 2000:129). It becomes clear that such depictions of Brunei are infused with this colonial discourse. The portrayals and the image they create reflect the prevailing attitudes of the writers and the times in which they were written. As such they are “resonant with imperial overtones matching the then stereotyped views of race and empire” (Gunn, 2000:137). They were written by European colonial authors for an audience of their peers and were dedicated to the denigration of native peoples, in this case Malays, their history and their society (Alatas, 1977:8 and 17).

Brunei features in the English language novels of authors such as Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, Alex Waugh and Anthony Burgess. It is also chronicled in letters and articles written by Victorian colonial officials in the region (Gunn, 2000:138-149). One of the most notable among this latter group is Sir Hugh Clifford, who wrote an article entitled ‘A Dying Kingdom’ about the country, having visited from his base in what was then Malaya (now Malaysia). Time has proven the title totally misjudged, but the article itself is worth considering for its exposition of how Brunei and Bruneians were ‘Otherized’ (Holliday, Hyde and Kullman, 2004:21-25) as part of the discourse of colonialism. Clifford romanticised ordinary Malays by casting them as “noble peasants” (Gunn, 2000:138-140). In a similar vein, Blundell (an alias used by Frank N. Butterworth) described the average Bruneian as decent, honest and hard-working, based on his observations of day-to-day life during his eight-year tenure there in the early twentieth century (Gunn, 2000:140). Conversely, Clifford (1902) reported being horrified, disgusted and even contaminated at

the decline caused by the “vice, consistent avarice, short-sighted folly..., self-indulgence, lack of self-restraint and loss of self-respect” he witnessed at the Court of Brunei where, “Personal pleasure has been the fetish of king after king” (Clifford, 1902:107 and 110).

Despite some sympathetic depictions such as some of those above, the image of Brunei that seems to have entered the consciousness of readers is of a place of primitive darkness, danger, exotic flora and fauna, intemperance, hedonism and oppressive rule. Such an image does more to justify the redemptive colonial presence; at least this is how it would have been cast in colonial discursal terms. At the same time officials such as Clifford and Butterworth were almost invariably portrayed as natural leaders because they were *orang puteh* (white person) whose mission it was to civilise and protect the indigenous people. Expatriate English teachers and petrochemical engineers could be cast as their modern-day embodiments. The reality of the relationships is much more complex than this binarism of coloniser and colonised suggests. For example, Clifford explored Brunei and learned to speak Malay. He was also familiar with local customs and the simplicity of the lives of the Malay peasantry appealed greatly to him (Gunn, 2000:138). This suggests that there was a conflict between his official role as a colonial agent and his regard for a way of life that would become a victim of that imperialistic drive (Gunn, 2000:138-139), a common dilemma for those at the forefront of colonialism. Nevertheless, his rendering of Brunei in words conforms to the prevailing discourse of his time,

Here is a land of darkness under sun-glare, of idyllic simplicity and virtue  
cheek by jowl with vice, treachery, wickedness unspeakable, cruelty that is  
satanic, tyranny, misrule, oppression; a land in which barren places sprout  
into a new strong life suddenly at a whisper of the white man’s will, and  
kingdoms old in story decay and putrefy in unsightly abjectness and squalor.  
It is the battleground of the new and the old; the spot where modern things  
and things very ancient meet in the death-grapple; where antiquated notions  
of right and wrong, of fitness and unfitness, die hard [...]

Clifford (1902:106).

Perhaps what is most problematic about these representations is not their veracity or otherwise, but their long endurance and obdurate resistance to being viewed otherwise with the passage of time and evidence to the contrary. They have become ‘fixed’, static and deterministic (Pennycook, 1998:166 and 188). They also represent the way Brunei and Bruneians were cast through a colonial lens in English, the language of the imperial power.

#### **4.7 The legacy of British protection**

The legacy of the protectorate period of Brunei’s history is a feeling that “everything British... or Caucasian is ok... There’s still that mentality” [P5:73]. “...in history... they were helping us back then with independence and everything... we’re just recalling how they taught us... and we’re always looking at them as our superiors... because they’ve got better education” [SP6:110]. In Brunei this education is delivered through the English language which found its position strengthened in the wake of British occupation. Such a conceptualisation of the colonial period as the British assisting and educating the Bruneians is shared by one of the student participants. It is likely an image that would have sat well with the colonial masters of that era as it fits in with their justification of colonialism as a civilising, developmental mission. All of the student participants in this study were aspiring to study abroad, the majority in the UK, ensuring the continuation of educational links between the two countries. Degrees conferred by overseas universities continue to be regarded as being better than those awarded by the local university and holders of overseas qualifications are reportedly given preferential treatment in the job market. A participant with access to insider information about one of the government ministries relays how recruiters there were directed by their permanent secretary not to offer positions to UBD graduates [P5:342]. This is suggestive of a lack of confidence in the standards of their own local institution and an ongoing dependence on the former ‘protector’ for validation. It also points to the long shadow that imperialism has cast, though in this case it may be more apt to suggest that Brunei persists in holding aloft the umbrella of protectionism by perpetuating its own dependence on the UK educationally.

SP6 later refers to this higher recognition given to overseas graduates, conceding that there is some denial involved, "...we don't wanna talk about it, but it's really true" [SP6:285]. Despite its being covert, awareness seems to have permeated the consciousness of these young people. Two participants used the words 'last resort' [SP4:259; SP7:67] when referring to the national university; another regards it as a "back-up" [SP2:168]. SP3 states he had never considered studying there and would only do so "if I was forced to" [SP3:382-384]. Another participant states that she wants to continue her studies "anywhere but here" [SP1:1053].

Echoes of the civilising mission aspect of colonialism continue, with one student participant equating going overseas to study with being smarter and "more civilised" [SP2:782]. We may prefer to believe that such attitudes no longer exist, but the vestiges seem to leach into the words uttered almost accidentally, giving voice to deeply held notions that seem resistant to time and enlightenment. One student participant feels it has become "like a tradition for Bruneians to actually apply to UK first" [SP7:73]. She refers to the choice of the British system of education due to the fact that, "We were once conquered by the British" [SP7:77], and this relationship has now evolved into "very, very good friendship" [SP7:77]. She also suggests that, "Bruneians tend to think like British" [SP7:324]. This sense may have developed due to their shared use of the English language.

This feeling of goodwill towards its former protector is conveyed to the current generation in the way the British are portrayed in Brunei's history curriculum. A typical, locally disseminated history textbook informs students that the Protectorate Agreement of 1888 "saved Brunei from being absorbed further by the Brookes' regime" (Curriculum Development Department, 2002:3). It also refers to the British Military Administration's (BMA) role in restoring peace and organising the rebuilding of Brunei in the wake of Japanese occupation during the war years (Curriculum Development Department, 2002:79). This portrayal of the colonial period as a benign phenomenon gives more credibility to the notion that Brunei's former ruler, Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III, had prolonged its protection until he had consolidated his position and the timing was most opportune for him. It also removes any images of coercive behaviour on the part of the British, thereby

negating the need for feelings of antipathy and creating a favourable climate for the retention of the language brought by the ‘protector’ and planted in the country.

#### **4.8 Being anonymous**

The lack of anonymity in Brunei is a recurring theme and is likely a factor that is contraindicative to the construction and performance of political identities. Anonymity could be regarded as the very antithesis of identity assertion, involving the shedding of all markers and the ability to move unnoticed and unregistered through a period of time and space. Such movement is not possible in Brunei, where a number of participants confessed to feeling under surveillance by their fellow citizens most of the time. P4 recalls having to adjust her own behaviour and careless attitude when she returned to live in Brunei after an extended period abroad. She remembers being reminded, “You’re in Brunei. You need to care a bit more” [P4:355]. “In Brunei everybody’s just looking at you” [P1:172]. “You can feel them eyeing you up and down” [P1:181]. Both she and her co-interviewee admitted to missing “that whole being anonymous” [P2:177] experience that the time they had spent abroad in the UK had afforded them. This suggests that there is a sense of liberation in being away from home when one is free to be whoever one chooses without any of the attendant pressure to impress or conform that living in one’s own locality entails. Both of these participants have an affective connection with the UK, coming from mixed heritages, but their enjoyment of the anonymity of life there is probably only tenuously linked to this. It is a reaction consistent with being removed from a situation of sustained supervision and allowed to become invisible.

Conversely, this relative invisibility provides the space within which self-directed identity construction can take place. Freed from a locality where they are told who they are or who they should be, they can build their identities unfettered by social pressure or peer scrutiny. One participant recalled that finding herself overseas at the age of 16 to further her studies triggered her search for identity [P5:274]. The notion of a quest is suggestive of her conceptualising of identity in its essentialist sense, as something singular, tangible, findable, pre-existent, awaiting discovery. Such a notion is deeply rooted, enduring and is

often betrayed in expressions that occur in everyday discourse, thereby perpetuating their own currency. In a similar vein, another participant stated, “It was only in the UK that I started to actually find out who I was” [P7:77]. Yet another saw it as a chance to reinvent herself, “If I go out there, nobody knows me. I could be a different person [SP1:778]. In Brunei she feels, “There are some things I keep myself from doing here because that’s just the way it is here. You just gotta blend I think” [SP1:780]. It seems that moving away from what is familiar acts as an impetus, suddenly making identity construction an issue and a possibility. In the past, when social interaction was highly proximal, everybody’s place was so clear as to make its consideration supererogatory (Bauman, 2004:18). In today’s dynamic society, that is no longer the case. People are frequently cast adrift in a sea of uncertainty, loosed from social anchors of identity such as race, nationality, family, and compelled to contemplate how they wish to identify themselves and find new ways to belong.

### **Diaspora Blues**

So, here you are  
too foreign for home  
too foreign for here  
Never enough for both

Ijeoma Umebinyuo (2015:147)

Talking about her experience as a mixed-race child (Brunei Malay and English), one participant remembered that her relatives had made her feel very different [P2:39] and that at primary school, “I remember being bullied for being half white” [P2:43]. She admitted to feeling isolated by her difference, her perceived Englishness [P2:60]. However, on her arrival in the UK to pursue her undergraduate studies, she laughingly recounted her realisation that, “I was so not English! I could not fit in there either, it’s funny... I can’t fit in in Brunei... I can’t fit in in England... Where?” [P2:116]. Her sense of belonging is challenged in both locations, if she conceptualises her Bruneian Malay identity and her English identity as dualistic, either-or ascriptions. It could be that her fellow Bruneians’ insistence on her Englishness and unwillingness to allow her to feel Malay [P2:83], had led

her to assert her English identity more strongly, especially when she found the situation reversed when she went to a single-sex secondary school. In this context, her mixed heritage had a certain cachet; “There, if you were half English, you were looked up to” [P2:88]. So, in this setting, she found acceptance and no longer felt like an outcast. It is perhaps not coincidental that this particular school is recognised for its high attainment in English language examinations and is seen as being exceptionally Anglophone in orientation.

Her co-interviewee, who also has a mixed heritage (Brunei Malay and Scottish), feels she suffers from “mixed-kid syndrome” [P1:84]. This causes her to over-identify with Malay culture in a desperate effort to fit in. It involves not only speaking Malay, but doing so in a certain way, and even eating certain foods [P1:84]. Essentially, she believes she is overcompensating by trying to be more local than the locals, which could be seen as resisting them by usurping their power to deny her her Malayness. She lamented that, despite her best efforts, they would not accept her Malay identity; “They don’t want to see the half-Malay side of me... They want to see me as the half *orang puteh*” [P1:86]. This choice relegates her to outsider status and denies her access to the in-group of “pure Malay people” [P1:84]. Her iterative use of the word ‘want’ could be interpreted as indicating that she may on some level be aware of the deliberate choice they are making in how they identify her. However, she herself has embraced both identities and lives out her Malay identity and her Scottish one among the others that she has constructed.

A participant, who is of mixed Malaysian and Bruneian descent, speaks of her shock on hearing that one of her younger siblings wanted to stay on in Australia, where she enjoyed being independent and the fact that, “Nobody stares at her” [P4:202]. The participant herself regards Bruneians’ tendency to scrutinise each other as “the culture here... It’s the habit here” [P4:204]. This could be suggestive of her acceptance of this as a feature of her locality. Her co-interviewee agrees and adds that the level of scrutiny intensifies in accordance with how well known or how well connected an individual happens to be [P3:207]. These observations suggest a high degree of insularity and intense social pressures, both of which are likely to impact and possibly constrain identity construction

and performance. If people live in a proverbial fishbowl, especially one where attempts are made to prescribe a number of key identities, their negotiation of their own identities is likely to be limited or heavily influenced by the expectation society has of them. From a political perspective, people in Brunei are expected to identify as monarchists, loyal subjects of HM the Sultan, in keeping with the *Beraja* (monarchy) pillar of the national ideology. Any other political identity, if performed publicly, could lead to dire consequences.

#### 4.9 Brunei's international identity

Brunei lost no time in asserting its position as a sovereign state on the world stage. As soon as the country became independent on 1<sup>st</sup> January 1984, it also became the 49<sup>th</sup> member of

Figure 9: The 10 members of ASEAN



the Commonwealth, ensuring the continuation of its close ties with the United Kingdom (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012a). A week later on 7<sup>th</sup> January, it became the sixth member of the now ten-member strong Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) (Figure 9). This was its first step towards normalising relationships with

some of its neighbours, which in the past had been fraught. ASEAN membership has become the cornerstone of Brunei's foreign policy (Oxford Business Group, 2013:131) and the country has successfully chaired the organisation a total of four times to date. Later that same year on 21<sup>st</sup> September, it became a full member of the United Nations (Permanent Mission of Brunei Darussalam to the United Nations, n.d.). Brunei also joined what is now known as the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) in January 1984 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2012b) and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in September 1992. The country is a member of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the



Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), among many other affiliations (International Business Publications, 2008:172), both economic and socio-cultural in orientation.

SP7 compares her country to those without monarchs, regarding them as “rather unstable with politics and all that” [SP7:81], casting political activity in a negative light. But P7’s earlier choice of the word ‘dictated’ is suggestive of a level of political consciousness which acknowledges that some kind of oppression is taking place. Nevertheless, an uprising similar to those collectively called the Arab Spring in 2012 seems unlikely to happen anytime soon. The concept of the country’s peaceable nature is one that is constantly reinforced by the addendum ‘Abode of Peace’ which is the translation of ‘Darussalam’ in its official name. SP7 also links this nomenclature to the ‘unique tradition’ of Brunei [SP7:1011]. This seems to have entered the consciousness of her citizens. However, this may be subliminal and is likely to remain latent rather than being voiced publically or ever acted upon. If Bruneians are passive where politics are concerned, it begs the question as to why this is so. Could there have been an internalisation of a sense that political expression is contraindicative to success and wellbeing in Bruneian society that has passed through to the present generations?

If we accept that political participation is essential to development (Sen, 1999b:5) and being a recipient of beneficence precludes being agentive when it comes to change (Sen, 1999b:xiii), Bruneians would have bleak future prospects. Despite democracy’s dominance in today’s world, its ‘default’ setting in terms of world politics (Sen 1999b:5), other systems still exist, such as Brunei’s absolute monarchy, and they have to accommodate both development and change within their strictures.

“Bruneians are pampered”, declares one of the student participants [SP4:809]. They are undeniably the recipients of beneficence and there is an overarching sense of gratitude among participants, accompanied by an awareness of the fortuity of having Brunei as a birthplace. Many refer to the way the Government looks after the people. Another participant alluded to the high standard of living; things are affordable because of subsidies

of staples such as rice and cooking oil, free education and healthcare [SP7:1015-1019]. The word ‘grateful’ was uttered several times [P5:49, 63 and 493; P6:618; P8:899]. The Bruneians involved in this study profess to feeling lucky and proud to be who and where they are [SP2:462; P6:632]. The extent to which their acceptance of benefits is passive is not easy to determine. It could be argued that their gratitude in itself is suggestive of unthinking acceptance, since they would be entitled to share in the spoils of their homeland’s natural resources. Notably one of the participants suggests that his current apathetic attitude to politics would change if the economy of Brunei were to be negatively impacted [SP3:1601]. A relative of P6, who contributed to her interview, hinted at the placatory function of the welfare offered by the state, “It’s a way to shut our mouth” [H1:619]. Based on these views, Bruneians could be regarded as being held in thrall by their gratitude for the relative prosperity they enjoy. Alternatively, they could be seen as being complicit in an arrangement that they recognise to be flawed, or at least non-ideal, as long as their standard of living is not compromised. It is also possible that there are elements of both of these positions in the way they perceive their situation.

In the 1970s when Brunei was relatively *nouveau riche*, it became known as the ‘Shellfare State’, a cliché that persisted for many years (Kershaw, 2001b:118). The welfare made possible by the oil revenue generated by Royal Dutch Shell, now Brunei-Shell Petroleum, has been the main vehicle in the de-politicisation drive that has existed since the failed rebellion.

The economic stability that Brunei has managed to sustain since independence in 1984 has bolstered the existing political framework and ensures its survival to date. Brunei has one of the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) per capita rates in the world, estimated at US\$54,800 in 2013, giving Brunei a world ranking of twelfth that year (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). It is in the enviable position of having no national debt and of having a trade surplus rather than a deficit. The Sultan’s position of absolute power enables him to control the vast revenue generated by the country’s oil and gas production. This has the reciprocatory effect of safeguarding his power by rendering the country and her residents dependent on what is generally perceived as his magnanimity and bounty. There is little

evidence to suggest that they might consider the natural resources and their revenues with which the country is blessed as belonging to the nation of Brunei itself and, by extension, to them, the denizens of the country (Kershaw, 2001b:135). Were such a belief to take root and flourish, it would likely jeopardise the status quo by usurping the sedatory gratitude, replacing it with agitative entitlement.

HM's absolute financial discretion is legal under Brunei law, and ethical, according to the traditions of Malay monarchism (Kershaw, 2001b:129). This implies that he is trusted to act in the best interests of the *rakyat* (loyal subjects), by giving them an equitable share of the wealth (Kershaw, 2001b:133).

Bruneians' implicit trust in the unimpeachable integrity of the Sultan's fiscal fairness came close to being shaken, if not entirely shattered, in the late 1990s. In 1986, the Sultan had appointed his youngest brother, Prince Jefri Bolkiah, as the Minister of Finance. This gave Prince Jefri ultimate control over the Brunei Investment Agency (BIA), which handles Brunei's external investment portfolio. But, in early 1997, Prince Jefri resigned from this position in advance of a breaking scandal. This was interpreted by some as a move to distance himself from the Sultan, lest the latter also be tainted by the allegations made against Prince Jefri (Kershaw, 2001b:130). Soon afterwards, the Asian financial crisis necessitated a thorough re-examination of the country's financial situation. It emerged that billions of Brunei dollars, reportedly up to Brunei \$40 billion, were missing, feared to have been misappropriated ("Brunei Prince's '£3bn spending spree'," 2000).

Echoes of Clifford's words in 1902 about the extravagance and hedonism of the royal household, the forebears of the current incumbents, still seem to haunt the present. In the wake of the Asian financial crisis and the collapse of Prince Jefri's Bruneian conglomerate, Amedeo Development Corporation, there was a danger that, for the first time, the secrecy surrounding the royal family's excessive spending and un-Islamic behaviour would be broken (Head, 2000). The danger also arose that the division between the public purse and the Sultan's personal fortune would be held up to widespread scrutiny and interrogation, both locally and internationally. However, these dangers were averted, and, in a move

aimed at achieving damage limitation, there was an out-of-court settlement with Prince Jefri, the details of which were not disclosed.

The elevated price of oil in the intervening years has helped Brunei recoup some of the losses attributed to Prince Jefri's alleged profligacy. Ironically, the legacy of his entrepreneurial vision lives on in what are now some of Brunei's most iconic institutions. These include the state-of-the-art Jerudong International School, and, the paradoxically re-named, 'Empire' hotel, which now hosts all visiting dignitaries and political conferences. Awareness of the excesses that were revealed, albeit fleetingly, at that time, seems to have receded into the back of people's minds, though they are now more likely to be reminded or alerted to new cases that may occur, given the penetrative reach of the Internet. It is no longer as easy as it has been hitherto to keep people in the dark with regard to the exploits of their ruling family.

In 2013, the US-based non-governmental organisation, Freedom House, designated Brunei's status as 'Not Free', giving it a score of 5.5 out of a possible worst of 7 for freedom; 5 out of 7 for civil liberties; and 6 out of 7 for political rights ("Freedom in the world: Brunei," 2013). The criteria for these ratings are derived from western democratic standards of what constitutes freedom. One of the respondents showed awareness of such etic perceptions of the country. According to her, "Brunei rated really high on general happiness... but really low on freedom of speech and expression" [SP1:296]. This elision may have been a mere coincidental statement of the way things are or betray a deeper awareness of the censorship that prevails in her country. Another felt that growing up in Brunei involved internalising a sense of self-control or reserve; "discipline in a way that you have to limit yourself... what you can do, what you cannot" [SP7:1730]. She conveyed this in an accepting, matter-of-fact way, without any hint of resentment or apparent desire for things to be otherwise.

#### 4.10 Identifying the demise of political activism

In what is possibly one of its most enduring contradictions (Gunn, 2000:139), Brunei, while celebrating and proclaiming its own peaceableness outwardly, is still deemed to be in need of the protection afforded by emergency rule internally. The limitations in this seem to have become the norm over time and have had the effect of discouraging political activity. This is evidenced by the gradual dissipation of political organisations over the years.

The most politically aware adult participant recalls how he was surprised to find out “things I didn’t know about Brunei; like how Brunei is technically still under martial law” [P7:725]. He only realised this when he read about it while he was studying in the UK. On 12<sup>th</sup> December, 1962, as a response to the failed rebellion, there was a proclamation of emergency in Brunei. Article 83 of the Constitution outlines the conditions for such action (Constitution of Brunei Darussalam, 1959, art. 83, revised edition 2011). In clause 2, it is stipulated that each proclamation should only be in force for a period of two years. However, more than fifty years after the actual threat, Emergency Orders are still in place. P7 grew up unaware of his country’s political status, which testifies to the obscurantism that takes place. By not making things explicit and distracting people by looking after them fiscally, even the most politically astute can be lulled into acquiescence. The choice of the term ‘Emergency Orders’ is possibly also calculated in that its connotations are suggestive of a danger that needs to be averted or guarded against, where action is necessary for the greater good rather than being deliberate and dictatorial. The more unequivocal ‘martial law’ is connotative of enforcement and rigid control. Significantly this is how the participant chose to express it, though he did qualify it with the word ‘technically’ which softens it somewhat. Given the country’s assumption of the titular ‘Darussalam’ or ‘Abode of Peace’, the irony of its prolonged restriction cannot be overlooked (Black, 2011:327). If Bruneians are at all conscious of this incongruity, they are choosing to remain circumspect about it.

Currently only one legal political party exists. This is *Parti Pembangunan Bangsa* (National Development Party). However, such political apathy has not always been a feature of Bruneian life. Sidhu suggests that it was post World War II “that political

consciousness became more crystallized in Brunei with the emergence of modern political parties” (Sidhu, 2010:185). *Parti Rakyat Brunei* (Brunei People’s Party) was registered in August 1956 (Saunders, 2002:132-133). By 1957 its membership of approximately 16,000 was equivalent to 75 percent of the adult male population at that time. It was led by Sheikh Ahmad M. Azahari (Saunders, 2002:134).

#### **4.10.1 Performing apolitical identities**

“I’m not into politics at all” [SP7:290]. These words seem to hold true for all but one of the participants. Political activity or activism is generally thought to stem from political identities. The absence of such activity could therefore suggest either the complete absence of political identities or the presence of relatively weak ones. Alternatively, an apolitical stance could in itself be regarded as a political identity in that it chooses to eschew attitudes and actions of a political nature and to accept the status quo. Therefore, an apolitical identity may manifest as patriotism and assent in place of the more normative and newsworthy revolution and dissent. Identity can be “as much about disaffiliation as it is about affiliation” (Block, 2014:5) and it would seem that the Bruneian participants in this study overwhelmingly choose to disaffiliate themselves politically, at least publicly.

Huddy (2013:746) underscores the importance of considering gradations in identity strength, as these can be variable in their effects on political behaviour and attitudes. The perennial state of emergency in Brunei for over 50 years has all but removed any internal threat to the stability of the country. Huddy (2013) contends that the presence of threat leads to heightened political emotion, cohesion and possible subsequent action (Huddy, Sears and Levy, 2013:15). When no real or perceived threat exists, the development of a political consciousness seems to be unnecessary or even contraindicative. The rebellion that led to the imposition of the current Emergency Orders continues to cast a long shadow over the political present. The Sultan continues to rule by decree. Civil servants and security personnel are not allowed to join political parties and, since combined these two groups constitute a majority of eligible citizens, the country remains overtly apolitical. Only one of the research participants suggested an active political consciousness. The others seem to have chosen apolitical identities, possibly adapting to the prevailing political

climate. Instead, the others' responses conveyed a sense of gratitude and of feeling lucky to be Bruneian.

There have been some indications of late that Bruneians' latent politics may not continue to remain as dormant as it has been for the past thirty years. On the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of independence on February 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2014, a local newspaper headline read, "HM slams malicious campaign against Syariah Penal Code" (Kamit, 2014a).

The announcement that Syariah law would be extended to include a penal code or *Hudud* punishments was made in late 2013 ("Brunei announces tough new code," 2013). These new measures are to be phased in from April, 2014. The Sultan called the Act which he signed on October 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 "now part of the great history of our nation" (Bandial, 2013). He went on to say, "This is our Brunei, a nation of *Zikir* and Malay Islamic Monarchy". The term *Zikir* translates literally as 'chant', but a broader interpretation suggests stronger adherence to Islamic ideals (Deterding and Sharbawi, 2013:89).

In his National Day *titah* 2014, the Sultan condemned the use of social media to insult "the king, *ulama* {Islamic legal scholars} and *Syara'* {Malay spelling of *Syariah*}". In a barely veiled threat, he warned that such dissent could not be allowed to continue and was a matter for law enforcement agencies in Brunei. He also reasserted the role of MIB in the creation of a strong identity which he regards as essential to the process of nation building. He likened MIB to a "firewall" against the "various issues and challenges tied to globalisation" (Kamit, 2014a). It may be no coincidence then that Bruneians used social media platforms to vehemently defend the country against international censure in the wake of the implementation of *syariah* law. Mindful of instigative and facilitative roles thought to have been played by social media in the uprisings collectively termed the 'Arab Spring' (Howard et al, 2011), it is not surprising that the Sultan has acted to quell the rising tide of disquiet.

However, his words on this occasion have led to further condemnation by the International Commission of Jurists (ICJ) who urged respect for those expressing dissent (Palatino, 2014). Earlier in the year, Sam Zarifi, the Regional Director of ICJ Asia-Pacific, sent an

open letter to HM expressing concern about the decision to implement the Penal Code, highlighting its inconsistency with Brunei's commitment to upholding human rights in the region as part of ASEAN (Zarifi, 2014). This letter expressed the concern of the ICJ and sought clarification on the imminent imposition of the Penal Code. It also requested a timeline for the country's ratification of a list of human rights instruments which it had previously indicated it was reviewing. It appears that while Brunei Darussalam welcomes the nominal inclusion in international organisations, such as the United Nations (UN) and ASEAN, it wants to do so on its own terms and without necessarily accepting or complying with the ideals and principles which guide and undergird these organisations, especially when they collide with internal power mechanisms.

Paradoxically, Brunei has succeeded in not only retaining its membership of these organisations for the past thirty years, but in cultivating a relatively high international profile and, for the most part until very recently, avoiding censure for its absolute rule, poor human rights record and strict press control.

Despite the criticism levied by the ICJ, the Sultan remains resolute. On March 6<sup>th</sup>, 2014, as he presided over the opening of the 10<sup>th</sup> Legislative Council session, he called on the people to disregard

[...] what others say about us here in Brunei because they do not know the way we know what it is to be Bruneian and how it is in Brunei. What is important is that we ourselves as Bruneians must truly be Bruneian [...]

Hab (2014, citing HM the Sultan).

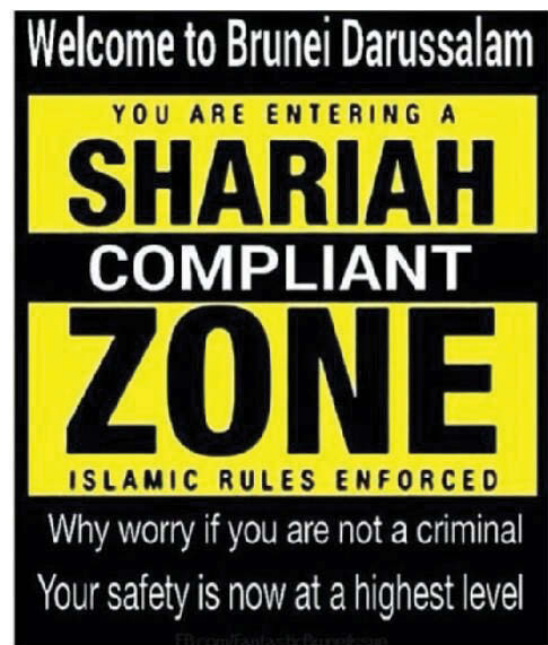
HM reiterated that the introduction of the Penal Code was a developmental rather than a regressive move. This reaction to external criticism is very much in keeping with the principle of non-interference in another country's internal affairs; one that is central to ASEAN (Goh, 2003:114). The Sultan also called for unity within the country. "We need to stand as one, regardless of race" (Hab, 2014). This call for unity was put to the test a few months later when Brunei made international headlines as the date for the official



implementation for new Syariah laws dawned. The date, originally set for 22<sup>nd</sup> April, was deferred, giving rise to speculation that the Sultan was rethinking the move. But this was not the case and on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2014, the first phase was implemented (Liljas, 2014). This led to an unprecedented backlash of criticism against Brunei and its ruler, which was spearheaded by celebrities, such as Jay Leno and Ellen De Generes in the US, and Stephen Fry and Richard Branson in the UK. In both countries boycotts of iconic hotels, such as the Beverly Hills and the Dorchester, owned by the Sultan, were put in place, resulting in substantial losses (Stout, 2014).

The response from local Bruneians, though virtual, suggests either a reawakening of latent political sentiment or defensive patriotism. Bruneians took to social networking sites to hit out at ‘outsiders’ whose righteous indignation on their behalf was considered by them to be misplaced. The twitter hashtag, #bruneiunited, was widely used to support the Sultan’s decision, and on Facebook posters declaring “Brunei Darussalam – a Shariah compliant zone” (Figure 10) were posted and widely shared. Anyone who criticised the Sultan’s action was told they did not understand, faithfully echoing the words of HM’s earlier *titah* on the subject. One tweet under the hashtag #justsaying cast the country’s sudden notoriety in a positive light in terms of its geographical location, “On a bright side, they know where Brunei is.” It went on to argue that if Bruneians accept the imposition of such laws, given that they are the ones who will be subject to them, it is not necessary for others outside the country to protest (Appendix 9). This calls to mind the words of the poet Robert Frost (1874-1963), “If society fits you comfortably enough, you call it freedom.” However, this pro-establishment stance is not the only one expressed online.

Figure 10: Facebook poster (May 2014) re. reaction to external criticism



Hitherto, any stirrings of political criticism have been confined to private murmurings behind closed doors. HM's simile of MIB-as-firewall has been tested in recent years however, with the Internet providing a forum for Brunei's digital-age, English-language-educated "citizen satirist[s]" (Higgie, 2015:161). Higgie coined this term "to explore the practices of satirical content producers on social media websites" (Higgie, 2015:161). She links this re-orientated engagement with politics to the wider concepts of mediascapes and ideoscapes proposed by Appadurai to account for the multimedia flows of ideas and information (Appadurai, 1996:53). In Brunei, such engagement also has a revivalist element, given the political dormancy of the past 50 years, and its virtuality affords people there the anonymity that is not possible in their actual world.

For a time, a Facebook page called 'Brunei Memes' was openly provocative. As its name

*Figure 11: Social media post (2014, January 16) re. online satire in Brunei*



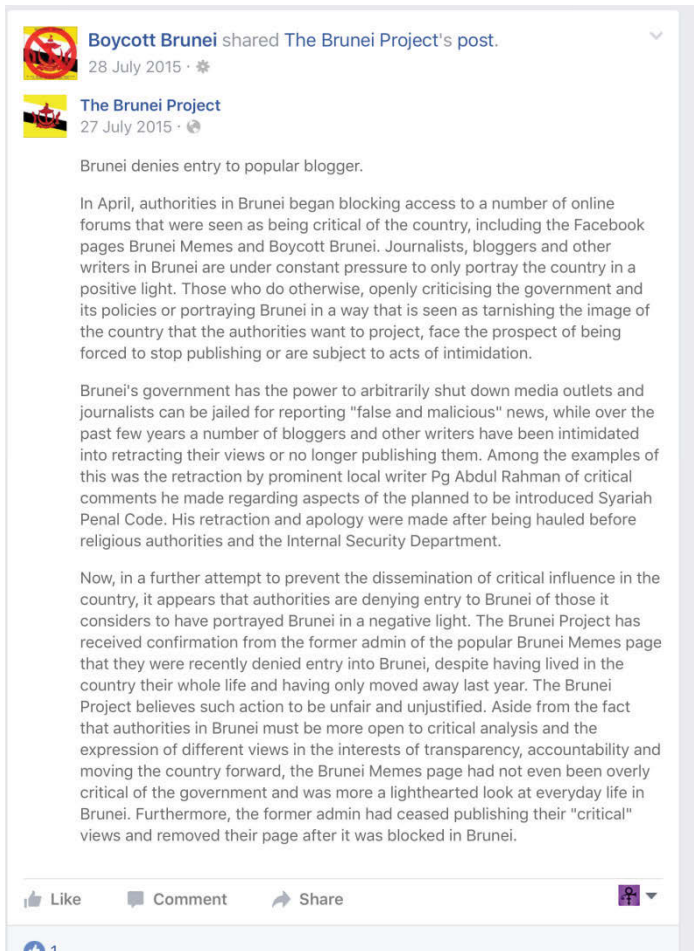
suggests, it featured Internet memes. 'Meme' is a word coined by Richard Dawkins to describe "an idea, behaviour, or style that spreads from person to person within a culture" and, when used on the Internet, also involves creative alteration (Solon & Dawkins, 2013). Subjects that are known to be taboo, such as MIB, were targeted, leading to its eventually being outlawed (Figure 11). All online activity is monitored by *Keselamatan Dalam Negeri* (KDN, the internal security department), and it is rumoured that the

administrator of the Brunei Memes site, whose identity inspired much speculation, was compelled to desist and was possibly even refused permission to re-enter Brunei (Brunei: Admin of Brunei, 2015). Whether or not this is true is not as revealing as the kind of discussion it has generated which points to the attempts being made to challenge media censorship and control despite surveillance.

Not all Bruneians are happy about the direction in which the country is moving. A Facebook page entitled 'Boycott Brunei' was set up following the announcement of *Syariah* Penal Code in 2014. This is overtly political and takes a much more seriously

critical position, targeting issues such as human rights, racial discrimination, and economic decline. It currently (July 2016) has 1,662 likes. Notably none of the participants can be counted in this number, although it is unclear whether or not the webpage may be blocked within Brunei (Figure 12).

*Figure 12: Social media post (2015, July 27) re. online political awakening*



Some social media pages that lampoon and satirise some of Brunei's mores remain active. One of these, 'Bru Blah Blah' ([www.brublahblah.com](http://www.brublahblah.com)), is primarily in English and mostly features links to extended textual descriptions of typical Bruneian behaviour rather than visuals. Another, 'Brunei Memes Comic' ([www.facebook.com/bruneimemecom](http://www.facebook.com/bruneimemecom)), consists of memes, the majority of which are in BNM, though some are translingual. The content of these is relatively innocuous politically; a factor that likely prolongs their existence.

It is notable that in the article under the headline, "Respect us as we have respected you" (Hab, 2014) reporting the call for unity and assertion of Bruneianness, details of an additional B\$1.65 billion being allocated for development projects follow HM's entreaty. It is also notable that in February 2014 two much-longed-for franchises were granted permission and opened outlets in the Sultanate. Starbucks began operating on February 16<sup>th</sup> and Burger King followed soon afterwards on February 25<sup>th</sup>. A local netizen's politically-laced posting questioned the timely appearance of these long awaited chains. In this posting on a popular social

network, the franchises' sudden appearance was linked to a desire to keep people quiet or act as a distraction from graver issues. A reactionary comment referred to "the art of distraction", reminiscent of Chomsky's remark that "the best defense against democracy is to distract people" (Chomsky, 1998:53). Such open questioning and unapologetic diffusion of the cynical awareness it suggests are perhaps a result of the coalescence of better education, Internet exposure and globalising forces. However, at a time when surveillance of online activity has been stepped up, it is not without risk to the individuals involved. One of the participants was already alert to this danger and alluded to her cyber self-censorship [SP6:1604].

#### **4.11 The caring monarch**

"It's the B! It's the something about the sultanate. When I see Brunei, it's like it's unique. It's still being ruled by a king! So that's the only thing that fascinates me" [SP4:519]. Hassanal Bolkiah has been the absolute ruler of his country since 1967, but "the Brunei State prefers to project a 'caring monarch' to his subjects" (Kershaw, 2003:133). SP4, who admitted to being patriotic and had previously joined both the army and police cadets [SP4:175], is referring to the uniqueness of Brunei's political situation. For him, the *Beraja* or 'Monarchy' aspect of the national ideology (MIB) is foremost. He also compares Brunei favourably with Malaysia which also has a sultan, but is "more like democracy" [SP4:519], which his tone implied was not particularly desirable. This calls into question the widely-held belief that people in non-democracies actually desire a democratic system and that it is the best political model for all countries. Later he talks of being fascinated by the concept of "being protected by... under someone's like-" [SP4:527]. Another participant likes the idea of "being taken care of by the monarch" [P5:130], reaffirming that HM's orchestrated image as a paternal figure has entered the consciousness of local people.

These two perceptions challenge widely disseminated western portrayals, such as HM's place atop a list of the world's enduring dictators (Norman, 2011). This points to the many performed identities of HM Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. He is at once the all-powerful autocratic leader and the paternalistic, caring monarch, among other personas.

Hassanal Bolkiah's leadership may be dictatorial, but it is also benevolent, or at least it has been hitherto for all but a small number of citizens. This paternalistic or "father leadership style" (Low Kim Cheng, 2008) is in keeping with Islamic tenets and promulgates the notion that the people's welfare is his overriding concern. He himself embodies the national ideology being an Islamic monarch of Malay origin.

This identity as a caring paternal figure is one that has been carefully nurtured and orchestrated over time. It has gained in strength with the passage of time and its credibility continues to strengthen as the Sultan himself ages in a society where wisdom and advanced years are still correlated. It is also reinforced by the respect that is traditionally accorded to the father in Bruneian Malay families. Key decisions are made by him and family members do not typically question him or his authority. This predisposes them to acceptance of decisions made for them by their leader.

The Sultan actively performs this identity in both his words and his deeds. For example, in a *titah* delivered at a passing-out parade in early 2013, he became overwhelmed by emotion while addressing an audience that included the bereaved families of 12 Royal Brunei Armed Forces personnel who had died in a helicopter crash the previous year (Faiq Airudin, 2013). This public display of emotion is rare, making its effect on the people intense and it did much to reaffirm and cement his reputation for concern about the welfare of his subjects.

In the immediate aftermath of that crash he was personally involved in the investigation into its cause and even visited the survivors in hospital (Noor, 2012).

The small size and high levels of security within the country afford the Sultan many opportunities to interact closely with his people to an extent that is unimaginable in other countries (Appendix 10). Whilst his power, wealth and lifestyle set him apart in many ways, he has nevertheless succeeded in maintaining a common touch that ensures his

popularity. Much of this is due to his hands-on approach and ability to perform multiple identities simultaneously.

In December 2013 a photograph of the Sultan directing traffic in the wake of an accident involving his outriders went viral (Chung, 2012). Online social networks were abuzz with Bruneians expressing love and pride. One local netizen shared the link, prefaced by the message, “He takes care of us wholeheartedly” and explained that he had been waiting for a version in English to be posted (the original was in *Bahasa Melayu*), so that he could share it with international friends. Another had commented in response, “And this... is why we love our monarch.” Such unsolicited, spontaneous expressions of regard could be dismissed as naivety or the result of indoctrination, but they are nonetheless a salient feature of the Brunei populace’s relationship with their Sultan.

There is a sense of intimacy inherent in this relationship that could not be easily replicated or even contemplated in other contexts. The Sultan appears to have found many ways to reconcile his omnipotence and his benevolence so that their essential contradiction is no longer even apparent or hardly relevant.

#### **4.12 Being other than Malay**

“The colour of IC – that’s the big issue” [P3:165] claims one of the three Bruneian Chinese participants. Brunei’s national ideology, MIB, elevates those who are of Malay ethnicity and institutionalises their preferential treatment in the same way that the *bumiputra* (sons of the soil) policy has done in neighbouring Malaysia since the early 1970s. But it appears that it is not this racial profiling itself that impacts people most on a day-to-day basis. In P3’s experience, the colour of your identity card (IC) is more important than the colour of your skin. This suggests that any discrimination that occurs is linked more closely to immigration status than it is to race, at least in an overt sense. In support of this notion, he reveals that he belongs to a special sub-group of Chinese citizens known as *Cina Muara*. While this translates literally as ‘Estuary Chinese’, according to his Malay co-interviewee it means, “You’re similar to Malay. You’re more Malay than Chinese. You sort of have

Malay culture and qualities” [P4:124]. This position is further enhanced by the ability to speak BNM which leads to higher levels of acceptance than would normally be accorded to Chinese people [P3 and P4: 120-131]. In this sense, Malayness can be regarded as a “cultural category” rather than an ethnic one (Gunn, 1997:6). This renders it slightly more attainable than the exclusivity associated with ethnicity, but nevertheless it is dependent on the goodwill of the Malay majority who can grant or withhold their acceptance.

“To test if you are truly Bruneian they’ll ask you to name like three traditional cakes, three songs or three dances which I doubt even the locals know” [SP1:79]. At the time of her interview, the only Bruneian Chinese student participant had recently been granted citizenship with its prized yellow identity card. Her mother had undergone a citizenship test. SP1 conveys the heightened sense of belonging that accompanies her new status [SP1:62]. Despite having been born and living her entire life in Brunei, she only feels as if she belongs there when the colour of her identity card changes. Her words betray this in the choice of the word ‘locals’, a group to which she has not hitherto claimed or been allowed membership. Many permanent residents (PR), especially those of Chinese ethnicity, share her previous feeling of strangerhood and alienation. Without the citizenship as evidenced by the yellow card, “Being a PR here is so horrible compared to being a PR elsewhere... When you go overseas..., you’re like a refugee everywhere you go” [P3:171]. As a result, “Many just pack up and go. So many left already” [P3:189] to seek better lives in countries such as Australia or Canada, “The big places” [P3:189], or destinations of choice for Chinese migrants. Although P3 himself enjoys the privileged position of being a Bruneian citizen with the additional prestige of being a *Cina muara*, his passion when outlining the plight of his fellow Bruneian Chinese who are not citizens, suggests both high levels of empathy and righteous indignation on their behalf. This could suggest latent political sentiment roused by the injustice he perceives. However, despite P3’s relatively advantageous position, his ethnicity may always be a limitation in Bruneian society, where anyone other than a Malay is less valued and treated differently. Relating this to the context of work in the public sector, another Bruneian Chinese participant states, “When you’re working in the government..., as Chinese it will still be considered second best to Malay, with the same IC of course” [P8:480]. Furthermore, she suggests that

Chinese people need to work much harder than their Malay counterparts in the same position, whilst being careful all the while that they do not “feel threatened by you” [P8:486].

#### **4.13 Identification by colour**

Bruneian citizenship is identified by the issuance of a yellow national identity card, known locally in English as IC or *Kad Pengenalan* (KP) in Malay. Yellow is the colour of royalty in Brunei, symbolising the Sultanate. A yellow card is a key determinant of how an individual is treated and regarded in this locality. PRs are issued with purple cards, though these are often referred to as ‘red’; and temporary residents, such as expatriate workers, are given green cards. Coincidentally, all 16 participants in this study are yellow IC holders. This is a key factor in that it will have facilitated their progress through the educational system, as well as having paved the way for them socially. It is because of this and their high levels of achievement in English-medium education that six out of the eight adult participants had received government scholarships to study in either the UK or Australia; and all eight student participants were aspiring to embark on similar scholastic journeys.

The only participant of Bruneian Indian heritage, one of the highly select few who are Bruneian citizens (Mani, 2006:13-14), speaks of her pity for students who have purple ICs because they are not eligible for free education or government scholarships [SP5:931]. However, her status as a yellow IC-holding citizen did not protect her from racial slurs due to her Indian origins. She shares an anecdote about an incident involving fellow students at her former college who called her *kaling* – a pejorative word for Indians in Brunei and Malaysia (Lim, 2003:174, 184-185), suggesting she should return to her country of origin and that she did not belong in Brunei.

It appears that being fully Malay is the optimal racial category; and anything other than that can be a disadvantage. Notwithstanding this, it is the colour of the IC that determines the fiscal fortunes, educational opportunities and overall welfare entitlements of Brunei’s residents. This suggests that elevation of Malays and denigration of all other ethnicities



may have become institutionalised at societal level, albeit subtly and mostly subconsciously.

Consequently, the desire to identify with Malays can lead to extremes such as outright rejection of any other heritage, as was the case with the paternal grandmother of one participant. Adopted by a Malay family as a child, she refused to acknowledge or perform her Chinese identity by rejecting its language; “She would deny her Chinese heritage. She said, ‘I don’t wanna speak in Chinese!’” [P4:154].

Although the IC can function as a race leveller, endemic racism based on entrenched stereotyping seems to persist. This is not confined to the older generation as might be expected, given the higher degree of insularity and lower levels of education that existed in the past. In addition to the insults directed towards the Bruneian Indian participant, SP5, by peers at her prestigious sixth form college, P3 recalls another incidence of overt racism. In this case, it took place during a classroom discussion and was directed towards Chinese students. While discussing scholarships that are reserved for Malays only, one of the Malay students expressed the view that it was right that these not be awarded to Chinese students. Incidentally, Chinese students frequently outperform their Malay peers in high-stakes examinations and are disproportionately represented at award ceremonies. According to the teacher involved, his rationale was that, ““they are *gila usin*”” (‘money mad’ in BNM) [P3:167]. Such a prejudicial view is rendered all the more forceful by the fact that it was unapologetically delivered in the presence of an ethnically Chinese teacher by a well-educated young man in a multi-ethnic institution.

The deeply-rooted stereotype of Chinese people as being obsessed with money may be linked to the ways in which society and the economy were constructed in colonial times (Hirschman, 1986:330). Although he is describing the situation in Malaysia, formerly Malaya, there is enough similarity to suggest this could also be the case in Brunei. The British relied on the entrepreneurial spirit and industriousness of the Chinese, though this was tempered by resentment about their financial success (Hirschman, 1986:346-347). In

this way, the Chinese became established, both literally and figuratively, as the urbanite, mercantile, moneyed race. Hirschman also contends that,

[...] the colonial administration provided few meaningful opportunities for inter-ethnic interaction. Moreover, by refusing to recognize Chinese (and Indian) residents as permanent members of the Malayan community with local loyalties, the colonial administration reinforced Malay xenophobic attitudes.

Hirschman (1986:352-353).

In addition to being socially divisive at that time, the “belief that the Chinese really did not belong to local society – regardless of length of residence” (Hirschman, 1986:353), a belief reportedly furthered by the British colonial powers, has clearly contributed to the current perpetuated exclusion of many Chinese and Indian Bruneians.

#### 4.13.1 Daring to be different

Brunei’s famed *Kampong Ayer* (Water Village), “the Venice of Asia” [SP7:439], was chronicled by the Italian historian, Antonio Pigafetta, one of the first Europeans to visit Brunei in the early sixteenth century. He was a Venetian and is credited as being the one to first confer the title ‘Venice of the East’ on the Water Village (Oxford Business Group, 2013:10). A mural commemorating this momentous occasion adorns the lobby wall of the Empire Hotel (Figure 13) and his comparison has been

Figure 13: Pigafetta’s arrival in *Kampong Ayer* circa. 1521



perpetuated ever since. *Kampong Ayer* is the cultural heartland of Brunei Malays, but in recent times there appears to be some ambivalence in the way it is regarded. It is touted and hyperbolised in tourism-related literature on the one hand, yet it is largely ignored and its inhabitants disparaged and patronised on the other.

Given that the political climate in Brunei is inclement to anything other than compliance and conformity, the emergence of a “skinhead version of Brunei” [SP8:699] is surprising. This subgroup is associated with *Kampong Ayer* and could be regarded as the nearest thing to being anti-establishment that exists in the country. Known locally as *poklen*, the word expresses the stereotype of a person “who wears all black with... yeah, or just *macam* (like) outstanding” [SP3:61]. This group consists of young people who “don’t wanna be like anybody else” [SP3:584]. They tend to be shunned and ridiculed from afar by mainstream Bruneians and are “labelled as non-educated people” [SP3:740]. SP3 insists they come from *Kampong Ayer* and are associated with it [SP3:746, 748]. SP4 also refers to the relatively bad behaviour of his friends from the Water Village [SP4:365-369]. He goes on to mention the way this group had appropriated both punk and hip hop culture, dressing and behaving accordingly, and in a manner that would guarantee them disapproving attention in any local setting. He regards them as “rebellious” [SP4:371], but one of the other participants feels, “It’s up to them... to be who they are, right? I mean it’s impossible for them to stop” [SP8:709]. This latter view accords them the agency to choose to identify as *poklen* and the freedom to perform this identity, even if it results by their being sidelined by the society in which they live. It could even be argued that their pre-existing disenfranchisement may have led to this alternative identity construction in the first instance as they are often from poorer backgrounds and have not succeeded in the educational system, one of the only ways of becoming upwardly mobile in Bruneian society.

One of the student participants tells that she has some friends from *Kampong Ayer*, but differentiates these from what she calls “typical of *Kampong Ayers*” [SP6:1351]. Her words convey a sense that these friends are breaking away from the stereotype since they were her co-students at Sixth Form College. “Some of them are actually in MD” [SP6:1351]. The word ‘actually’ here signifies that this is not the norm. Students from *Kampong Ayer* who qualify for sixth form entry are the exception. She goes on to relay that the stereotypical Water Villager is an uneducated school drop-out [SP6:1353].

As well as dressing in an exaggerated way, *poklens* also “have their own dialect” [SP7:930], apparently adding letters to the ends of words as a kind of signature. This is explained further in Chapter 5, Section 5.6. Similar groups exist in Malaysia where they are known as *lah-lahs* [SP7:973]. A Facebook post explains, “If you know what Chavs are, *Poklens* are the Bruneian version” (Brunei Memes, 2013). This parallel is significant from a sociological standpoint. A ‘chav’ is defined in the online edition of the Oxford English Dictionary as “a young person of a type characterized by brash and loutish behaviour and the wearing of designer-style clothes (esp. sportswear); usually with connotations of a low social status” (“Chav”, 2012). The term is classified as slang and derogatory. It came into circulation in the 1990s and is thought to originate from the Romani word *čhavo*, meaning boy or young man. This word has become emotive because of its power to denigrate working class and disadvantaged people and reassert classist attitudes. Calling it “the vile word at the heart of fractured Britain” that fosters “the loathing of a feral underclass,” Toynbee (2011) contends that its use by those in privileged positions relegates the underprivileged masses to the scrapheap of humanity. Its relative acceptability in everyday usage renders it all the more poisonous as it seems to legitimise contempt for the less fortunate.

While the word *poklen* does not seem to have such strongly negative connotations in the Bruneian context, its discussion during interviews was not without a degree of unease. Some participants laughed when the subject was broached which may be an indication of embarrassment or discomfort, quite a common reaction in Brunei as in other Asian societies (Fontes, 2008:103). There was also a general sense that while these participants were aware of the existence of *poklen*, from their relatively elevated social position they regarded them as an unfortunate feature of Bruneian society. There seemed to be no grudging admiration or celebratory reaction to the fact that *poklen* dare to be different. There was more of a feeling that they are to be pitied and their existence lamented.

It is ironic that *Kampong Ayer*, the cradle of Brunei-Malay tradition, culture and gentility, has nurtured this group whose brashness and characteristically fake-branded attire flout the

reserve and modesty that are its hallmarks. It may be that economic deprivation is the root cause of their evolvment in Brunei as it is in other countries.

The origin of the word *poklen* itself is uncertain and it has given rise to a number of contested explanations among linguistics scholars based in and local to Brunei. These range from an association with the Falkland Islands to fandom of a non-existent British football club called Portland (Deterding, 2010). The Falklands connection has been linked to the fact that the term *poklen*, then a friendly nickname, emerged at a time when these islands featured heavily in local news coverage due to the war there in the 1980s. Inhabitants of *Kampong Ayer* have a similar island-like lifestyle, giving further credence to this possible origin. It has also been argued that the two words are vaguely homophonous. Another plausible explanation is given by a local scholar. She believes that it may be derived from ‘folk land’ as in *orang kampong* or ‘folk people’ (Salsa, 2013) which ties in with their being dwellers of the Water Village, home of traditional artisans and craftspeople. However, if this is the case, their endonym is all the more ironic, given their trademark image and behaviour. Nevertheless, the level of tolerance they are given by the authorities suggests that they are not perceived as a threat to social harmony. Their youth, relative poverty and unpolitical agenda are likely to contribute to their perceived harmlessness, making them irksome rather than potentially seditious.

#### **Conclusion to Chapter 4**

This chapter has highlighted the pervasiveness of politics, even in a location where concerted efforts are made to discourage it. Almost all participants claim to be apolitical which suggests support for the status quo. They attribute this to their sense of economic wellbeing and the overriding feelings of gratitude at the fortuitousness of their living in Brunei. This gratitude is itself politically connoted, being underwritten by royal / governmental beneficence. Nevertheless, some of their words betray latent political sentiments. There is a sense that the potential for political identities still exists; it may have been dormant over the years, but it is not fully extinguished. Despite recent *titahs* from

HM that attempt to re-assert national insularity – an ideological battening down of Brunei’s hatches – English has brought the world in. It is looking increasingly likely that political awakenings will be virtually enabled, as the existing tendency towards acquiescence gets eroded by the country’s declining economy and the global engagement of its English-language-speaking citizenry. The role the English language plays in Bruneian identity is the theme of the chapter that follows.

# CHAPTER 5

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*Language and Identity*

*The limits of my language are the limits of my  
world*

Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1889-1951



## Chapter 5: Introduction – English as a Bruneian reality

“Every individual is at once the beneficiary and the victim of the linguistic tradition into which he has been born,” (Huxley, 1954:6). This Chapter will explore the ways in which the languages to which participants are exposed from their early years may shape, script or circumscribe the way they develop, think and perceive reality. Huxley believed that all languages, being artificial symbol systems with implicit philosophies, have a petrifying effect on awareness due to their necessarily reductive power. They are a means of packaging reality locally in such ways that man does not become overwhelmed by the infinite possibilities that exist. A person’s first language allows him or her to benefit from the knowledge of those who have gone before, but also restricts him or her to the articulation of reality that the said language presents. The English language first came to Brunei as the language of imperialist governance, but it has since been chosen by Brunei and given a prominent role in the creation of the modern state. The impact it has had as a local language and as the main medium of education on the ways these Bruneians perceive themselves and the world are the focus of this Chapter. For the participants in this study, monolingualism has simply never been an option due to the exposure to multiple languages that is a natural feature of their locality. Multilingualism is their norm. Within this study they articulate a worldview through English as a Bruneian language and as an international language as both have been important aspects of all their lives.

The relationship between thought and language or language and thought has been the subject of extensive debate throughout the ages. It remains imperfectly understood and contested even now. The issue of whether language influences thought (linguistic relativity) or has a determining role in its genesis (linguistic determinism) is explored in the widely-known Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (Hoijer, 1954:92-105). Although the collusion of this teacher-student pair in formulating any such hypothesis has been questioned in recent times (Hill & Mannheim, 1992:386), their combined theories are still regarded as “an important landmark in linguistic thought” (Nunan, 2010:5 and 2013:215).

In 1929 Sapir wrote:

It is quite an illusion to imagine that one adjusts to reality essentially without the use of language and that language is merely an incidental means of solving specific problems of communication [...]. No two languages are ever sufficiently similar to be considered as representing the same social reality. The worlds in which different societies live are distinct worlds, not merely the same world with different labels attached.

Sapir (1929:209).

Whorf suggested, “We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages” (Whorf, 1940:231). This gave rise to the contention that a person’s worldview is contingent upon his/her first language which impacts its perspective and directly influences the ways experiences are categorised and labelled. Whorfianism was formulated in the 1940s and 1950s and gained some currency. Later, with the advent of psychologists such as Skinner (1957), Piaget (1926), Vygotsky (1934 and 1962) and linguist Noam Chomsky (1965 and 1968) among others, alternative theories of language acquisition and cognition dominated and Whorf’s ideas were dismissed and discredited. However, in recent times they are resurging, albeit in their weaker form, in the work of linguists collectively known as Neo-Whorfians. These include Lakoff (1987), Slobin (1996), Gumperz and Levinson (1996) and Boroditsky (2001). Their re-emergence points to the continued uncertainty and academic contestation that prevail. The controversy has been fuelled and opened up to a more general audience by popular works from Evans (2014) and Deutscher (2010) that are sympathetic to, if not uncritical of, linguistic relativism. These are countered by offerings from McWhorter (2014) and Pinker (2007) who strongly attest that languages are instinctual and reflect cultures rather than being curtailed or shaped by them. The very survival of these theories in the face of sustained ridicule suggests they are worthy of some consideration.

Sapir-Whorfianism is classified as a ‘mold’ theory of language, wherein language moulds or shapes thought categories (Bruner, Goodnow & Austin, 1956:11). This is distinct from the ‘cloak’ theory, viewing thoughts as pre-existent, waiting to be communicated in languages, words that give them voice, expression, life. Samuel Taylor Coleridge believed

that language is not reproductive, but that it gives “outness to thought” (Corrigan, 2008:23). In a similar vein, the eminent 18<sup>th</sup> century English scholar and lexicographer, Dr. Samuel Johnson, called language “the dress of thought” (Johnson, 1825:19). This assumes that human thought is independent of language and can be expressed in a variety of different languages through translation. In this sense people who live with two or more languages could be said to be “translating lives” (Besemeres & Wierzbicka, 2007). The participants in this study experience life in and through at least two or more languages from an early age. They began speaking in either Brunei-Malay, a Chinese language, or English. On starting school at the age of four or five, they would have encountered STM as the medium of instruction alongside English. In this sense, if they were monolingual at any stage, it would have been for a very brief period in infancy. For this reason, they are unlikely to regard language as a monolithic construct wherein one word corresponds to an object. On the contrary, they would probably have realised that things in their environment could be given numerous ‘names’ depending on the linguistic code being used. The question Whorfian theory raises is whether they experience the same social reality regardless of how it is encoded, differing only in the words used, or whether there are distinct Malay, Chinese, and English ways of thinking, talking about and reacting to these realities. Since English plays such a prominent role in the education system, its effect on how participants experience the world is central to this study.

### **5.1 The quest for real English / Who owns real English?**

“Being bilingual is good,” [SP1:506]. “It’s no problem speaking English because everybody does,” [P4:54]. This has become more true in recent years due to the combined impact of widespread education and Brunei’s increased exposure and involvement internationally. But the faint ghost of imperialism may linger on in the words of SP7 who surmises that, “The main English would be British English... and I suppose British English is much more real,” [SP7:90]. Brunei’s perpetuated educational links with Britain and its continuing reliance on exonormative British standards may have had an implicit effect on her view. Later she links language and ways of thinking by claiming, “Bruneians tend to think like British” [SP7:324], with her tone suggesting that this is something to be proud of.

The tendency to look elsewhere for validation and its wider impact in Brunei will be discussed in greater depth later in this Chapter. SP7's use of the word 'real' is arresting and open to interpretation; it could mean 'original', 'authentic', 'existent', 'non-artificial', or 'essential'. In a sense, her thinking about English in this way is a throwback to the once widely held notion that English somehow belonged to the English, or at least to so-called native or L1 speakers, and that others who speak it do not have the same claim or ownership rights.

Ownership of English by all who speak it, regardless of whether they do so as a first, second or a foreign language, is the variable that renders its global expansion more benign and beneficial (Norton, 1997:427). However, it seems that ownership is not automatically conferred by the ability to speak the language. In an article calling for a rethink about the ownership of English as a lingua franca, one of its functions as the dominant international language, Shibata problematises the ongoing differentiation between native and non-native speakers of English in the context of Japan. In doing so, she contrasts the way the verb 'speak' is used for those who are native or L1 speakers of the language, while the verb 'use' refers to those for whom it is a second or international lingua franca. She contends that the word 'use' renders English "a tool for a particular purpose, needs and advantage" rather than "a language to express ideas and minds" (Shibata, 2011:72-73). Conceptualising language in this way precludes the development of a sense of ownership and identification among learners who are confined to the arguably lesser status of 'users' rather than 'speakers'. This distinction is relevant to the Bruneian context because of the constant public reaffirmation of BNM as an important marker of national solidarity and a mainstay of Malay culture (Martin, 1996:36). English, on the other hand, is perceived more pragmatically as a "key to the outside world" (Jones, 1996:128) akin to the 'tool' alluded to by Shibata. As well as perpetuating the increasingly irrelevant dichotomy of native and non-native speaker, this has privileged one type of English, English as a native language (ENL), over all others, giving its speakers the unwarranted ascendancy that is proving very difficult to dispel.

If we are convinced by the rationale which dictates that only ENL is *the* authentic English, which conquers and authorises its use to the world, non-native speakers can never become free from the implicit ENL myth; namely native speakers are *the real speakers* of English whilst non-native speakers are *its users and borrowers*.

Shibata (2011:73).

SP7, for whom English is her second language and the main medium of her advanced education – part of her repertoire of four languages, appears to have had her thinking infiltrated by this myth. This is somewhat surprising given that many in Brunei, including SP7, could be regarded as having acquired ‘functional nativeness’ since English has both range and depth in Bruneian society (Kachru, 2005:12) and she has achieved significant academic success through the medium of English. It functions in many domains, has penetrated all levels of society, and is being used creatively “to articulate local identities” (Kachru, 2005:12). Nevertheless, SP7’s words reveal a sense of looking elsewhere for, or to, a ‘better’ English than the one infused with Bruneian flavour or a more standard English set by its ‘real’ speakers, such as BrSE.

Widdowson (1994) also challenged the notion that any country or group of speakers could act as custodians of any language. He argued that languages by their very nature are protean, evolving to meet the expressive needs of their speakers in their localities. He quotes the oft-repeated words of Nigerian novelist, Chinua Achebe, explaining his decision to write in English; “But it will have to be a new English still in communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings” (Widdowson, 1994:384, citing Achebe, 1975:62). Thus Achebe’s writing became an act of both resistance and appropriation. He wrote in English, but his writing performs his Africanness. Widdowson uses this as an example of the creativity of language uses which “draw on linguistic resources to express different perceptions of reality” (Widdowson, 1994:384). In the case of English, it develops locally in many diverse locations whilst necessarily remaining true to “its ancestral origin” without being indebted to “any descendants of this ancestry in the present” (Widdowson, 1994:385). He dismisses native speakers from countries such as

England and the US as “irrelevant”, suggesting that English is owned by all its speakers (Widdowson, 1994:385). The reality may not always reflect this.

## 5.2 Negotiating linguistic repertoires

P8 reveals, “I found it so weird the other day when my neighbour was speaking to his Dalmatian in Mandarin,” [P8:398]. She reiterates this later, adding that the “Dalmatian understands all the commands in Mandarin,” [P8:404]. She found his choice of language incongruous; “very hard to accept” [P8:406] because, “In my head... you have to speak to the dog in English,” [P8:400]. She attributes this to the influence of television and believes her own dog (a pug) “looks western” [P8:398]. Ironically, the pug is in fact thought to be originally from China, but was taken to Europe by early traders. P8 is Chinese and has an extensive and varied linguistic repertoire of about six languages, but speaking to a pet is something she believes is more concordant with the English language. In a similar way P1 has always spoken to her cats in English [P1:412 in Interview 12]. She contrasts herself with her ‘fully-Malay’ cousins to whom “cats are just animals... They don’t play,” [P1:417 in Interview 12] or, as P8 says, “They don’t seem to have that kind of relationship,” [P8:418]. However, the said cousins did go so far as to name their cats in Malay [P1:425 in Interview 12]. Nevertheless both P1 and P8 clearly regard talking to and forming close attachments to animals as a western phenomenon best actuated through English.

“When I speak in Chinese my words would just come out; it doesn’t seem to have to go through here” (*pointing to her head*), [P8:208]. She is referring to her L1, Hokkien, which, if you are Chinese, “you have to know in Brunei,” [P8:738]. She also speaks Cantonese which she learned from television [P8:226], but she “always found Chinese (*Mandarin*) very difficult, so I always preferred English and Malay,” [P8:360]. She says this was due mostly to the complex logography. Malay was the easiest for her because it “doesn’t have all these tenses,” [P8:370]. This participant did not start speaking English until she was about 12 years old. In her first Chinese school, “English is just a subject... Even in an English classroom you wouldn’t be speaking in English,” [P8:360]. Her regular use coincided with her move to the Science College, a selective secondary and sixth form

college for high achievers, although prior to this she had occasionally practised speaking with her live-in maid from the Philippines and always spoke to her pet dogs only in English [P8:392] – the language she had convinced herself was most suited to this interaction.

### 5.3 English in education

Brunei, as a result of its unique power structure, retains tight control over its education system as a vehicle for nation building. Jones confirms that in Brunei language planning and nation building are intertwined (Jones, 1990:293). However, the policy and implementation of a bilingual system in 1984 went against both the 1959 constitution and a government-commissioned report recommendation put forward by Aminuddin Baki and Paul Chang (Omar, 2007:357). Both of these were strongly in favour of the use of the Malay language as the sole, or at least main, medium of instruction. But, “Fate intervened to prevent the introduction of Malay medium education” (Jones, 2012:183). Instead, the bilingual policy which was put in place seems to have been politically motivated in response to the internal nationalist insurrection of 1962 and the country’s strained relationship with neighbouring Malaysia in the 1970s (Kirkpatrick, 2010:34-35). Jones believes that the “planners were at the mercy of circumstances” (Jones, 2012:184) and that, what time has proven to be a very fortuitous decision, especially when contrasted with the vacillation that has plagued Malaysia in this regard, was in fact just a result of the authorities’ reaction to unfavourable situations. The decision was justifiable since Malay medium tertiary education was not available at that time and consequently English was accorded its position “based on an assumption of its importance for academic study and thus its ability to facilitate the entry of students from Brunei to institutions of higher education overseas where the medium of instruction is English” (Jones, 2012:184, citing Brunei Government Publication, 1984). Further delineating the pragmatic and utilitarian focus in giving English such a prominent role, Baetens Beardsmore suggests an important distinction, positing that “the primary goal of the *dwibahasa* programme is **education**, not the learning of English” [emphasis added] (Baetens Beardsmore, 1998:22).

Subsequently, from an official standpoint, education and the concurrent acquisition of the English language there have a strong utilitarian bent which could lead to inflated levels of instrumental motivation (Gardner & Lambert, 1972). Although the dichotomy of instrumental versus integrative motivation may seem overly simplistic and somewhat dated, it remains relevant in the locality. This is due to ongoing pressure to keep engagement with English on a pragmatic rather than affective level. English is wanted and has been chosen in Brunei, but some of the cultures embedded in it and which it co-constructs are not desired. Van Leeuwen suggests that the English language gives its speakers “a choice between functionalisation and identification” (Van Leeuwen, 1996:55), with a functionalisationist perspective roughly equating to instrumentalism. But this too is problematic in that language-in-interaction is intuitive and responsive to situations, and is likely to run along a continuum between these positions rather than ever wholly being one or the other, if that is even possible. The very nature of language and the pursuit of language learning seem to preclude an entirely functionalisationist orientation. There is also the difficulty of determining where or when one stops and the other begins as they are highly contingent and shifting. Therefore, even if an individual chooses to adopt a functionalisationist-instrumental attitude, it is unlikely that s/he could fully resist the forces of identification and integration.

High achievers like the participants in this study are often faced with difficult dilemmas. P8 has “always been grateful to the government, but... I felt I’ve got like what my parents wanted,” [P8:899]. Becoming an English teacher “wasn’t my... dream,” [P8:84]. She had been much more academically inclined towards the sciences, but at age 17 she was made an offer that was hard to refuse; a fully-funded opportunity to study both A-levels (Advanced) and subsequently to pursue an undergraduate degree in the UK. This degree had to be in either Medicine, English Literature or English Language, but not in TESOL. P8 found this strange, but is clear that it was something on which the Bruneian Ministry of Education insisted [P8:96], though she never found out the underlying rationale for this decision [P8:102].



P5 found herself in the same situation in that she was selected for the same scholarship programme, known as the 'special scheme', based on her high achievement in O-level (Ordinary) examinations – like A-levels, the Cambridge-based exonormative system Brunei relies on as a qualifying standard for further education. She found herself plucked from her natural niche in the sciences and suddenly thrust into the realm of humanities. "It was a struggle for me because always being in the sciences, never taking humanities... I remember working 200 percent more than my other friends," [P5:283]. This struggle continued throughout her period of study due to the need to "pick in between the lines" and interpret texts whereas, "With the sciences, there's always an answer," [P5:283]. Being forced out of her comfort zone, her identity as a scientist, led to persistent feelings of inferiority [P5:277]. She believes these compromised her academic performance and continued during her undergraduate study period when they were exacerbated and compounded by her isolation as "the only Malay, the only Muslim" in 2001 [P5:285 and 291]. She also felt disadvantaged because, although she could speak and write fluently in English, she lacked the western cultural literacy background (Hirsch, 1987) that was often assumed as indicated by references to canonical texts, such as Orwell's *Animal Farm*. In this instance speaking English was not enough to enable her full, confident participation. The elevation of a pig to power in this novel underscores the cultural dissonance between her study abroad and her Bruneian Islamic culture. She also recalls being named "the girl with the constant epiphany" [P5:283], but admits that at that time she had no idea of what the word meant. This example points to the bibliocentric nature of the English language in the sense that Christian-derived allusions abound. Later, P5 refers to her being "a born-again Muslim" [P5:431], another biblical expression. P7 also uses words like "orthodox" and "fold" to explain his religious identity negotiation [P7:133].

Eventually P5 and P8's sense of cultural discomfort was eased, if not entirely dispelled by the extended period of time they spent immersed in the educational environment of their British universities. Later both "realised the worth of reading between the lines... I'm still glad I didn't take a science degree," [P5:285]. P8 feels, "Doing lit has had a very big impact on my life in a sense that... once you've done lit, you know, you see things differently... You don't only see things on the surface. You are able to see it from many

different angles,” [P8:138]. However, she recalls that she felt reluctant to contribute, especially in the intimate setting of tutorials. There she found the pace very fast and felt overawed by her fellow students, thinking, “It seemed to be in them,” whereas for her who was relatively new to speaking and thinking in English it required more effort [P8:206 and 208].

#### **5.4 Performing as ‘bondees’**

All eight adult participants perform the identity of ‘teacher’ and all except one are English Language teachers, although the exception also teaches through the medium of English. At the time of this research, the majority of them (six out of eight) were ‘bonded’ – the English expression used in Brunei to denote the period of service required to pay off the debt incurred by being sponsored to study overseas. Thus, in claiming the identity of overseas-graduate teacher and in becoming that teacher, the identity of ‘bondee’ is necessarily imposed, or at the least becomes inevitable. It is an identity that some embrace more acceptingly than others.

Most of the participants are unperturbed by this, since returning to Brunei was already part of the trajectory they had set for themselves and they are quite positively disposed towards teaching. P5 knew she wanted to teach [P5:279]. “Another very very very big part of my identity is me being a teacher. I see that as a very integral part of who I am,” [P5:585]. She is unequivocal about the obligation to abide by the terms of the bond, saying, “They’re bonded... so they definitely have to come back to pay the country” [P5:629] and “to work off your bond,” [P5:631]. P8 refused the offer of a further scholarship to pursue a Master’s degree as she found her chosen yet imposed identity as teacher more onerous and looked to a future time when she would be free, “It’s not like I’m going to be bonded forever,” [P8:84]. She is very much aware of the period of time she has to serve, revealing at the time of this research, “I’m on my sixth” [P8:682] of a ten-year bond. Despite her reservations about her teacher identity, P8 was still happy to return to Brunei.

This was not the case for P7 who would have stayed on in the UK or Europe after he graduated, mostly because he wanted to pursue his identity as a musician. He went so far as to formally request that the Brunei Ministry of Education release him from his bond and allow him to repay his debt monetarily over time. “Funnily enough, they didn’t reply,” [P7:105 and 107]. When these attempts to avoid or delay returning proved fruitless, he felt honour-bound to come back. At the time of his interview, he was bonded for a period of five years. However, since he was then expected to do a teaching qualification, this would mean an additional five years would be added – something he calls “pretty sly” [P7:101].

The word ‘bonded’ therefore has a Brunei-specific meaning whose connotations are understood by everyone there. Having a bonded identity means a person is successful. He/she is engaged in the simultaneously honourable and honour-bound task of contributing to nation building, although he/she ‘belongs’ to or is ‘owned’ by the government for the period of indenture. There have been reports of returning graduates being ‘released’ from their bonds due to the lack of suitable job vacancies for them on their return. A recent Brunei Times headline reads ‘65 Scholars Released from Bond’ (Yap, 2015), but this release is on the condition that they remain within the country, working in the private sector.

In recent years there have been more cases of default, leading to local newspaper headlines and letters to the editor with titles such as ‘Take harsh action against runaway scholars’ (Chasing Runaway Scholars, 2014). In this letter students are accused of being unpatriotic and the writer suggests the drastic step of revoking their status as citizens of Brunei, and even advocates seizing their passports abroad. Another online article asks, “Should Brunei punish its ‘runaway’ scholars?” (Palatino, 2013). What is most revelatory here is the kind of discourse in English that has developed around this issue. It has overtones of criminality as evidenced by the use of words such as ‘punish’, ‘escape’, ‘release’, and ‘runaway’. This is indicative of a conceptual position that prioritises duties over individual rights or liberties and betrays an acceptance of, or at least a tolerance for, the authorities acting with complete impunity.

Some, however, argue that time spent abroad “forces many people to reevaluate their opinions, biases and worldview” (Palatino, 2013, citing mujahidjohar [online comment]). Mujahidjohar also suggests that their experience of being overseas in a western environment may lead to a political awakening, challenging the immunity of government to criticism as well as the heightened social awareness that leads them to question local societal connotations such as seniority and competence. For these reasons he advocates trying to understand their rationale for not returning before condemning them (Palatino, 2013, citing mujahidjohar [online comment]).

This is a sense that current students may not regard the ‘bond’ as such a benign phenomenon (Should Brunei punish, 2013; More than 50, 2015). Lately, its connotation as indentured servitude that requires young people, often under the age of 18, to sign away their freedom, appears to be coming to the fore. This may be linked to the decline in Brunei’s economic fortunes. Formerly the word ‘bond’ may have been interpreted more as connotative of closeness in that the returning scholars were entering a partnership with their government by contributing to the development of the nation. HM the Sultan strives to cultivate this interpretation by maintaining close links with students during their period of study abroad. In keeping with his identities as a paternal, beneficent ruler, the Sultan regularly visits and mingles with students abroad, reminding them of their duty to Brunei (Othman, 2014; RTB News, 2013). One of the student participants in this study is among the audience members at the Australian event. During his address HM reminds the assembled students that they are part of the country’s 2035 vision of producing educated and highly skilled citizens (Wawasan Brunei 2035, 2008). He entreats them to “bring home useful knowledge”, but warns against picking up or bringing “the cultures of others to their own country,” since, “Culture and knowledge are two different things.” He ends with the hope that they become “a truly intellectual community with the MIB character and spirit” (RTB News, 2013). The power wielded by HM’s words in the form of *titah* is discussed in Section 4.4. Any issues that he chooses to focus on are automatically imbued with greater solemnity and responsibility.

“This is when I truly became proud to be a Bruneian,” [P5:47]. P5 is referring to her awareness of the financial hardship some of her fellow students from other countries were experiencing [P5:63]. She continues, “I really became so grateful with what I had... Every one or two years the Sultan would come... see the students in UK and then give us money. It’s called *ziarah*,” [P5:49]. These *junjung ziarah* (visits) are lavish events, hosted at venues such as The Dorchester hotel in London, where food is provided and the Sultan and any accompanying family members mingle freely with students. Each student receives a cash gift of sums up to £250 [P5:63]. This unparalleled level of intimacy with their ruler renders any renegeing on their scholarship agreement almost a personal affront in the face of His generosity and is a further deterrent. HM’s *titahs* on these occasions are akin to moralistic sermons that remind students of the high expectations the country has of them and of their duty to contribute to its future development in return for their generous scholarships. Their participation in courses overseas in the first place was facilitated by the government language policy which led to the implementation of the bilingual system.

### **5.5 Attitude to and in English**

“I see myself as lucky that I can speak English more than other Bruneians can,” [SP3:757]. He is glad that in Brunei’s bilingual system the medium of instruction for his A-level subjects (and much of his previous education) was English. He thinks, “It sounds better in English. I like English words better than Malay words because they sound nicer,” [SP3:821 and 823]. His identity as an English speaker changes according to his interlocutors. When he is with his cousins whose English fluency he rates as lower than his own, he feels he is “the best one out of them. So when I speak English to them, I feel that I am superior... It makes me superior,” [SP3:833]. Conversely, in his English AS-level (Advanced Subsidiary) class among peers of similar or higher linguistic ability, “I feel so small,” [SP3:877]. In this context he believes, “I have... one of the worst English... so I actually feel really intimidated... I didn’t think that I was good enough for the class,” [SP3:881 and 886]. These identities see him veering from ascendance to inadequacy; all premised on his English language ability.

Language ability acts as a “crucial gatekeeper” (Pennycook, 1994:13) in Brunei’s educational stakes. All students need an A to C grade in the Brunei-Cambridge General Certificate of Education (BCGCE) in order to qualify for tertiary education whether locally or overseas. Furthermore, a credit grade in Malay (STM) at the same level is a prerequisite for any scholarship application, also giving STM utilitarian value. Since STM varies significantly from BNM, the students’ L1, striking a balance is not always easy. SP7 was exposed to an English-language environment from an early age. She attended a nursery in the UK where her mother was pursuing a postgraduate degree [SP7:157]. Later, on her return to Brunei, she attended a Chinese school where she learned Mandarin. Her parents still speak to her in English [SP7:191], but her grandparents have voiced some disapproval; “My grandparents would scold my mum coz they taught me too much English and I didn’t know a single Malay word,” [SP7:700]. She confides that her “Standard Malay is very bad” [SP7:1100], but she is aware of its utilitarian value in the procurement of a scholarship, as the interview for this is bilingual in English and STM [SP7:1116]. However, she expects that any discussion of MIB would likely be conducted in BNM [SP7:1112]. Therefore, she needs three languages to be successful in her scholastic quest. These realities underscore the ‘natural’ heteroglossia (Bakhtin, 1981:170) and multilingualism that are the norm in Brunei.

#### **5.5.1 English as alienator**

While SP3 admits to feeling superior when he speaks English among those who are less confident, SP5 believes that speaking English well leads others to “think we’re arrogant for speaking English,” [SP5:987]. “We’re showing off! You know, we’re not being Malay... They say, ‘*Kambang eh? Cakap English eh?*’” [SP5:999]. Translation: ‘Showing off eh? Speaking English eh?’ This is part of the contradiction that surrounds English language acquisition. It can act as a social leveller since achievement in English paves the way for social mobility through education. In fact, the provision of equality of opportunity for all Bruneian pupils is believed to be one of the main objectives of the bilingual system (Jones, 1996:123). However, English can also be divisive, separating the successful from the disenfranchised. Some remain conflicted, equating facility in English with a betrayal of Malayness, of breaking with tradition. SP6 confesses, “They say that I’m an embarrassment because of my name and I don’t know Malay,” [SP6:1532] as she comes

from a prominent Malay family. She herself feels “a bit lost” because, in terms of speaking Malay, “I just really can’t do it,” [SP6:1540].

In the college where all of the participants were former students or teachers, segregation occurred along linguistic as well as racial lines when it came to social interaction. SP5 refers to “those pure Malay... who speaks Malay basically with each other” [SP5:963]. Unlike the participants featured in this study, these are likely to be students who have been less successful in the BCGCE O-Level English Language examination. This led to a two-tier academic system within the college; high achievers in English language as the elite group, and an underclass of those who struggled with English (O’Hara-Davies, 2006:75-76). “If I did have friends who were Malays..., they’re mixed and they speak English,” [SP6:856]. She feels that she was not brought up in a “stereotypical Malay family” [SP6:395] and although her father is Malay, “We don’t speak Malay. My dad has difficulty speaking Malay, so I find it weird to be with Malay people,” [SP6:407]. SP6’s father is from a prestigious family. Consequently, he received his secondary-level education abroad in Singapore before attending university in the UK; a common trend for his generation, underscoring the traditional elitism linked to English language proficiency in Brunei.

SP5’s reference to the accusation of not being ‘Malay’ by speaking English is echoed to an extent by P7. He believes that feelings of national pride are “diluted by speaking English” [P7:767]. He feels that at his first school, which was a private, international one, “There wasn’t really much of that national pride thing going on,” [P7:763]. Later, at the selective secondary school he attended, there was a lot of English spoken, hence the dilution continued. As a result he claims that speaking English is “just part of who I am” [P7:541], since, “I’d still say I’m more naturally adept at English than Malay,” [P7:535].

As a newly-returned graduate at the time of this research, P7 had recently begun performing his identity as a teacher. In doing so, he began by using only English as the medium of instruction in his classes. Soon however he realised it was “quite futile... so I had to sort of mix and mash my languages,” [P7:781]. Past research carried out in Bruneian classrooms has found that some students find “the marginalisation of their

national language Malay in English classrooms very confusing” (Saxena, 2009:176). The insistence by some teachers of excluding Malay in favour of an English-only approach is perceived as anachronistic since Malay is “venerated in different forms and practices symbolic of their Brunei Malay cultural and traditional identity.” It is also the medium of their “MIB-driven cultural socialisation” in all spheres of life there. Saxena suggests that the conflict between “English-only” ideology iteratively played out in Bruneian classrooms mirrors the wider “postcolonial dilemma of internationalisation and localisation” (Saxena, 2009:176). P7 identifies strongly as an internationalist on a personal level and is among those teachers who intuitively resist the Ministry of Education policy requirements. He found that students “seemed to respond more when I speak in Malay or Malay and English,” [P7:783] and that the use of Malay enhanced his rapport with them [P7:787]. My own classroom experience mirrors this. Once alerted to my possible complicity in linguistic imperialism / neo-colonialism by my unwitting, naïve acceptance of the fallacious tenets of ELT (Phillipson, 1992:185), I embarked on a mission to exterminate my inner coloniser (Pennycook, 1998:28) by incorporating my limited Malay language resources into my English lessons. In doing so, I am trying to communicate my awareness of and respect for their languages and cultures by using them as resources that enrich the process of learning English in which we are engaged (Prodromou, 2001: ‘Conclusion’ section, para.2).

Malay language functions as a marker of solidarity and Malayness. This calls to mind words widely attributed to the late Nelson Mandela – “If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.” By speaking Malay, P7 is identifying as one of them and is adopting a “humanistic approach” to language teaching (Harboard, 1992:351), instantly breaking down barriers due to the emotional resonance of their shared linguistic heritage. He is also using “the most genuine vehicle of communication” (Medgyes, 2001:439).

### **5.5.2 Teaching and learning in English**

All eight of the adult participants teach mostly, but not exclusively, through English. Their teacher identities are actuated and performed into being by their daily iterative activities and communications in this language. For two of them it is their L1, for the others it is a second or arguably a third or fourth language in some cases. This means that all share the



identity of accomplished linguists with extensive resources. None of them are monolingual. Therefore none fit the paradigm of the 'ideal' English-language teacher; one who is an L1 speaker of English, likely monolingual, and who insists on an English-only approach to language learning (Phillipson, 1992:185-198). This paradigm has been a dominant feature of the discourse of English as an international language (EIL) (Pennycook, 1994:6) for many decades and it continues to cast a long shadow on the field of ELT. P4, who had been recently transferred to a new sixth-form centre, believes that her expatriate head of department discriminates against local teachers by assigning them lower level classes and subjects. This privileging of NESTs stems from the historical prevalence in applied linguistics of a "deficit discourse" or the persistence of fallacies such as the comparative and native speaker ones (Mahboob, 2010:3), what Holliday (2006:49) defined as 'native speakersim'. It often translates into inequitable workplace treatment of non-native English speaker teachers based on their being positioned as 'deficient' (Selvi, 2011:187). She feels he gives the 'prestige' subjects (and therefore the high-achieving students) to other expatriates; the 'native-speaker' or L1 speaker of English [P4, 2009, October 07: personal conversation]. She senses that he underestimates her and her compatriots, giving her only a C grade in the yearly teacher evaluation. This is significant since payment of a yearly bonus of one-month's salary is linked to it and it goes on record at the Ministry of Education. Robert Phillipson might accuse this head of department of discrimination based on language or linguisticism, language-related behaviour akin to racism or sexism (Skutnabb-Kangas, 1988:13), since in this scenario "language is the means for effecting or maintaining an unequal allocation of power and resources" (Phillipson, 1992: 55).

The student participants vary in their attitudes towards both the use of their L1 in the ELL classroom and their preferences for teachers who can speak both languages. SP2 holds that, "Expatriate teachers are always better," [SP2:804]. He is unable to specify why he has come to this conclusion, but attributes it to "something about how they teach" and "how they communicate with students" [SP2:806 and 810]. He contends that, "if you have an English teacher teaching you Malay, although she's really good in Malay, it's just not right," [SP2:814]. Whereas when a Malay teacher teaches Malay, "It gets to you... It just goes

straight to your brain,” [SP2:816]. The reverse holds true for English in his view. SP3 concurs, asserting, “I know they’re better at it,” [SP3:857]. SP4 agrees too, suggesting teachers from other countries are “much better... because it’s their natural language,” [SP4:617].

SP1, on the other hand, found it helpful when teachers could translate for her if she asked. She feels, “It would help you understand,” [SP1:519]. She confesses to always asking, “‘How do you say this in English?’ when I can’t understand a Chinese word and I knew it,” [SP1:521]. She uses English as her default code because she feels it is her strongest language although it is not her L1. She has a linguistically diverse background. Each of her parents speaks different Chinese languages, Hakka and Foochow, as their L1, but converse with each other in Hokkien. SP1 then learned Mandarin at her Chinese primary school, as well as being introduced to both English and STM there. As a result she thinks, “Too many languages confuse you, especially when you’re young,” [SP1:505]. In such a situation she feels people react by gravitating towards one:

Normally people, almost everyone, they tend to slant towards one language. They can’t do all three at once. So if you’re really good at Malay, normally, I don’t know why, but you’re really good in Chinese as well. So if you’re good at English, you would be bad at both of them.

[SP1:507].

Unsurprisingly, she is in favour of mixing languages [SP1:676] since it is all she has ever known. Although she does not state it explicitly, this predilection implies a preference for teachers who are bilingual in the target language (TL) and the L1 or preferred language of the learner. ‘Ideal’ monolingual native speakers would be unable to provide the translation she finds useful as a language-learning strategy. Nor would they be able to engage in the “meta-talk” that involves exploring both the L1 and the TL comparatively and contrastively in terms of the semantic and interactional norms of each. This approach improves literacy levels in both languages and heightens overall language awareness (Kramsch, 1993:246).

### 5.5.3 Sounding out who I am

According to SP7, “In Brunei the main English would be British English” [SP7:90] due to its dominance and, for her at least greater authenticity (see Section 5.1), but SP4 discloses that, “I have two different English,” [SP4:431]. He explains:

I usually speak to people like formal like now like and in school I speak normal English that people would speak like English students, but then I mean at home I speak English with my sister, but it’s not normal English. It’s like more American because we watch TV a lot.

[SP4:433].

He lists channels such as HBO and E as favourites, as well as the CSI drama series [SP4:445-453]. These remarks betray these participants’ awareness of the multiplicities of Englishes that exist. He now has and is building “a repertoire of Englishes” (Canagarajah, 2005a:23). Among these varieties, BNE is a nativised variety that meets the expressive needs of Bruneians (Svalberg, 1998; O’Hara-Davies, 2010:406). Whilst having much in common with its proximal cousins in Malaysia and Singapore, BNE exists as a distinct variety. There are both grammatical and lexical variations from STE and other varieties. Consideration of its existence dates back to the early 1990s (Cane, 1994). Some of its defining features are briefly explored in studies by Svalberg (1998) and O’Hara-Davies (2010). Deterding & Sharbawi (2010) provide a comprehensive analysis of this variety, using recent data from recordings of university students reading a specially selected passage, short interviews, and texts from various media sources in Brunei. Pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse patterns are analysed, giving a fuller sense of how BNE is evolving and of its distinctiveness. Some of the defining features include a proclivity for use of the past perfect and conditional tenses, widespread reclassification of uncountable nouns, such as ‘homework’, ‘advice’, ‘staff’, use of ‘send’ in place of ‘take’ / ‘drive’ / ‘drop’, and a tendency towards initialisms that can confound the uninitiated.

Similarly, BNM is distinct from STM, particularly phonologically and lexically, and has usurped the role of STM as the national language, despite the latter’s official status

(O'Hara-Davies, 2010:408). SP4's reference to speaking English with an American accent as a result of his exposure to television, supports the suggestion that the elevation of British and American accents "to a higher ledge on a hierarchy of varieties of English" may "not stem from the hegemony of colonisation, but from their association with the new centres of the global economy" (Saxena & Omoniyi, 2010:5), as well as new and evermore pervasive centres of global knowledge, technology and entertainment. It may also be a result of their gravitating more towards the media-borne cultural associations of the language and emulating the style of confident fluent speakers as a way of experimenting with their own language use. I recall that many students who came to sixth form from a secondary school renowned for its high levels of English language achievement spoke with noticeably American accents and were often more vocal and confident than their counterparts from other schools. In Brunei, English teachers are not recruited from the US, so it could be adduced that these students were influenced by western popular culture and media sources.

P1 and P2's experiences as English L1 speakers learning Malay served to highlight how they became aware of and learned to negotiate both varieties of that language, and even to operate on a dialectal level within BNM. P1's husband refers to her "mixed-kid syndrome" as evidenced by the way she speaks Malay. "If I speak Malay, it's the same as all the *kampong* kids... Actually my *kampong* Malay is so much better than his, so much better than a lot of pure Malay people that I know." She does it "because this is what I know... I want to fit in so I've trained myself to talk that way," [P1:85]. P2's strategy was to "speak English in a more Malay accent... to Malayanise it... I would try to speak bad... It was just completely distorted," [P2:89]. This was her way of challenging those who regarded her as "so English... Well check this out: this is me!" [P2:89]. She continued with this strategy for some time, so much so that her expatriate English teacher formed the impression that "I couldn't speak English properly," [P2:89]. Later when she moved to an all-girl secondary school, known to be Anglophone, she found she was suddenly "looked up to... People wanted to know... so it was completely the opposite... so obviously I had to change my accent again," [P2:89]. Such linguistic dexterity goes beyond merely speaking in a given code, it is the use of language to meet or react against a perception of that language and its speaker that varies according to situations and interlocutors. It involves accent, dialectal

and varietal changes, and “constitutes a text, not just of what the person says, but *of the person* from which others will read and interpret the person’s identity in the richest and most complex ways,” (Joseph, 2004:225). P1 and P2 became aware of this at an early age, adjusting their English and Malay languaging to mollify, conform, confound or resist the expectations of those around them, especially those who made them feel ‘other’ in their home country.

Changing accents to fit in is a common occurrence everywhere if people want to sound as if they belong. P1 reveals, “When I go to Scotland, the accent it just comes out... That makes it easier to fit in I think.” [P1:327]. SP2 thinks his mother who is Chinese “has a weird Malay accent” [SP2:354] so, “She prefers talking in English,” [SP2:356] which is the language they use to communicate. Her L1 is Hokkien, but although he has receptive comprehension, he cannot speak it. He speaks Malay to his father [SP2:348] and can draw on the different languages and dialects in his repertoire, depending “on who I hang out with... If I speak English with my Chinese friends, I try to fit in the Chinese accent coz I have that natural Chinese accent in my English,” [SP2:950 and 952]. This underscores not only the importance of language itself, but also of accent in the creation of closeness and inclusion or distance and alienation. It is also a conscious decision to talk a certain way to achieve “just the feeling of fitting in, you know, just if he speaks English in a Chinese accent, I would want to speak, you know, the same as he does, I think... and it’s more fun that way,” [SP2:958]. SP2 considers, “It’s fun having several different accents as well for English,” expressing the hope that he could add an Australian accent during his planned scholastic sojourn there [SP2:960 and 962]. If all linguistic behaviour is “a series of acts of identity” (Le Page & Tabouret-Keller, 1985:14), intentionally adopting a particular accent or style of speaking can be regarded as a strong assertion and performance of the associated identity. A group of adolescent residents of Brunei’s famed water village integrate STM, BNM and English in a distinctive way “as part of in-group practice” that is “mainly intentional in order to project a uniquely favourable identity among them” (Muhammad Najib, 2012) to identify themselves as *poklen*.

## 5.6 *Kampong Ayer* – Identifying as *poklen*

Brunei's capital city, Bandar Seri Begawan (BSB), formerly Brunei Town, is home to *Kampong Ayer*, thought to be the largest water village in the world. Still known as the 'Venice of the East', it could be regarded as an example of the pervasiveness of imperialistic discourse in that a place in Brunei still needs a European equivalent to add to its validity and to enhance its evocativeness, but this is not something that is imposed or even promoted by outsiders. It is continued by Bruneians themselves (see for example, Siti Hawa, 2008:35). However, as detailed in Chapter 4, Section 4.13.1, many Bruneians seem to have an ambivalent attitude towards *Kampong Ayer* and its remaining residents. Whilst on the one hand it is regarded as the heartland of Bruneian culture, on the other its residents are often subject to discrimination. SP5 and SP6 both admit to looking down on people from *Kampong Ayer* [SP5:1317; SP6:1316] with SP6 explaining, "We have this er stereotype... dropping out from school you know. They're uneducated and all that," [SP6:1353]. They are likely referring here to the most 'visible' group of *Kampong Ayer* residents. Their reaction is not isolated since *poklen* are frequently regarded as "social misfits" by their fellow Bruneians (Muhammad Najib, 2012, citing Noor Azam, 2012 [personal communication]).

*Kampong Ayer* is home to Brunei's most visible subculture. This is made up of a group of mostly teenagers, known as *poklen*, who dare to stand out from the crowd and defy expectations. One of the ways they differentiate themselves is through language. SP3 thinks, "They wanna be Westerners... They actually don't know how to speak English. That's what stands out as well," [SP3:736]. He also reveals, "They're labelled as non-educated people," [SP3:740]. This is important since, if the avenue of education is closed to them, they are left with few options to succeed in Brunei. SP1 refers to them as "malcultured emos, mal emos" [SP1:424]. SP4 concedes, "They're a bit different in behaviour," [SP4:365], but he also considers the use of the term *poklen* as "a term used to label *Kampong Ayer* inhabitants" [SP4:377] in a more general way.

SP7 suggests, "They have their own... dialect language," [SP7:930]. SPL1 clarifies, "They put an x at the end of every word," [SPL1:932]. Muhammad Najib (2012), who has

conducted an in-depth study of *poklen* youth and their language use, concurs, adding that exaggerated spelling, cynicism and the extensive suffixation of both x and z are features of *poklen* speech, though these are pronounced to a lesser extent than they are used in written text messages and social media postings. In this way, their use of language becomes distinctive, if not always clear to outsiders. Such deliberate distortion could be regarded as a kind of rebellion against standard norms and a system in which they may have ‘failed’ and which has failed them by not validating their significant, if not always academic achievement in acquiring English language skills. It is in effect a linguistic usurpation that combines their modified version of English with “ghetto (*Kampong*) Malay” (Anggak Barunai, 2011; Ain Nur Ashryna, 2010) to meet their expressive needs and “desire to talk like ‘white people’ or ‘being English’” (Muhammad Najib, 2012). Linguaging in this way is part of identifying as a *poklen*, a horizontal identity, the kind that are often regarded as flawed and undesirable (Soloman, 2012:4).

### **5.7 Choosing English language speaker identity**

Language is often expected to be a vertical identity; that is one that is passed from parent to child (Soloman, 2012:2). However, in the case of many of these participants this is not so. The choices of schools their parents made for them however suggest that many wanted their children to become accomplished speakers of English. SP4’s parents sent him to a private school for his primary education, followed by what was once a Catholic mission school for much of his secondary education because, “They regard it as more standard,” [SP4:48]. SP2 reveals, “My mum has always put a lot of emphasis on the English language,” [SP2:332].

Speaking English or linguaging in English has always been or has become an important identity for all of the participants in this study. Each has achieved high levels of academic language proficiency, what Cummins designates as cognitive academic language proficiency (CALP) (Cummins, 1979), which have already or will soon enable them to study abroad. This ability separates them from many of their peers whose linguistic achievement in English has remained at the basic interpersonal communicative skills

(BICS) (Cummins, 1979) or conversational fluency end of the English language continuum. Given that the bilingual education system makes the English language available to all Bruneians, the factors that have contributed to these participants' relative success warrant some exploration.

It is notable that all the student participants, except for the one (SP8) who claims English as his L1, were privately educated at international, ex-mission, or Chinese schools. SP8 spent his early years in the USA, followed by four or five years in the UK while his father was on diplomatic service, leading him to say, "Honestly, I'm not a Malay person," [SP8:61] and, "English was my first language," [SP8:270]. This signifies the role he believes language has played in making him who he is. As "the place where the sense of ourselves, our subjectivity is constructed" (Talbot, Atkinson, & Atkinson, 2003:1, citing Weedon, 1997:21), the English language has been a site on which SP8 has constructed and performed identities that are different to those he may have had if he had grown up speaking Malay in his homeland. Among these is the one of 'new kid who does not speak Malay' which was thrust upon him on his return to Brunei and which may have contributed to his assumption and subsequent enactment of what in Brunei are alternative identities. Finding himself back in Brunei, having no knowledge of Malay language, "I was struggling," [SP8:218]. He attended a government school, likely because his parents realised the need for him to acquire Malay language skills, since by then he was a monolingual English speaker due to the Anglophone environments in which he had grown up. He admits that, "I was kinda lonely at first coz I was like kinda different" [SP8:244]. But SP8 has since taken control of that identity of difference by appropriating it and choosing to define himself by images he has cultivated – ones that often set him apart from others in his society. His seeming preoccupation with the notion of image leads to the recurrence of the word throughout his interview when it is uttered more than 20 times. By embracing his once designated difference, he becomes empowered to self-define as being unlike others, more of a standout individual.

One of the performances of difference that sets him apart from his peers is that he is "very much into music and they know me (as) the guy who wears black all the time... That's my



image,” [SP8:16 and 18]. Although “having long hair isn’t really acceptable” for a Muslim male, it “has a link to music actually, long hair,” [SP8:477 and 521]. However, he insists, “They never stopped me from being who I am,” [SP8:1013]. The use of ‘they’ here is ambiguous. It may refer to his peers or to wider society. It may betray an awareness and self-consciousness about the watchfulness of life in such a close society. He claims that he personally performs mostly in English because, “In English, yeah, I feel for that more” [SP8:61]. However, when he is performing locally with his band they also perform in Malay, but he says, “I don’t really touch on that much,” adding that he still respects both languages in terms of music [SP8:61]. Speaking English fluently would have already set him apart; using that language to perform a risqué type of music with religiously dubious lyrics compounds that. Having previously distanced himself from his Malay identity, he later asserts it, saying, “I can’t really change the way I think. First, I’m still a Malay,” but he qualifies this by adding, “My life is actually around the world,” [SP8:422].

Being born and spending his formative years overseas may have contributed to his voicing this deceptively simple, yet profound statement. Alternatively, it could be argued that having such an internationalist perspective is becoming more common in our shrinking world where virtuality and globalisation change ways of thinking as well as modes of behaviour and consumption and where English language increasingly acts as the common international communication code, furthering interaction and interconnectedness. SP8’s comments suggest he believes he embodies a “new type of person whose orientation and view of the world profoundly transcends his... indigenous culture” (Adler, 1977:25). Adler goes on to suggest that such a person’s essential identity incorporates different life patterns; in SP8’s case evidenced by his musician persona and alternative lifestyle where atypical self-reliance is practised and an outwardly nonconformist dress style is adopted. Adler’s internationalist or multicultural person is also someone who accepts that realities are multiple from both a psychological and social standpoint, and who “embodies a core process of self-verification that is grounded in both the universality of the human condition and the diversity of cultural forms” (Adler, 1977:25). SP8 refers directly to the universality of music and advocates widespread participation in it [SP8:236]. He presents as being very much in and of the world, yet simultaneously of Brunei.

Participants refer to various resources that they feel enhanced their English language acquisition. Somewhat surprisingly two referred to the Ladybird series, Peter and Jane, which was first published in the early 1960s [SP2:328; SP3:765]. Enid Blyton books “helped me a lot” [SP7:688]. SP1 agrees. She was particularly captivated by the Famous Five series, especially the tomboy character, George, who was “everything I wanted to be” [SP1:272]. This character made such a lasting impact that recently, when she was assuming a *nom de plume*, she chose the masculine ‘Mick’ as part of it [SP1:266] in order to identify more closely with her heroine. SP1 also points out that, “It’s not traditional for Chinese families to have story time,” [SP1:127] and that the decision to read these books was her own which her parents indulged by buying her more books once her interest became clear. SP4 expresses a preference for Archie comic books [SP4:80]. Norton (2009) refers to her previous Canadian-based research “to better understand the ubiquitous Archie reader” and advocates that educators validate such literacy “practices that students find engaging and meaningful” (Norton, 2010:161-162). He also mentions the impact of television programmes as does SP3, who learned from cartoons [SP3:795], and SP7, who remembers watching “Disney classics with my dad” [SP7:696]. Whilst it is interesting to find out their preferred stimuli for and sources of English language models, it is perhaps even more remarkable that I could enumerate many of those exact influences from my own early literacy experiences more than 25 years earlier on the other side of the world in Ireland, in an English L1 context. This kind of time lag is indicative of the relative stasis that has characterised the ELT industry. It also points to the tendency to export ‘tried and trusted’ literacy resources in English regardless of their modernity or cultural appropriacy to countries that are willing consumers of the world commodity that the English language has become (Phillipson, 1992: 1 and 4).

The adult participants grew up a decade or so before the student participants in the 1980s when Brunei had recently become independent from Britain, at a time when the *dwibahasa* or bilingual system was newly established. Brunei was in a transition phase as it emerged from a state of ‘protection’ into sovereignty and assertion of its own national identity. As such they are among the pioneering members of the new independent Brunei success story.

They are symbols of the aspirations of the state for its citizens to become accomplished Malay-English bilinguals (Jones, 2000:227). While a number had attended private or ex-mission schools, many had been to top government schools, such as the all-girls secondary school and the science college. P6 recalls that ‘Sesame Street’ helped her to learn English and that there were lots of books available to her at home [P6:32 and 36]. Her young daughter now watches ‘Playhouse Disney’ and ‘Dora the Explorer’ which are helping her to learn both English and Spanish [P6:82]. P6 also admits, “I do speak in English to her all the time,” [P6:88]. As a parent she is turning English language speaker identity into a vertical one by choosing it as her main mode of communication with her daughter. This is a trend among young English-educated parents, also noted in research into language shift in Brunei conducted in the early 2000s (Noor Azam, 2005: 232-235).

P5’s choice of favourite authors is unexpected, “I like Jodi Picoult... I try to read everything she’s ever written,” [P5:209]. “I love Dan Brown... because his books make me think,” [P5:213]. Both authors are known for the controversial nature of their topics. Referring indirectly to ‘The Da Vinci Code’, she recalls that she enjoyed how he “twisted people’s expectations” about Christianity, but, “If it was a book on Islam... no way! Blasphemy!” [P5:213]. She then goes on to discuss her curiosity about Salman Rushdie’s banned book ‘The Satanic Verses’ which led her to go as far as reading a synopsis [P5:223] so that she could get a personal sense of why a *fatwa* was issued. Based on this she reached the conclusion that the book was “really, really, really, really blasphemous” [P5:223]. Hitchens (2009) regards this *fatwa* as “the opening shot in a war on cultural freedom” which he believes has caused the media to become self-censoring with regard to Islam (Hitchens, 2009). While P5 admits to having recently become more pious, her relatively avant-garde taste in reading material, her introspection, and her willingness to speak openly about sensitive issues, seem contradictory, as is her more interrogative approach to MIB. She suggests that the time she spent outside Brunei opened her eyes to new ways of looking at her country and herself, “If you’ve never been out of Brunei and they keep trying to you know put in MIB to your head, you never really think” [P5:545]. She then goes on to insist on the need to reconcile this ideology with being a global citizen. It is unclear whether the greater clarity afforded by moving away resulted from her immersion in an Anglophone

environment, being in an academic environment where critical thinking is encouraged, or perhaps even the absence of scrutiny that accompanies anonymity, or a combination of some or all of these factors. P7 also found his study period abroad liberating, confessing that, “It was only in the UK that I started to actually find out who I was” [P7:77]. Here his words suggest he is veering towards the traditional, more essentialist notion of identity as something that pre-exists, awaiting discovery. Later he reveals his paranoia about being back in Brunei where he finds “trying to be yourself” [P7:79] more problematic. This points to a more dynamic conceptualisation of identity as ongoing and evolving. Both P5 and P7 admit to having experienced life-changing awareness shifts while abroad, raising the question of whether it is necessary to leave a place before one can see it more critically.

P6 appears to have evolved an internationalist perspective without having travelled overseas to study. Arguably, in modern times the combined faculties of the English language and the Internet make this possible, subject to an individual’s predilection for engaging globally. P6 struggles to explain why, suggesting, “I just maybe am like that” [P6:691]. She admits to rarely using Malay as one of her classroom languages because, “If I say things in Malay, I keep saying it wrong. It’s embarrassing” [P6:100]. Instead, she tries to encourage her students to “think out of the box” [P6:689] by choosing language enrichment materials from popular western culture, such as song lyrics that have “underlying concepts... layers to the song. It’s not just superficial. I want them to see what I can see” [P6:689]. This worldliness that P6 exudes has been facilitated by her access to English from an early age, but is propelled by her own propensity to look outside and engage internationally.

## **5.8 Who is Bruneian? Who is local?**

All of the participants are Bruneian in the categorical identification sense. This is an “external identification” system that is “formalized, codified, objectified... developed by powerful, authoritative institutions,” such as the state. It involves the “attachment of definitive markers to an individual by a passport, fingerprint” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:15) and, in the Bruneian context, the prized yellow identity card. In deciding who is

or can be Bruneian, the state is exercising its “power to name, to identify, to categorize” (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:15), giving it complete control of the symbolic power involved in that process (Bourdieu, 1991). Each of the participants also self-identifies as a Bruneian, doing so to varying degrees irrespective of ethnic or linguistic background. Being an L1 BNM-speaking Malay does not seem to necessarily correlate with greater levels of identification as a Bruneian. SP6, who is Bruneian-Filipina, goes so far as to say, “Bruneian could be anybody” [SP6:1542], but this is countered by SP5 who refers to “those pure Malay who speaks Malay basically with each other” [SP5:963], and SP4 who talks of his grandparents in similar terms. “They’re pure Bruneians... True Bruneians... still retain their tradition” [SP4:661]. These references to both Malay language and tradition as key elements of Bruneian identity reaffirm McLellan’s notion about the non-equivalence of the terms ‘language’ and ‘*bahasa*’. He suggests that *bahasa* is an umbrella term covering notions of good manners, politeness and socially appropriate behaviour (McLellan, 1996:2). SP4 feels that, “A true Bruneian, like, it’s mostly about ethics, [SP4:675]. He gives an example, “I know which Bruneian has still retained his traditional lifestyle where he’s passing through people, he will bow down,” [SP4:681]. These traditional manners and etiquette are known as *budi bahasa* [SP4:691]. SP8 also alludes to this awareness of tradition, “What old people used to say is good for society,” [SP8:413]. These ideas are closely bound up with BNM and a ‘quintessential Malayness’ which goes beyond being able to speak Malay languages. In Brunei they are often communicated through proverbs or *perambahan*. These are used “not just as a form of communication, but also as means to display the culture and mannerisms of Malay society.” They veil rebuke or criticism in humour, sarcasm and/or advice in deference to the importance of face (*kemukaan*) and face-saving in society there. For example, a lazy workshy man might be called *biawak punggur* (a monitor lizard); an overly loquacious person might be described as *bibiran* (lit. lips and lips); and someone who is *berangin* (windy) is one who lacks conviction. These are believed to derive from the observations and their expressions by previous generations who lived *kampong* lives (Zin, 2010).

P5 claims, “The Malay idea is very romantic. It’s supposed to be linked with being genteel” [P5:132]. These attitudes and reactions arise from the way the terms ‘Malay’ or

'*Melayu*' have been used "as the core of an ethnically or a nationalist project" and have been used discursively to essentialise this concept though it remains "a contested and often divisive" one in both Brunei and neighbouring Malaysia (Reid, 2001:295).

SP7 recalls her grandparents' concern that her parents were focusing too much on her English and Mandarin to the detriment of Malay language [SP7:700]. However, she finds, "Some Malays, if I speak Chinese, they will sometimes discriminate me... and look at me as a Chinese as well" [SP7:1047 and 1049]. Given the lesser status this entails, it is clearly not something SP7 welcomes. Her attitude to Chinese people and one of their languages is ambivalent. She values Mandarin on the one hand because of China's growing world prominence and her own positive experience of her Chinese school [SP7:179], but she clearly does not want her command of Mandarin to lead to her being identified and/or treated as a Chinese person in Brunei. On the other hand, she refers to a Chinese-Bruneian woman she knows who "speaks fluent Brunei-Malay" whom she consequently thinks is "much more Bruneian than I am" [SP7:896 and 903]. However, this ascription is precarious as the 'entry' secured by language ability can be withdrawn at will if, for example, behaviour is at odds with what the insiders deem to be Bruneian. SP7, for example, refers to "Chinese people who wear short miniskirts," commenting, "I don't think that's Bruneian" [SP7:920]. Similarly, P3 links his ability to speak even "horrible" [P3:131] Brunei-Malay to his designation as *Cina Muara* which P4, herself a Malay, explains as being viewed as an honorary Malay (see also Section 4.12, p.126). This leads to being accepted more readily [P4:127], regarded as a local and given insider status. P3's maternal great-grandfather, who was "Chief Registrar at the courts, made sure they always spoke English. He didn't let them speak Chinese, [P3:146]. This would have been under the British administration during the 1920s or 1930s when English language would have been the prerogative of the elite. It also underscores that English has long been a salient feature of P3's heritage, going back at least four generations.

### **5.8.1 The allure of the foreign versus valuing the local**

The concept of 'localness' is mired in contradiction in Brunei. What is local, or being local, can be vaunted, bestowing privilege and exclusivity or deprecated and rejected depending on the context. Pennycook stresses the importance of considering the local "in

relational terms” since it is invariably “defined in relation to something else regional, national, global, universal, modern, new, from elsewhere” (Pennycook, 2010:4).

The tendency to laud that which is ‘from elsewhere’ is very much in evidence when it comes to tertiary level education and the qualifications that follow. The desire to study overseas appears to be something that has entered the Bruneian psyche. This may hark back to colonial days when it was solely the prerogative of the elite, granting it allure that has persisted into the present. It has come to be regarded almost as a rite of passage for successful young Bruneians, those who have achieved academically and linguistically in and through English and to a lesser degree in STM.

Six out of the eight adult participants went abroad to study. Five went to the UK and one to Australia. At the time of this research, all eight of the student participants were poised to embark on similar scholastic adventures. “Anywhere but here” [SP1:1053] is SP1’s response to being asked about her preferences for further study. SP3 never considered studying at the local university and would do so only “if I was forced to” [SP3:382 and 384]. SP4 calls the local university “the last resort” [SP4:259] (see also Section 4.7, p.108). His words are echoed verbatim by SP7 [SP7:67]. She feels that it has become expected that Bruneians would study in the UK based on the country’s ongoing close relationship with its former protector (see Section 4.7). There are no traces of antipathy here. Her words suggest that while she is aware of the legacy of imperialism, she is confident that it has been appropriated locally and refashioned to suit the prevailing needs and conditions of her country. She wants to go abroad because, “If you study in UK, you will be exposed to more,” [SP7:332]. SP8 not only wants to go abroad, he has only selected universities that are “from the top 20” because, “That means it’s gonna be a good job... when I finish,” [SP8:4 and 8]. For him, going abroad to study means, “You get to change your perspective; you see a whole different culture there. If you wanna bring it back, you bring it back. You learn a lot of things,” [SP8:256]. But bringing culture back is very much contra to the expressed wishes of HM the Sultan. He clearly states that he wants students to come back armed only with their knowledge they have acquired, but not culturally encumbered with the influences of other places (Othman, 2014; RTB News,

2013). This desired separation of knowledge from culture is problematic if not impossible as all knowledge is socially constructed (Foucault, 1972:15), reflecting the values and interests of those involved in both its formulation and transmission.

P1 took the unusual decision to reject an overseas scholarship because she did not want to student English Literature, the only choice she was offered [P1:239]. P6 also went to the local university which is English-medium. Both pursued degrees in the Teaching of English as a Second Language, an option denied their counterparts who were sent abroad. However, P6 laments the fact that, “They prefer, you know, people who go to UK universities,” [P6:154]. Phan’s research on Western-trained and non-Western trained teachers of English in Vietnam found similar tendencies, with those educated abroad regarded as “worthier” and “better” than those who stayed at home. On the other hand, and as is also the case in Brunei, these teachers can be subject to charges of arrogance, heritage culture abandonment and greater expectations when it comes to professional performance (Phan, 2008:144-149).

This is one of the instances when the local is devalued in favour of what is external. P6 rails at what she regards as the injustice of this, given that many UK graduates who later pursue postgraduate studies (previously a Postgraduate Certificate of Education or more recently a Master of Teaching [MTeach]) locally find the standards there challenging, yet still regard the qualifications of people like her somehow inferior to their own [P6:154]. This attitude is invidious and extends to higher governmental levels with P5 revealing the explicit directive of a senior official at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, “‘No UBD graduates!’ he said... ‘Not good enough’,” [P5:345]. She is aware, “They often feel erm looked down upon,” [P5:343], but admits when asked if there was a perceptible difference between those who graduated locally and abroad, “I would love to say no, but I do see that those who go to overseas universities, they do seem a bit more exposed and open-minded... Being independent and being somewhere else does show through I think... It matures you,” [P5:343].



Although the local university may not be the institution of choice when it comes to further study, being a local and the concept of localness are important motifs in Brunei society. English newspaper headlines frequently feature the word ‘local’ as a way of simultaneously signalling inclusion and engineering exclusion. For example, headlines such as “Singapore envoy honours local student,” (Hizam, 2007), ““More local ICT experts needed to drive the industry’,” (Zaini & Junaidi, 2008:3), “Global allure of local craft,” (Roslan, 2008:2), and “Going local as a way to stand out,” (Too, 2010:B24), frequently index and reinforce the distinction between who or what is local or otherwise.

Being other than local in Brunei means being cast as a ‘foreigner’. The word is deployed in the English media without any of the circumspection and deference to sensibility that have become the norm in some western media. It could be argued that this is simply a statement of fact that these persons hail from another land, but the words ‘foreign’ and ‘foreigner’ have perhaps become too connotatively loaded for this to be accepted unproblematically. Headlines like, “Local vs foreign varsities?” (Sofri, 2007:4) and “Put priority on employing locals over foreigners,” (Hab, 2011:A4), posit the two as opposing rather than complementary conditions. Even those in public office have been known to employ this kind of divisive discourse with a more recent headline proclaiming, ““\$200 million subsidies used by foreigners’,” (Kamit, 2014b). This official is reported as having suggested that, “Foreigners should pay unsubsidised prices for items such as fuel, electricity, medicine, rice, among others,” (Kamit, 2014b). P4 used a social media platform to express his dismay at what he perceived as xenophobic discourse (see Section 4.2, for a discussion of this from a political perspective).

The plight of permanent residents in Brunei is also highlighted by this dichotomous discourse. They exist in a ‘nowhere’ condition of statelessness, suspended between local and foreign, but without the advantages of either position. A letter to the editor of one of the English-language newspapers from a third generation permanent resident captioned “Permanent residents can’t be treated as foreigners,” (Sad ‘alien’, 2008:4) is just one example of an expression of the frustration felt at Brunei’s refusal to grant them an official Bruneian identity. The writer stresses, “For the past 20 years I had never felt any different

from Brunei citizens,” but when travelling on a “CI – certificate of identity,” s/he was “like an alien” who cannot respond spontaneously to the question, ‘Where are you from?’ (Sad ‘alien’, 2008:4).

The question of who is local is far from simple. Being born in Brunei does not make one a Bruneian. My son was born there, but would never be considered Bruneian. Many Chinese children born there are not given the official identification of Bruneian that citizenship would bestow. Selasi proposes asking, “Where are you a local?” in place of “Where are you from?”(Selasi, 2015:3), arguing that our experience is where we are from. SP6’s view that Bruneian can be anybody does not hold true, but taking Selasi’s proposal a step further, anyone who experiences Brunei could be counted as a local there.

This brings to mind a critical incident when my status as a local or non-local was called into question. When I went to register for an international conference being hosted by UBD in 2010, my name could not be found on the list of presenters. It emerged that there were two lists; one for local presenters and another for international ones. I was asked the question ‘Are you a local?’ and was at a loss as to how to reply. ‘Yes and no. Yes, in that I am living here at the moment; and no, in that I am clearly not a Brunei national.’ What was most striking about this exchange was the sense that my status in terms of ‘localness’ was indeterminate in that moment and was contingent on whichever designation the Bruneian administrator chose for me. My name was eventually located atop the list of local presenters and I was reassured, ‘Yes, you are a local.’ On this occasion I unexpectedly ‘passed’ as a local (Pennycook, 2012:90). I felt honoured by this temporary status, even if my inclusion on that list had been completely arbitrary or even motivated by a desire to shore up the number of home-grown presenters. This incident reminded me of my desire to belong there, to be local in a place where so many years of my life had been lived and experienced. In Selasi’s (2015) view, my experience there makes me local. This suggests that the time spent overseas by the participants and their experiences lived there could have made (or will make in the case of student participants) them temporarily local elsewhere, if they choose to be.

### **5.8.2 Appropriation and a home-grown empire**

The English word ‘empire’ is another that is connotatively loaded. It is a word that has been reincarnated in Brunei through the naming of the country’s most iconic hotel as The Empire Hotel and Country Club. This occurred in the late 1990s in the wake of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. This hotel had originally been called Jerudong Park Hotel (Mohamad, 2001; Tresniowski, 2001). Both notably are English names, but while the original conjures up the actual location of the hotel, the new appellation could suggest a certain nostalgia for its former protector, when for almost 100 years Brunei formed part of the British Empire – a kind of “celebratory romance of the past” (Bhabha, 1994:13). This gesture, along with the retention of street names immortalising former British Residents and the current British monarch, attest to Brunei’s equanimity about and acceptance of its colonial legacy as a fundamental part of its history and identity. However, now Bruneians have taken control of the discourse; the ‘Empire’ has changed hands – it is claimed from within, it is a flagship Bruneian edifice bearing the name of Brunei’s old master, but the name has now been chosen for whatever reasons. Brunei also chose not only to keep but to actively nurture the English language, which Phillipson suggests is the modern incarnation of the British Empire (Phillipson, 1992:1). This view is supported by Parakrama who holds that, “The loss of an empire may be actively recuperated through the wielding of linguistic power” (O’Hara-Davies, 2006:19, citing Parakrama, 1995:57). Likewise, Sir Winston Churchill famously predicted that, “The empires of the future are the empires of the mind” (Esperanto.tv, 2014). Given the complex interrelationship of thought and languages, English could be viewed as keeping Bruneians in thrall to British standards. Educationally, the country continues to rely on standards set from afar in the form of the BCGCE O-level and A-level examinations and degrees from British, Australian, and increasingly American universities.

The O-level English Language paper is particularly problematic because of its antiquity, given that it determines the present-day academic futures of young Bruneians. All of the participants in this study are among the successful minority who achieved credit grades (A to C) in this examination, enabling them to proceed to the sixth-form centre where this study is based, and later to tertiary education abroad, or failing that at home in Brunei. This

examination originated in the mid-twentieth century when it was devised to identify English L1 speakers who were academically suited to the pursuit of further education in England and Wales. However, its suitability for this role was later questioned and its use was discontinued in the UK from 1988 onwards (O’Hara-Davies, 2006:13, citing Atkinson, 1990:‘The new examinations...’, para.1). Yet this largely unchanged product continues to be marketed in Brunei Darussalam as well as in a number of other Commonwealth countries (CIE, 2015). I have previously argued that the continuing reliance on this examination system is evidence of Brunei’s reluctance to fully sever the colonial cord (O’Hara-Davies, 2006:124). In its role of consumer, Brunei contributes to the perpetuation of Britain’s linguistic power, its modern-day empire of English based on the commodification of the English language (Heller, 2003:473; Heller, 2010:101; Block, 2010:300). This tendency to look elsewhere for validation and standard-setting coexists with the constant lauding of what is traditional, unique, local and in keeping with MIB, in both the media and official discourse. It is accompanied by the ‘outsidering’ of anyone within the country who is deemed foreign, especially *orang puts* (anglicised plural slang version of *orang puteh*, also a part of ‘*poklen-speak*’). Many NESTs fall into that category.

## **Conclusion to Chapter 5**

This chapter has explored how the English language contributes to the production of Bruneian identities. The country’s education policy, driven by both political and pragmatic concerns, has led to its de facto position as the dominant medium of education. It renders not only the teaching, but the learning and speaking of English “a highly political project” (Pennycook & Coutand-Marin, 2003:338). However, this is countered by efforts to negate or at least attenuate its ideological saturation and associated ‘western’ worldviews (Bakhtin, 1981:271), allowing Bruneians an English voice on and in the world while insisting that only Malay languages, especially BNM, can construct Bruneianness. Conversely, the Islamic faith, one of the key elements of this according to MIB, is steeped in Arabic, practised in Malay, and often problematised in English. Chapter 6 explores the power religions exercise over identities’ construction in Brunei.

# CHAPTER 6

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*Negotiating Religious Identities*

*Man is a Religious Animal. He is the only  
Religious Animal*

Mark Twain, 1935-1910

## Chapter 6: Introduction – Brunei: a *zikir* nation

This chapter explores how participants express their perceptions of their own religious identities. The majority of the participants in this study, twelve out of sixteen, identify as Muslim. Of the other four participants, two are Buddhist, one is Sikh and one is Catholic. This more or less reflects the latest statistics on Brunei's religious demographic (Central Intelligence Agency, 2014). The *Shafi'i* school of *Sunni* Islam is the official religion of Brunei. At face value it may appear that having any religious affiliation is in itself an identity; an identity that is an accident of birth later reinforced by socialisation rather than a choice they have made based on belief. This calls into question the extent to which we can choose our identities. As sentient beings, early in life we become aware of ourselves as genderised, temporal, situated creatures, courtesy of the era, location and family circumstances into which we are born. As our life narrative unfolds, we activate some of our 'bestowed' identities more than others at various times and according to the prevailing conditions. In this way, some of our identities become stronger and more defining of us due to their iterative performances, while others lie dormant and nominal either through neglect or rejection. The primacy of Islam in Brunei means that it is likely that people there develop an early awareness of their religious identities, whether they are Muslim or not. Its dominance also serves to throw other religions into sharp relief, their minority status intensifying their defining capacity. The extent of an individual's later identification with his or her childhood religion, his or her manifestation of it, and personal religiosity or spirituality, are performed identities, even though these are also mediated by factors such as parental and societal expectation. They are further impacted by the way religion is regarded at national level, how it is disseminated through social institutions such as schools, and reified through the use of repeated incantations in its associated languages, making it a part of everyday life. Islam in Brunei mixes Arabic, Malay and, to some extent, English.

*Wawasan 2035* (Vision 2035), the blueprint for Brunei's future trajectory, envisages the country as a *Negara Zikir* (Zikir Nation). "A *zikir* nation is one that upholds Allah's laws, has good moral values among its citizens, as well as in its approach to other countries" (Sainah Haji Saim, 2013:63-64). HM the Sultan first voiced his commitment to taking

Brunei in this direction back in 2007 (Dewi Mohd Sofri, 2008). In his *titah* on the eve of *Eid Aidil Adha* (Feast of the Sacrifice), he resolved to make the country a *zikir* one that always glorifies Allah (Being closer to Allah, 2007). The implementation of *Syariah* Penal Code in 2014 amid a maelstrom of external criticism propels the country further along that path. This is presented as a reversion to the Islamic law of old that was interrupted by “the presence of foreign powers” (Implementation of the Shari’ah, 2014:para.8) rather than as a new departure, casting it as the rightful restoration of a long-lost, religious legislation. This is also a strong reassertion of the country’s Islamic identity. At the time the interview phase of this research was conducted, *Syariah* Law applied mostly to family law matters involving only the Muslim population.

### **6.1 Identifying with Islam**

Twelve of the participants in this study were born into the Islamic faith. While being Muslim means there is a communal, collective aspect to this identity, it does not justify their being regarded as a singular entity. The extent to which they identify with and adhere to their religion differs greatly, varying from P5 who claims, “I personally feel like a born-again Muslim kind of thing” (P5:431), who in the two years preceding her interview had “gone a bit deeper into my faith” (P5:205), to SP8 who says, “I’m sorta agnostic” (SP8:549). SP8 also has friends “who are actually... er atheists” (SP8:621) and he feels that Bruneian society is becoming more secularised (SP8:619). These two participants’ responses appear to put them at both extremes of the religious identification continuum in Brunei. In fact, SP8’s very awareness and use of the terms ‘agnostic’ and ‘atheist’ are imbued with risk in a land where apostasy has hitherto been unthinkable. It will soon become a capital offence when *Syariah* law is fully phased in by the end of 2016 (Hidup, 2013). It may be the case that the utterance of such words in English renders them less deadly than their Arabic or Malay equivalents.

All of the other Muslim participants fall somewhere in between and, while it becomes clear that their religion regulates their social practices to some extent, especially in terms of the clothes they wear and the food items they eat or abstain from, it does not emerge that they



feel religion dominates their lives as much as might have been expected, at least on a conscious level. The lines between what is religious practice and what is social conformity may have become a little blurred as many of Brunei's norms and customs have Islamic underpinnings due to the long tradition of the religion in the country. Some participants linked religion with tradition and Malay etiquette. One describes her parents as "more the religious type" who are "very strong on Bruneian culture" [SP7:399]. For another, the most important aspect of the whole national ideology is the age-old wisdom, "What old people used to say is good for society, like when you cross in front of someone you have to bow down," [SP8:413]. This is part of the gentility associated with Malayness.

If, as SP8 suggests, Brunei society is becoming more secularised, this does not fit in with HM's plan for a *zikir* nation; a plan which may have been devised in response to this very tendency in the first place. It could also have been one of the factors that has alerted the authorities to the need to reassert Islamic principles more strongly in the country through the invocation of stricter *Syariah* law. Similarly and probably not coincidentally, the drafting of legislation making attendance at religious school mandatory for all Malay children, which came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January 2014, is a proactive step to stem the tide of future secularism.

Enshrining *Syariah* Law imbues conformity to the status quo with a level of divine sanction and may be a strategy to avert social unrest in an age of increasing awareness and dwindling oil resources. One of the non-Muslim participants expresses the view that the whole MIB ideology is aimed at keeping "the social foundations strong here or something" (SP1:214).

The participant who identifies as being agnostic would prioritise the Islamic nature of his country to outsiders, "First I'll tell them it's a Muslim country" (SP8:615). In doing so, he links himself to his Muslim background, whilst simultaneously distancing himself by his choice of what would be an 'undesirable' identity from an Islamic perspective. He is also aware that there are certain religious prohibitions that restrict the "image" (SP8:473) an individual chooses to project. In his case, his trademark long hair which "has a link to

music actually...” (SP8:521) “...isn’t really acceptable” (SP8:477) because, as he explains, it is regarded as the feminisation of a male or a male emulating a female (SP8:480). Whilst remaining nominally and outwardly Muslim, this participant’s performed identity as a musician is in contravention of many Islamic teachings. He identifies very strongly “as a musician” (SP8:43), as does another participant, “I think what’s most important for me at the moment is to make music... and that’s what I wanna really do because I think that’s the only thing that’s keeping me alive – is to create music” (P7:153). For both of these participants their identities as musicians are deeply held, the kind that “begin as intrinsically motivated behaviors” (La Guardia, 2009:93, citing Waterman, 1984). These are experienced spontaneously, volitionally, and are “willingly engaged self-expressions” (La Guardia, 2009:93, citing deCharms, 1968). Reconciling these active identities as musicians with their Islamic faith is problematic. The permissibility of music in Islam, whether it is *halal* (permitted), *haram* (forbidden) or *makruh* (disliked, but tolerated), is an issue on which Muslim scholars have failed to reach consensus. It remains unresolved, leaving young people such as these oscillating between the stance that sanctions their musicality and that which censors it.

P7 calls this “a grey area” and “a tricky thing” [P7:695] and is aware of the “several disagreements between different factions about whether music is allowed in Islam or not” [P7:695]. He also compares Brunei’s conservatism with the relative liberalism of Malaysia and Indonesia in this regard. Earlier he had revealed that one of the main reasons he was reluctant to return to Brunei after his overseas studies was that, “There are just so many opportunities musically for me if I were to be in UK,” [P7:93]. Likewise, SP8 is conflicted, insisting he only wants to promote music in Brunei and is “not doing anything bad actually” [SP8:348]. This spontaneous protestation indicates that he is conscious of the negative perception that exists. He goes on to explain, “I don’t think Brunei is ready yet... The whole MIB thing is like... get in the way” [SP8:350].

The secular nature of the musical genres favoured by the participants in this study appear to tend towards what would almost certainly be classified as *haram*, especially in the case of SP8. His interest lies in heavy metal bands with names such as ‘Megadeth’, and the highly

biblically-referenced ‘Lamb of God’, whose members are often associated with excessive alcohol and substance abuse. This makes SP8’s musical identity seemingly impossible to reconcile with his Islamic one, but through him they do coexist, even if that existence is an uneasy one. There remains a sense, however, that the bestowed religious identity could be undermined by the active construction and performance of the musical one. Both P7 and SP8 convey a sense of being driven by the active performance of their musical identities regardless of how these may be viewed by more religious-minded people in their community. Prominent Islamic artists, such as Yusuf Islam (formerly Cat Stevens) and Maher Zain, lend some credence to the view that compromise is possible. Yusuf Islam believes that the context is the variable that makes music either *haram* or *halal* (Bilal, 2012:para.13). He contends that his own recent offerings fall into the latter due to their content and intent. Similarly, Maher Zain considers his music to be “a message of Islam” (Shahid, 2011). Identities at local level are mediated and advanced by the successful performance of similar identities on a wider scale. The macro level performances of artists like Yusuf Islam and Maher Zain, help make Muslim artists more mainstream. This then permeates localities such as Brunei, enabling musicians like P7 and SP8 “to become braver” [P7:693], creating more space for the performance of their musical identities at a local Bruneian level. Their language choices for performing these identities are explored in Chapter 5.

## **6.2 The ‘I’ of MIB**

Brunei’s national ideology, MIB, constitutes three concurrent identities that an ideal Bruneian should perform. He or she would be of Malay ethnicity, practising *budi bahasa*, be a faithful follower of Islamic teachings and be a loyal subject to the ruling Sultan. Being Muslim in Brunei is correlated to such an extent with being Malay that anyone that converts to Islam in the country is said to *masuk melayu*, which translates as ‘become or enter into Malayness’ (Saunders, 2002:xviii; Mansurnoor, 2012:134). There are no Muslim converts among the participants in this study. Anyone born in Brunei of at least one Malay parent nominally complies with two of the three requirements from the outset. In such a locality people become aware from an early age of these generic identities and the weight

of social expectation that they embrace and enact them. This is communicated by parents, teachers, imams, and the Sultan himself through his *titahs*.

Although the three prescribed prefabricated identities are conferred on all Bruneians of Malay ethnicity as a matter of course, the recipients vary in their awareness of them and in the degree to which they interrogate them at different times in their lives. P5 recalls that it was only when she left Brunei to study in the UK that, “The search for identity started at that age. I think it’s normal though... meaning of life at the age of sixteen,” [P5:275]. It was not until then that she awoke to the true significance of her Islamic identity. While she was in Brunei, although she had been born a Muslim there, the true meaning of this for her was lost in its normalcy while she remained in her home country. Similarly, P7 suggests:

When you were younger, you were sort of inculcated by all these ideas and you just sort of took it for granted, but now that you’re older you start to see things more clear. Once you’ve seen a lot of the world, you start to see different things.

[P7:187].

This suggests a move from being nominally something to actively engaging in identity exploration and performance in a quest for more bespoke identities.

Conflict with or even rejection of one or more of these three identities could occur if young people’s experiences had exposed them to alternative identities in other localities or to pursuits that are contraindicated by MIB and/or Islam. The example of the taboo status of music in Islam is a case in point. P7 also admits that he “strayed away a bit” [P7:133] while he was abroad and that on his return home “my mum has been nagging me about going back to the fold” [P7:133]. The choice of this expression ironically indexes the extent to which Judeo-Christian references are embedded in the English language.

### 6.3 *Ugama* school: becoming Islamically minded

The new Compulsory Religious Education Act 2012 came into effect on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2013 (United Nations, General Assembly, 2014:3). This supersedes all previous rulings on religious instruction. It requires that all Muslim children of Brunei citizen or permanent resident parents attend a full course of religious instruction lasting up to seven years (Azaraimy HH, 2013:para.7).

The early socialisation of Malay Muslim children into the norms and values of their religion begins at home. It is later formalised and consolidated by attending *sekolah ugama* (religious school) in addition to ‘regular’ school. The term ‘regular’ has been chosen since calling it ‘secular’, the normative opposite of religious, would be misleading in this locality. The concept of secularity is generally regarded as incompatible with Islam in the sense that Islam is an all-encompassing way of life or *din* (also spelled *deen*) that impacts every aspect of a follower’s behaviour and experience (Wadud, 2006:18). Typically a young Bruneian primary schoolchild attends regular school in the morning from 7:30am to 12:30pm and goes to *ugama* school for up to three hours in the afternoon depending on their age and level (Nurhamiza, 2013). Even when this is referred to in English, it remains ‘*ugama*’, followed by the word ‘school’. It is not generally translated, as *ugama* signifies Islam rather than just any ‘religion’, although it translates literally from Malay as such.

Apart from a short-lived experiment with an integrated system of education in 2004 and 2005, Brunei has operated a dual system in which religious educational provision runs parallel to general education since the mid-1950s (Muhammad, 2009, 121 and 154). Although this is not ideal from an Islamic perspective, it is the system that these participants have experienced. Their reactions to and recollections of their time in *ugama* school illuminate the establishment’s desire to mould them into religious beings. “I didn’t like it,” [SP3:1316]. He is referring to *ugama* school and explains that he found it very tiring as it followed the morning session at school.

Continuing in this pragmatic vein, SP7 chose to attend a local private Chinese school which only operates in the afternoon, preventing her from attending *ugama* school [SP7:599].

Although she had earlier emphasised the religiosity of her parents, they had decided as a family that the benefits of learning Mandarin outweighed the requirement to attend religious school. By forgoing attendance at *ugama* school and enrolling in a Chinese school, SP7 was given the opportunity to study three languages – Mandarin, English and Malay. This school’s strong reputation in the subject areas of Mathematics and Science was another persuasive factor [SP7:179]. Once there, however, she found herself in a Malay-dominated class. This suggests that other like-minded parents had prioritised multilingualism and possibly scientific excellence over religious instruction for their children. The new laws mandating that all Malay children attend *ugama* school mean that, beginning in January 2014, parents are no longer at liberty to make such educational choices. SP7’s mother had her daughter moved to the “Chinese-majority class” [SP7:183]. There she found some of her classmates to be very much Bruneian and others less so. Her judgements ran along both linguistic and religious lines. She characterised one Chinese classmate as “much more Bruneian than I am” [SP7:903], based on her fluency in BNM. However, she adjudged others to be less Bruneian because “they just ignore things [...] in a way, MIB way” [SP7:909 and 913], such as wearing clothes that do not conform to MIB’s modesty standards [SP7:920]. Her comments underscore the importance, both as entrée into an identity and its subsequent performance. However, in this case, on its own it is not enough. It needs to be accompanied by behaviour deemed appropriate by the dominant group.

Three of the mixed-heritage participants found that the institutions designed to nurture and strengthen their identities as Muslims instead became sites where these identities were most challenged and scrutinised. SP6 recalls being “bullied at *ugama* school” [SP6:856]. P1 recounts an anecdote about her younger brother’s plea for coconut oil in a desperate bid to darken his light brown hair. His hair colour had made him the target of bullies who physically abused him at his *ugama* school, resulting in his eventual withdrawal [P1:60]. Both P1 and P2 passionately recall the horror of the time they spent there, “It’s the nastiest place you can be” [P2:71]. The intensity of their exchange bears testament to the strength of their feelings, even in retrospect many years later.

The three participants who alleged to have been bullied – and also the brother described in the anecdote – have one thing in common; they all have mothers who come from other countries. This makes them “different from everyone else” [P2:69]. P2 recalls sitting in *ugama* class “hearing about all the things that are wrong with you” [P2:69]. She feels that the teachers there and the other students who were of 100 percent Malay heritage “felt that being born a Muslim, you are immediately religious and you are immediately good” [P2:75]. People like her, on the other hand, who are “half and half” [P1:79], “could easily be swayed” [P2:80] because of their partial Malayness and hence the implication of deficient ‘Muslimness’. Whilst the term ‘half and half’ could be taken to suggest balanced, dual backgrounds, P2 found that, despite being victimised in Brunei for being less than one hundred percent Malay, when she went to the UK, the very ‘Englishness’ that had singled her out at home was also found wanting there. It did not enable her to feel at home; “I could not fit in there either” [P2:117]. Having initially tried to strongly assert her Englishness, over time she came to the realisation that, “OK, maybe I’m not entirely English either” [P2:117]. She laughingly relates how she then allowed most of her acquaintances there to “believe that I was from wherever they believed I was from” [P2:117]. Her use of the word ‘entirely’ is interesting in that it could betray a desire for ‘wholeness’ or ‘completeness’ which is echoic of how other participants characterise those they consider to be ‘pure’ Malay [P1:85; SP5:963] or ‘pure’ Bruneian [SP2:978; SP4:661].

Summing up her experiences of religious school, P1 says, “*Ugama* school – that must have been the worst time ever for me” [P1:70]. She laments that even though she was good at “Qur’an reading and everything, my *ugama* teachers used to make me feel like crap” [P1:72]. Her childish earnestness to excel in this context in order to be accepted in the same way as her Malay peers automatically were, is poignant in the face of what she perceived as her teachers’ and classmates’ consistent unwillingness to validate the identity she sought as a good Muslim child. Despite her best efforts, all she remembers is being made to feel inferior in terms of holiness or goodness due to her mother’s original *kafir* (non-believer) status [P1:52-55]. Regardless of her being Muslim from birth, her mother’s ‘lesser’ Muslim identity as a convert appears to relegate her to a lower status in terms of religious identity. Her ‘half’ foreignness appears to condemn her to being forever regarded

as incompletely Muslim in their eyes despite the Islamic insistence on unity in the form of sisterhood and brotherhood.

Another of the three participants whose mother is from the Philippines, was not only sidelined by her mixed parentage, but was also cut off linguistically by her poor Malay language skills. “I was alone because I could not understand what they were talking about,” [SP6:856]. In school she had sought out other mixed friends who spoke English, but in *ugama* school she found herself alone among Malays, leading to her feelings of isolation.

These incidents occurred ten to twenty years ago when Brunei was much more insular. At that time attendance at *ugama* school was desirable, but non-attendance would not have engendered any penalty.

#### **6.4 Non-Islamic religious identities**

Islam is at the heart of Brunei’s national ideology; it is the central tenet of MIB. This suggests that being Bruneian also necessitates being a Muslim. In reality, this is not the case. Four of the participants in this study are yellow-card-carrying citizens of Brunei Darussalam who are not Muslim. Their alternative religious identities reveal that, while Islam is undeniably the vaunted religion, other affiliations are possible, if not easy.

Two of the participants who are Chinese come from a Buddhist background. Notably, neither claims an active religious identity. One hints that the latency of her religious practice may be due to the fact that her Buddhist parents are “not that religious” [P8:755]. She says of herself, “I’m a Buddhist and not very religious. Once in a while I still do go to temple and pray,” [P8:767]. But it seems clear that her religion has a very peripheral role in her life. This may also be due to the nature of Buddhism, which is less dogmatic and ritualistic than other religions. Consequently, it is less demanding of a devotee on a daily basis. In fact P8’s overall tolerance for the rituals of any religion comes across as being relatively low. She reveals that while preparing to marry her Christian (Anglican)



boyfriend, who is now her husband, she “found what I had to go through before having a church wedding a bit difficult” [P8:769]. She describes opting out after only two baptism classes; “I just couldn’t take it. It was not something that I truly believe in, so I just didn’t have fun,” [P8:769]. She also recalls her mandatory attendance at a pre-marriage course, a requirement for a church wedding, and her tone attests to the tedium that involved for her. Her choice of words and general attitude to religion suggest that for her it is an identity that is worn lightly and performed almost whimsically rather than being the centripetal force Islam is expected to be for Bruneian Muslims.

The other participant who is Buddhist claims to be only nominally so, “I guess I should have inherited the religion from my family. We never practise anything,” [SP1:328]. This suggests that, in the absence of parental religious identities, a young person may not necessarily seek to identify religiously, as this element would have been missing from his or her familial socialisation. Consequently, there would not be any parental expectation in terms of following rituals or fulfilling religious obligations. In such a case, if the person actively began constructing a religious identity, it would be because of a self-propelled need or desire to do so. This participant concedes, “I’m supposed to be Buddhist I guess,” [SP1:330], based on her annual temple visit. However, she feels that Buddhism is “not really a religion anymore” and that it has become “mixed up with superstition” in Brunei, Malaysia and Singapore [SP1:332]. She laughingly elaborates by questioning whether people can really tell the difference between *feng shui* and Buddhism [SP1:334]. This echoes the link SP7 makes between her parents’ religiousness and Bruneian culture, and SP8’s allusion to correlation between etiquette and ‘goodness’ in society.

Both of these participants have been impacted personally by the primacy of Islam in Brunei. SP1 has non-Muslim friends who attended government schools where, “They have to do prayers with them. My friend, Chinese, could say it like the way it’s said,” [SP1:216]. She feels, “You shouldn’t make non-Muslims do that,” [SP1:218]. Her choice of the words ‘them’ and ‘make’ are suggestive of a desire to distance herself along religious lines and an awareness of the institutionalised coercion that prevails. However, she herself did have to study and take exams in MIB [SP1:216], though she claims, “I don’t know what

it is,” [SP1:214]. This seems to be quite a common reaction, even among Muslims with P6 admitting, “The concept is kinda blurry in a way, coz you don’t know what really MIB is,” [P6:264]. SP1’s pragmatic response was to treat it like another subject that had to be studied in order to pass the examinations set. Similarly, P8 “didn’t really pay any attention in MIB classes,” [P8:798].

P5, by her own admission the most pious Muslim of all the participants, suggests that it is something that has to be heartfelt rather than intellectualised [P5:123]. However, she does concede that many people could be put off by the way it is presented, “It’s so dry and it’s so like elitist,” [P5:545]. Furthermore, she feels that more needs to be done to “incorporate MIB with also being a global citizen” [P5:545]. Earlier in the interview, she expresses her conflict about the way the *Melayu* (M) of MIB privileges Malays over other ethnicities. She does not agree with this, although she herself is Malay and a beneficiary of such privilege. She has experienced this in relation to the granting of educational scholarships; many of which “prioritise Malays over others and sometimes I do feel that there are those who are more deserving, but because they are Malay they get it” [P5:125]. She rationalises this to some extent by alluding to similar affirmative action policies (for example, *bumiputra* in neighbouring Malaysia). Nevertheless, she remains troubled by the suspension of meritocracy in education and feels that, since in Islam “it teaches us that nobody’s better than anybody else” [P5:128], the M and the B are intrinsically contradictory and “don’t mix” [P5:128]. However, she also feels that without the MIB ideology, “we wouldn’t be Bruneian,” since it is this that differentiates them from other Malays in the region and is what “makes us... typically Bruneians” [P5:130].

P7 has similar reservations about MIB which he expresses more forcefully whilst acknowledging his own advantaged position, “This may sound strange because I am Malay and I’m Muslim, but to a certain extent I view MIB as being racist, supremacist, so I find it difficult to identify myself with the MIB philosophy,” [P7:185]. He feels sad for the “non-Malays living here who are making a difference to Brunei” [P7:185], but who are excluded by virtue of their ethnicity – a non-negotiable identity. This means that even those who conform ethnically and religiously do not necessarily support or even fully understand the

conceptualisation of MIB. Therefore, while it is essentially exclusionary for some, it is also elusive for many. It has been intimated that its obfuscation may be politically motivated, serving to enhance its unassailability.

The sole Bruneian Indian participant comes from a Sikh religious background. She does not talk much about her own religious identity or the extent to which her religion impacts her life. The fact that there are no Sikh temples, known as *Gurudwaras*, in Brunei means any communal worship takes place in the homes of devotees (Mani, 2008:185). She does reveal that her parents had made it known that they would not be pleased if she were to choose to marry a Muslim, “My parents prefer like no Muslims,” [SP5:1686]. She thinks this may be due to the fundamental differences between the two religions. Her mother in particular feels, “They’re just like really opposite and they do stuff we don’t do,” [SP5:1692]. Like SP8, she says she will portray Brunei’s religiousness to outsiders when she leaves to go to university, “Religion – ultra!” [SP5:768]. She describes how religion has become so much part of the culture of Brunei with lots of people attending mosques on Fridays – something she regards in a positive light [SP5:770]. She goes on to qualify this to some extent by drawing a parallel with her own family’s public religious practice when she visits her grandmother in neighbouring Sabah, Malaysia. There, non-attendance at the temple would attract negative attention from other members of the community [SP5:773]. It is possible that similar social pressure is exerted in the Bruneian situation. This participant has experienced marginalisation in schools she has attended due to her non-Muslim religious identity and her non-Malay ethnicity which have been used to cast doubt on her ability to speak Malay. She recalls times when she would have liked to have participated in competitions such as debates, but, “It’s always a Muslim goes. They’ll go for the Muslims. It’s a bit unfair,” [SP5:795].

The most overtly religious of the participants who are not Muslim is the only Christian. He identifies very strongly as a Catholic and actively performs this identity in his homeland. Doing so does however seem to cause him some stress. He uses the word ‘worry’ seven times when discussing his religious practice [P3:308-315]. He also contrasts Brunei with Australia where he studied, “It’s much easier,” [P3:308] and he recognises the reversal of

that situation for Muslims who go to study there. He qualifies this, however, by mentioning the higher level of institutionalised cultural sensitivity that prevails in society there. This helps to mitigate openly racist or discriminatory behaviour. He explains how all Christian religious activities in Brunei have to be confined to the church premises or compound; something he appears to find restrictive [P3:310]. He also asserts that it is the evangelical element of Christianity that engenders its being perceived as a threat, since he feels Buddhists are not subject to the same level of scrutiny as Christians [P3:316]. While he claims he is mostly accepting of this less-than-ideal status quo and rationalises that, “I suppose it’s part and parcel of most religions anyway – a bit of suffering here and there,” [P3:323], he is irritated by what he regards as the “double standard” [P3:323] that exists. His words and tone suggest that he has come to the conclusion that seeking greater religious freedom is futile, as he rhetorically asks, “Ultimately, what can you do?” [P3:323]. Later he rails against what he calls “a veneer of religiosity” [P3:750] that conceals dissimulation. His own sincerity makes such abuse of religion anathema to him. His high levels of wariness with regard to religion seem to have led him to find religious connotations where they may or may not exist. He recounts an anecdote about a time when he was asked to show all the books he was carrying to a female customs officer on arrival at the local airport. All books mailed to Brunei are subject to similar inspection. He believes that she suspected one of the tomes he was carrying to be a bible, possibly because many Bruneian Chinese are Christians. It was in fact ‘Harry Potter’ [P3:806]. His own religious sensitivity may have led to this interpretation as he intuited a connection between her query and his religion. This may have been based on past personal experience or that of others. Alternatively, it may be due to his expectation of religious interrogation, as his lived religious identity seems to be, by his own admission, under a cloud of real or imagined surveillance.

When it comes to the national ideology, P3 says, “There are a lot of things in MIB which I accept wholeheartedly,” [P3:722]. He elaborates by suggesting that many of the enshrined principles are for the good of society. However, he goes on to suggest that the ideology has a stultifying or even regressive influence on the country and is divisive, leading to higher levels of xenophobia. This echoes P7’s empathic interpretation, but in this case it is

expressed by somebody on the other side of the religious divide. P3 also feels that the ‘I’ and ‘B’ are closely interconnected, with ‘I’ being used to bolster ‘B’ and delay threats to its perpetuity. He feels that Islam is the only force that is equal in its reach, exerting control over all, regardless of status. Therefore, it is the best way to quell any disquiet that may arise as a result of higher levels of education and lower levels of insularity that now exist in the country [P3:727]. Despite being Chinese rather than Malay, and Christian rather than Muslim, P3 claims, “I don’t think I am less of a Bruneian,” [P3:778]. He identifies strongly as both Bruneian and a Christian under the overarching influence of MIB, whilst conforming only to the ‘B’ of its designations.

### **6.5 Badges of religious identity: *tudungs* and *songkoks***

Some identities are invisible until they are performed. They are not marked. Others are signified outwardly, usually by the wearing of a uniform or some other badge of identity. Gee (1996:127) lists clothes as one of the elements of discourse, the “appropriate costume” for enacting social roles (see Section 1.2). The *hijab* or headscarf is one of the most universally recognisable markers of identity. The narrative spun by this quotidian piece of cloth is extensive, controversial and emotionally charged. In Brunei, the *hijab* is known as a *tudung*, a Malay noun meaning ‘cover’. All ten of the female participants and the researcher have worn a *tudung* at some stage in their lives, though their reasons for doing so vary as do their attitudes to it.

Despite the fact that wearing a *tudung* is generally regarded as signifying that a woman is a Muslim, in Brunei it is a requisite part of school uniform in government schools. This could be regarded as stripping the headscarf of its religious significance by allowing non-believers to wear it. Conversely, it could be perceived as being inclusive in the sense that non-Muslims are not obviously so in the context of school. Non-Muslim P8 “just saw it as part of the uniform,” [P8:844], though she does admit, “It was very hot and very restricting. I just got used to it,” [P8:824]. The two other non-Muslim participants are slightly less accepting of it. SP1 recalls her initial anger when she found that moving to sixth form also entailed donning a *tudung* – “I was really angry for one week until I got used to it,”

[SP1:220]. SP5, however, feels it is “very unfair” that students who are not Muslim are “forced” to wear it [SP5:680]. SP1 also mentions that her mother had to wear a *tudung* in order to get citizenship – “My mother wore a *tudung* for the first time in thirty years... and she hated it,” [SP1:434-436]. This suggests that putting it on could be cast as assuming a temporary Muslim identity, if such an identity were possible, and this was the price she was willing to pay to get the citizenship status she desired.

### 6.5.1 Proclaiming religious identity

A man cannot dress, but his ideas get cloth'd at the same time.

Lawrence Sterne, 1713-1768

In Brunei, wearing a *tudung* outside of a school context is a visible attestation that the wearer has an Islamic religious identity. Seven of the ten female participants in this study are Muslims and, though all have occasion to wear *tudungs*, each has a different attitude to and relationship with these pieces of cloth.

SP7 has grown up wearing a *tudung*, making it a habitual part of her attire. She says she wears it because, “I want to myself,” [SP7:489], though this is also a decision that gains parental approval. She views it as “a source of identity that you’re a Malay,” [SP7:501], and intends to continue wearing it when she goes overseas to the UK to study. The other participant of the same age claims that, apart from wearing one to school, she only wears it for formal functions [SP6:678]. This decision may or may not be related to her mixed Brunei-Philippine heritage, as she feels, “I wasn’t brought up in a stereotypical Malay family,” [SP6:395]. Her poor grasp of Malay language and attendance at a Chinese school may also have rendered the *tudung* a more optional item of clothing as these factors may have distanced her from more traditional Malayness.

The five female adult participants who are teachers are also required to wear the *tudung* at school, although, unlike in the case of students, this is not a requirement for non-Muslim teaching staff. P6 wears hers only at work and chooses not to cover outside of this context, “I don’t like wearing *tudungs*. I don’t feel I am pressured to wear one,” [P6:112].

Although she feels that, as she gets older, she needs to “fulfil the faith, stuff like obligations as a Muslim,” [P6:266], she does not plan on being strict with her daughter in the future when it comes to wearing a *tudung*, “It’s up to her! I think if you’re not sincere, you know, in these things, it’s pointless anyway, so you have to be ready and sincere,” [P6:270]. Her choice in not veiling means she is choosing to not be outwardly visibly Muslim, but she is choosing to identify as an ‘un-*tudunged*’ Bruneian Malay – a choice which is in keeping with her individualistic personality and is likely one which does not go unnoticed. Incidentally, P6 is a graduate of the local university which means her decision has not been influenced by proximal exposure to outside cultural practices as might have been the case if she had spent a prolonged period abroad.

Another participant who wears a *tudung* only when it is absolutely necessary to do so, describes herself as being “more spiritual,” [P2:412]. “I don’t think I’m particularly religious. I don’t know why,” [P2:408]. She objects to the outward displays of religiousness she sees in Brunei, “That’s another thing about religion here; religion is what you ‘show’ of yourself,” [P2:414]. She reveals her irritation that one of the senior administrators at her place of work chooses to pray in her glass-walled office rather than the more discreet *surau* (prayer room) nearby. “She prefers to pray where people can see her,” [P2:422]. She considers this as typical of religious behaviour in the country. Her tone throughout this exchange is impassioned as she clearly has strong feelings about what she perceives as superficiality posturing as piety. She sums up her view of religion as it is in her country by adding:

Religion is you preaching about how to be a good person. Religion is, erm, telling people that you pray five times a day. Religion is, erm, showing people that you are praying and you bringing your beads around with you everywhere and muttering to yourself. Religion is you wearing the right clothes, wearing your little *haji* hat\* and your white cloak and a huge... UFO *tudung*. That’s religion!

[P2:430].

\*a white hat worn by males who have performed the Hajj

Her strong feelings about this issue are never in doubt and may possibly be linked to her negative experience at *ugama* school where her own status as a *Muslimah* was compared unfavourably with those of one hundred percent Malay ethnicity. The tone was lightened by her reference to the ‘UFO *tudung*’. Her co-interviewee then joined in, leading to animated recounts of their experiences with this particular type of *tudung*.

### **6.5.2 Dressing for *ugama* school**

Girls attending *ugama* school are expected to wear a special type of *tudung*. It is larger in size than a headscarf and covers, not only the head, but the upper body to waist level. According to these two participants, it is widely known as a “*tudung* planet” [P1:441; P2:442], which explains the reference to UFOs. P1 recalls showing up to *ugama* school as a little girl in a headscarf-sized white *tudung*, only to have the teachers instruct her father on how and where to procure the required item, a ‘*tudung* planet’ [P1:444; P1:448]. She goes on to recall her mother’s mirth on hearing that the *tudung* was openly referred to as this. This sobriquet suggests a surprising irreverence, considering the religious connotation with which *tudungs* are imbued.

Neither of these participants’ British mothers opted to wear *tudungs*, despite being married to Malay men, converting to Islam, and settling in the country. Both participants concur that the only times they can recall their mothers wearing *tudungs*, was at funerals [P1:454; P2:453]. Nevertheless, P1’s mother has had subtle pressure over the years from her husband’s family. They invariably give her headscarves as presents in the seemingly vain hope that she will relent and become a *tudung* wearer [P1:456]. She, however, remains resolute in her stance.

P2 tells how recent photographs taken at her grandmother’s house on the occasion of *Hari Raya*, also known as *Eid Aidil Fitri* (religious holiday after Ramadan), revealed she and her sister were conspicuous among her female cousins due to their lack of *tudungs*. This only occurred to her when she was looking at these photographs, but no adverse comments were



made by her extended family about this [P2:466]. If they noticed, they chose to avoid any potential confrontation mentioning it might have caused.

Unlike P2, P1 often wears a *tudung* outside of her work context. She describes how she capitulated to advice from her extended family when she was a teenager, “They would advise me to wear the *tudungs*... and then I think it must have been about Form Four when I just went, ‘Oh, to hell with it!’ and I bought *tudungs* and I put it on for *Hari Raya*,” [P1:467]. She continues to do this for religious holidays and weddings. Her choice of words is more than a little ironic here, given the religious association of her decision, but it may suggest that the social pressure to cover her hair, as transmitted through her already *tudunged* relatives, may have been quite strong and relentless.

“He loves it when I wear the *tudung*. He’d love it if I wore the *tudung* all the time,” [P1:469; P1:471]. She is referring to her Malay father with whom she has a strained relationship. She laughingly explains that, “My dad is now into being ‘holy man’,” [P1:473]. P2 agrees, “They go through phases of being ‘holy man’,” [P2:475], and explains that her own father “has now started saying that he is a ‘good’ person because he prays five times a day,” [P2:477]. These two participants find such contradictory behaviour particularly galling in light of both their fathers’ past behaviours which they confided was less-than-ideal. In their eyes, the fathers’ efforts to achieve redemption by ostensibly religious behaviour and their current protestations of goodness as a result, do not convince their daughters.

Both of these participants have a dim view of people who consider themselves as good based on superficial religious practice, such as wearing big *tudungs* or praying in public – “That is kinda like how most people in Brunei would classify themselves. What’s the point in saying you’re a religious person when you talk about other people and you judge other people,” [P1:479]. She feels these behaviours violate the basic principles of Islam, and if people were truly religious, they would not act in this way. P2 also believes, “The ones who think they’re the most religious are those who are spiteful and very vindictive and just very vengeful and... very jealous and those who put you down and make you feel like

crap,” [P2:481; P2:483]. Such people also tend to “show themselves as being better than you,” [P1:484]. P1 had earlier given an example of a friend who “thinks she’s so religious,” advising her on how to pray, using her prayer beads where others can see her, yet, “She doesn’t go out the house wearing a *tudung*. If you’re really religious, you would. You wouldn’t show off your hair. That’s like one basic thing,” [P1:415]. This seems to suggest that, while the *tudung* is an outward display of an Islamic religious identity on the one hand and as such could be classified with other superficial signs of religiousness, it is also symbolic of true piety and conformity to Islamic norms of modesty.

What emerges is the complexity of these participants’ relationships with their *tudungs* and the wider societal implications of choosing to wear one or not. In Brunei conforming to expectations by habitually wearing a *tudung* is ‘normal’; it garners tacit approval and may even signify a deep personal religiosity. Choosing to go without a *tudung*, although it is socially acceptable, means choosing to be more visible; to blend less; to go against the flow; and thereby runs the risk of the non-wearer being regarded as irreverent, non-conformist or even rebellious. Such tendencies are considered undesirable in a Malay *Muslimah*, and if the person is also speaking English, the language itself, regarded as the conduit of undesirable ‘western’ ways of thinking and behaving, may be blamed. On a more superficial level, the *tudung* has become an essential accessory for fashionable Muslim women and the sale of headscarves has become a very lucrative business.

### **6.5.3 The *tudung* choice**

The two remaining female participants now wear a *tudung* most, or all, of the time. P4, however, found that she couldn’t continue to wear it while she was studying in London. She tells of one occasion when she was bullied at a bus stop in East London for wearing a *tudung* and was pushed onto the street; something that “scared the hell out of me,” [P4:325]. She recalls being forced to “put on a brave face” [P4:325], having left behind the safety of Brunei where a marked Muslim identity is supreme, and finding herself being suddenly victimised for daring to declare that same identity in the UK at a time in history when anti-Islamic sentiment was at possibly its highest ever levels. This incident, and the fact that she was one of only three Asians in her class (the other two were from Japan), led her to unveil. She did so in order to avoid attracting (what would likely have been)

negative attention to herself at a time of heightened tensions in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the US.

This participant does not always wear a *tudung* and dress according to Islamic rules. For some social occasions she removes her *tudung* and moves from being what she calls her “goody-goody” self [P4:459] which is closer to the Malay ideal, to dressing what she regards as provocatively. This alternative identity performance got her into trouble once at the local university. The incident was alluded to by P2. On that occasion P4 was dressed in high heels and tight jeans. She was accosted by “one of the people around there wearing a big UFO *tudung*, which means ‘religious’,” [P2:272]. She was then required to write her full name and registration number, and to sit through a lecture “about how to be a good person... and how she is going to go to hell,” delivered in “a very very condescending tone,” [P2:272].

P5 now wears her *tudung* all the time when she’s outside her house. She also often wears the more conservative style, akin to what P1 and P2 call ‘UFO’ or ‘*tudung* planet’. Her decision to do so is conscious and mirrors a deepening of her faith [P5:409]. Earlier she had explained how the size of her *tudung* reflects her greater depth of understanding, “In the past my *tudung* would be smaller, but then it doesn’t really cover what I need to cover. Then I realised actually it’s all to protect me, but at the same time to please God,” [P5:401]. She confides that she is often mistakenly presumed to be an *ugama* teacher, based on the way she is dressed [P5:405]. She then recounts an anecdote about how an actual *ugama* teacher had greeted her by saying, “Wow! *Ustazah!*” (an honorific title for female Muslim religious teachers) [P5:405]. She felt that even the religious teacher was mocking her for assuming that particular style of dressing. Though said in jest and taken lightly, this anecdote gives a sense of how much aware Bruneians are of each other’s outward manifestations of religiousness.

The time P5 spent in the UK is punctuated by a number of stances with regard to *tudung*-wearing. It coincided with an awakening to her own identity as a Muslim; an epiphanic moment as, “I only really started having faith, believing in my faith... when I was in UK

when it was presented to me in English,” [P5:144]. She goes on to say, “It was only then it clicked... Wow! I’m a Muslim. I remember this was when I started wearing my *tudung*,” [P5:146]. At first she was confident about donning her *tudung* in her new locality, even wearing it in some unlikely settings. She laughingly recalls, “I wore a *tudung* to the club! It’s so tragic!” [P5:455]. She had gone clubbing with her friends because she did not want to be left alone in Brunei Hall (a London hostel for Bruneian students). There she was accosted by “drunk Arabs... they were like ‘Sister! Sister!’” [P5:459]. Later, however, finding herself as, “The only Malay! The only Muslim!” [P5:285] on her university English course, in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, like P4, she felt compelled to remove it; “In my first year I took off my *tudung*,” [P5:295].

Taking off her *tudung* and thereby removing the most visible marker of her Islamic identity, did not protect her from feeling inferior and alienated from her classmates. She was painfully aware that when it came to group work, “Nobody wanted to be with me... They would have preconceptions of me because, remember, it was 2001,” [P5:291]. She reveals that she did not form friendships with anyone on that course as she felt that they looked down on her, compounding her own feelings of inferiority which dogged her throughout her undergraduate study. In her words, “The inferiority issue really stood out in my degree,” [P5:285]. She feels that she underachieved because of the outsider status she was assigned based on her ethnicity and her religion, as well as the associated perception that her English language skills were deficient.

The female Muslim participants in this study all appear to make their own choice about whether or not to wear a *tudung*. None of them suggested that they were subject to any pressure from male family members, except for P1 who referred to her father’s delight at seeing her ‘*tudunged*’. There also seemed to be general acceptance of the requirement to wear a *tudung* at work/college and as a mark of respect at funerals. The spectre of the discursal controlling Muslim male who demands that his wife and daughters cover was not in evidence. The women’s various choices in regard to *tudung* wearing testify to their agency in this matter. They also reveal how this agency is tempered by the attitudes and reactions that dominate the localities in which they find themselves.

#### 6.5.4 Malay male attire

The apparel oft proclaims the man.

William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*

Sartorial expression of religious identity for Malay males means donning a *baju cara melayu* (a two-piece outfit consisting of a long tunic and loose pants made from cotton or polyester in the same colour). This is worn with a *sinjang* or *samping* (a short, often embroidered, sarong worn over the trousers) and headgear called the *songkok* (a usually black velvet cap, similar to a fez). This attire is typically worn on Friday mosque visits and for formal occasions. It conforms to the Islamic requirement that the man's *awrah* or *aurat* (area from navel to knee) be fully covered and at the same time broadcasts his religious identity as a Muslim.

While the issue of female Muslim dress strictures is widely discussed and features in numerous publications, the Islamic modesty rules for men receive much less, if any, attention. Nevertheless, they do exist and Muslim men are required to adhere to them.

A recent headline in one of Brunei's English language newspapers reads, "Observe dress code etiquette at mosques" (Hasan, 2014). In a Friday sermon, imams (Muslim scholars) reportedly said, "The national costume of Brunei, the *cara melayu* attire, is a clear reflection of the Islamic criteria of covering the *aurat*, alongside its refined aesthetic and exquisite traditional art form... it would thus be desirable to upkeep this tradition" (Hasan, 2014). Five of the six male participants are Muslim and have grown up wearing *cara melayu* to the mosque and for important religious festivals, such as Eid, or *Hari Raya Puasa* as it is known in Brunei. It is also worn for school celebrations in place of uniform.

The *songkok* is part of school uniform in all Bruneian government schools. However, unlike the *tudung* for girls, it does not seem to be insisted upon beyond primary schools. None of the student participants in this study wore one to class and the only male Muslim adult participant rarely, if ever, wears one.

The sole Christian male participant often wears a variation of the traditional Bruneian attire, known locally as an ‘MIB shirt’ due to its association with Malays, Islam and Brunei nationalism. He reveals he does so for practical reasons, such as avoiding the need for a necktie and because it is easy to wear. It has the added advantage that wearing it means he is always suitably dressed whatever the occasion [P3:262]. In his case, wearing an MIB shirt has no religious connotations, but, practicality aside, ideologically it is an outward display of his identity as a proud Brunei national.

MIB shirts could be regarded as the Bruneian appropriation of western clothing. They are an example of *campur* (mixing) in that the design involves adapting and localising the western shirt style, replacing the usual collar with a stand-up one and a placket of five decorative dress studs (*kancing*). It is known locally as *butang 5* design. These shirts are often worn with western style suits, allowing the wearer to identify as a Bruneian man of the world, embracing national tradition, religion and modernity simultaneously.

Some of the five male Muslim participants have diverse attitudes to the clothes associated with their identities as Malays and followers of Islam. SP8 begins by stating that he only wears traditional clothes in his signature black colour to weddings [SP8:1125]. However, he goes on to say that he often feels like wearing them at other times, but does not do so because of the adverse reactions of other people [SP8:1129 and 1137]. He admits to being very image conscious and this is a recurring theme throughout his interview. This begs the question of whether an image constitutes an identity or is merely suggestive or illustrative of one. It is clear that these two concepts are interrelated in complex ways (Gioia, Schultz, & Corley, 2000:64). Image could be regarded as a projection of (an) aspect(s) of an identity, how an individual wants to be regarded by others based on his social construction of himself. However, Gioia, Schultz, & Corley warn of “identity’s susceptibility to the vagaries of image” (2000:73) which may cause it to become “unstable and mutable” (2000:64). In SP8’s case, the image he projects could jeopardise his religious identity which in turn impacts his ethnic Malay one.

The image SP8 has of himself as a long-haired, black-clad agnostic heavy metal fan, and his actions in realising that image enable him to perform his chosen identity as a musician. This identity and its associated image appear very much at odds with MIB ideals; a fact he concedes [SP8:1145]. He is aware of this incongruence, laughingly dismissing the wearing of a *songkok* because of his long hair [SP8:1147]. The clash of the *songkok* and his long hair could be regarded as symbolic of the seeming irreconcilability of the identities proscribed for him and his most actively performed ones. The other participant who identifies strongly as a musician says that he is happy to wear traditional clothes when “the context calls for it” [P7:521], such as on special occasions or for formal functions [P7:211]. He admits to being surprised to find himself with a new-found appreciation of the more traditional aspects of Brunei in general, especially its music, on his then recent return from study overseas [P7:213]. He hinted that this may take him in the musical direction of the fusion of traditional Bruneian music with other genres.

None of the participants appears to consciously imbue the wearing of their traditional attire with overtones of religious piety. Nevertheless, the *cara melayu* remains intrinsically connotative of Islamic faith and membership of the Malay fraternity.

## 6.6 Images of Islam

“I show a picture of a man in a beard to my class and they... automatically say ‘terrorist’,” [P5:115]. P5 laments that this happens even in Brunei. She attributes this to the power of the media and the image of Islam it propagates. This anti-Islamic discourse, often expressed in the English language, stems from what Lyons calls “a totalizing western narrative... about Islam and the Muslims” (Lyons, 2012:1). He believes that its genesis dates back to the 11<sup>th</sup> century, to the time of the Crusades and that it has held sway ever since (Lyons, 2012:5). This captures the imagination to such an extent that, even those who are Muslims and should know otherwise, buy into it. “They forget that actually people who have a beard are just following the *sunnah* (habit) or the steps of the Prophet,” [P5:117]. Now beards have become inextricably linked with Islamic fundamentalism, even among Bruneian Muslims. This reaction may also be tempered by the fact that Malay men are not

overly hirsute and therefore tend not to have beards, at least not the long beards that are most associated with fundamentalist tendencies. The only individual I recall seeing in Brunei who cultivated a long beard was an Anglo-Antipodean convert to Islam. This was a visible assertion of his Muslim identity and served to distinguish him from other male expatriate teachers. In recent years many Bruneians do grow goatee beards similar to the one HM the Sultan maintains, quite possibly to emulate him as well as following Prophet Mohammad.

Several participants have spoken of the fear of Islam and of them as Muslims that they encountered outside of Brunei. P5 said she feels sad about this. She mentions the 2009 decision to ban the construction of new minarets in Switzerland. She thinks such reactions are based on “a lot of misconceptions” [P5:429] about Islam. She questions the need to ban these structures, “Why are you afraid of a building?” [P5:429]. This is a question she could only ask if she could “put on my faithless hat” [P5:429]. This seems to suggest that her levels of empathy would allow her to temporarily suspend her deep Islamic identity and see things as a non-Muslim, if only fleetingly. Otherwise, she cannot but acknowledge the religious significance of these spires, since they are a definitive architectural feature of her country’s Islamic identity. In countries like Brunei, which are predominantly Muslim, each day is punctuated by the *muezzins*’ calls to prayer at the five designated times. These melodious calls to worship, emanating from the minarets, are as evocative as Christian church bells once were and are a salient part of Brunei’s soundscape.

SP6 found that, “People in Manila are actually afraid of Muslims,” [SP6:1668]. She reveals that when she visits the Philippines with her family, they are very circumspect about their religious identities. She feels it’s best if “you’re just really quiet and then you just blend in,” [SP6:1668]. Blending in means avoiding all outward displays of religious identity, such as long beards or head coverings. Speaking English also facilitates this since Arabic is the language most associated with a Muslim identity. In the same way, fear of intimidation made wearing *tudungs* untenable for both P4 and P5 while they lived in the UK. Both opted to blend rather than to risk the adverse reactions their portrayal of religious identity might provoke. Similarly, it is wiser for non-Muslims living in Brunei to



avoid wearing any religious symbols, such as crucifixes, as an assertion of religious identity. Such symbols are routinely censored in magazines there and images of religious rituals, other than Islamic ones, do not feature in the media (U.S. Department of State, 2014).

The demonising that exists along religious lines is reciprocal. Though it may result from stereotyping and reliance on reductive constructs, it is nonetheless pervasive and seemingly relentless. Both P1 and P2 recall the horror of their primary school days when they were otherised due to their backgrounds. “If you’re a *kafir* (non-believer or infidel), you don’t ever go to heaven, you go straight to hell,” [P1:52] because “you mom’s *orang puteh* (white person),” [P1:55]. They were also ostracised by their perceived status as lesser Muslims. “I’m not allowed at your house because you eat pork. You’re going to hell,” [P2:49]. These attitudes expressed by young children betray how early otherising takes hold and how resultant prejudicial views can become entrenched if they go unchallenged.

One of the biggest problems with such attitudes is that they are difficult to dispel once they have taken hold. A number of participants refer to the fears their parents have about them going to study abroad. They are conflicted in that, while they want their children to avail of the opportunity in internationally recognised universities, they do not want them to be swayed by western culture. SP4’s parents are encouraging him to study abroad, but, “They actually doesn’t worry about me that much, except for prayers,” [SP4:485]. The reason he gives is that, “There’s too much social things happening in the west,” [SP4:491]. SP3 has decided, “I don’t wanna try ‘bad things’, such as going to clubs or anything,” [SP3:475]. His rationale is that, since such clubs do not exist in Brunei, it would be better if he did not frequent them elsewhere.

Similarly, P7 recalls his parents warning, “Don’t do drugs. Don’t drink. Always pray. Remember God,” [P7:583]. When he returned to Brunei after a number of years in the UK, he felt his mother was “nagging me about going back to the fold” [P7:133]. He also admits that while he was away he “sort of strayed away a little bit,” but insists, “I wouldn’t say I’d become a bad person,” [P7:133]. Here he echoes SP3’s use of the word ‘bad’, hinting at

the subliminal connection between goodness and religion that permeates the consciousness of people raised in an environment where religion is a strong influence.

SP7's parents fear that going abroad will change her and that she will become less reserved; a quality and attitude that is prized in a Bruneian *Muslimah* [SP7:507, 515]. Somewhat contradictorily, she also says her parents "like me to think as a Chinese! Straightforward. Sharp", [SP7:1031]. This is based on the stereotypical idea that a distinctive Chinese mentality that is lucid and decisive actually exists and would be in contrast to the insouciance and vacillation stereotypically attributed to Malays. It is also unusual in that thinking as a Chinese person would in that sense allow less room for Islam.

The concerns of the Muslim participants' parents suggest that they believe it is their children's religious identities that will be most challenged when they leave Brunei to live elsewhere. This does not seem to hold true for the non-Muslim parents whose concerns were confined to safety and behavioural issues, and in Chinese families there were unspoken expectations of success and good behaviour.

The following sections seek to explore the complex interface between identity and religion on a more general level. In doing so, they will examine the ways that religions mediate our sense of 'self', the role that rituals play in demonstrating religious identities, and the interrelationship between religions and politics with a special focus on how they can contribute to national identity and nation building. These issues will be set against a backdrop of increasing segregation and division along religious lines that is causing concern in many parts of the world, as well as the fear that multiculturalism is failing and is being replaced by Islamophobia, radical Islamism, anti-Semitism, and a worrying rise in support for far right political parties in countries such as France and the United Kingdom (Erlanger & Bennhold, 2015).

## **6.7 Religion-identity nexus**

Identifying religiously, especially if that religion is Islam, appears to be a key element in being Bruneian. Even those who are not Muslim are touched by its influence on society there and experience it vicariously. The interrelationship between religion and identity ideation on a general level may be illuminating in understanding how and why it is such an integral part of the identity process.

### **6.7.1 The 'good' self**

The very idea “of what it is to be a human agent, a person, or a self” (Taylor, 1989:3), is complicated by the inextricability of “selfhood and the good... selfhood and morality” (Taylor, 1989:3). These “deep, powerful and universal” (Taylor, 1989:4) inclinations are so deep as to be almost instinctual. Taylor contends that they supersede any other tendencies that may be subject to environmental or cultural variations. Furthermore, in the distant past, “the existence of a God seemed inseparable from the moral dimensions of their lives,” (Taylor, 1989:324). Over time it seems that organised religions based on belief in a God have become conflated with morality, so that ‘goodness’ is often still adjudged according to religious doctrines and fear of God is used as a way to regulate society.

Taylor (2007) reminds us that in bygone days the “distinctions we make between the religious, political, economic, social” aspects of our lives did not exist. Then religion was omnipresent in society. It was “interwoven with everything else” and was not regarded as a separate entity (Taylor, 2007:2). Although he was referring to archaic societies dating back centuries, in some ways this description can be applied to the Brunei of today, since in Brunei the combined forces of Islam and MIB imbue all spheres of everyday life with religious or, at the very least, moral connotations.

Only one participant in this study betrayed any conceptualisation of the possibility of a non-religious society. He spoke of friends or acquaintances who did not believe in God – brave, bold apostasy. He was also the person who felt that society there was becoming more secularised at the time. His atypical and unconventional musical tastes were likely to have led to the awareness of such a possibility, as it would not be readily countenanced or even imagined in his own society.

In recent years it may seem that the influence of religions on individuals is waning in some cultures. Yet, paradoxically, religions are at the root of many of today's most bitter conflicts. A discursal war in English primarily has broken out between the amorphous 'West' and Islam. This renders identifying as a Muslim much more than merely performing a chosen religious identity in some contexts.

Clearly religious power at societal level and religious identification at a personal level are integral features of identity construction. This is particularly so in the locality of Brunei. Religions influence the production of other identities, impacting the political, economic and social lives of people.

The relationship that exists between modernity and religion is complex. Modernisation has not led to the levels of secularisation that were once expected (Berger, 1990:108). In fact, while some societies, most notably those in European erstwhile Christian countries, secularise, people in others seem to be turning to religion in a bid to add meaning to lives lived amid the dispassion of our technological consumerist times. Values that were dominant and sacrosanct in the not-too-distant past have fallen victim to this era. The result is people feel as if they have been cast adrift, no longer steered by these guiding principles, possibly leading them back to a quest for meaning and direction which can be found in religions such as Islam.

Bauman (2004:71-72) discusses Mikhail Bakhtin's suggestion that our 'cosmic fear' stemming from the realisation of our own insignificance in the fact of the wonder of the universe is "used (reprocessed, recycled) by all religious systems" (Bauman, 2001:72, citing Bakhtin, 1968). This has not necessarily changed with time, although, while modernity does not have to make us atheistic, Bauman contends that what it has done is "to make God irrelevant to human business on earth," (Bauman, 2004:72).

Far from becoming irrelevant as Bauman proposes, religion is as robust as ever in many parts of the world. In some countries, levels of religiosity and adherence to rituals are even

increasing. This has led to the abandonment of old forms of secularisation theory, directly correlating the rise of modernisation with the decline of religions as previously heralded by most sociologists, including Peter Berger (Berger, 2001:444). They have done so because of overwhelming evidence to the contrary in all areas of the world, apart from the notable exception of Western and Central Europe (Berger, 2001:445). Today's world, though becoming increasingly scientific and technified, is concurrently witnessing the resurgence of Islam and the ubiquity of religions in all but this one geographical location.

### **6.7.2 Ritual as identity performances**

Rituals are a key feature in the performance of religious identities. They are the outward manifestation of belonging to a particular religious group. It is by participating in ritualistic practices that people demonstrate religious identity. These performances actualise the identity and contribute to its ongoing vitality. Without ritualistic behaviour, many religious identities would be unmarked and unknowable. Kertzer sees ritual as “action wrapped in a web of symbolism” (Kertzer, 1988:9) and suggests that participation in rituals can create a sense of “solidarity without consensus” (Kertzer, 1988:69). Since such participation is usually public and therefore visible to others, it indicates acceptance of a particular religion and being part of a collective identity. However, although people may accept because they truly believe, their ritualistic behaviour alone does not equate to or even imply belief according to Rappaport (1999:119-120), since belief is an inward state that is only knowable subjectively. Although “participation in liturgical performance... neither indicates nor does it necessarily produce an inward state conforming to it,” the acceptance it indicates allows participants to transcend their doubts (Rappaport, 1999:120). ‘Islam’ is an Arabic word meaning ‘surrender’ or ‘submission’, both of which involve high levels of acceptance. Thus, it could be suggested that those who fulfil the ritual observances of Islam can be identified outwardly as Muslims. The extent to which their behaviour may be superficial, empty of true belief, is something that only the individual can know if he or she should interrogate his or her own faith. Taking the view that identities are called into being by iterative performances, if a person habitually engages in ritualistic Islamic behaviours, this would make him or her a Muslim, at least in an outward, nominal sense. Rituals by their very nature are different from other habitual behaviours. Rappaport reminds us that “the formality, solemnity and decorum or ritual infuses whatever performatives the ritual

incorporates with a gravity that they otherwise might not possess (Rappaport, 1988:116). In this sense, the repetition of such rituals could conceivably cultivate stronger conviction, even if its initial instigation was the need to conform to social expectations.

### **6.7.3 Religion and nation building**

The role of religions in the creation and reinforcement of national identities is generally accepted, or at least it has been in the past. The inherently collective nature of religions means they can readily be harnessed to foster other feelings of solidarity or ‘oneness’, acting as the glue that holds society together. Globalisation and the spectre of increasing secularisation are twin threats to that cohesion. Therefore, policies need to be put in place to mitigate the effects of these forces if a nation is to remain unified with a strong national identity.

Discussing the situation in South Africa, Chidester focuses on its policy with regard to religion and education, given that the country was, “Becoming a nation just when nations were supposedly going out of style, as national sovereignty was allegedly being swept away by global market forces...” (Chidester, 2006:64). Brunei had experienced something similar, albeit ten years earlier.

The combining of religion and education is significant, with the latter in the role of vehicle for the former, whilst also being infiltrated, curtailed or delimited by it. When one religion is dominant, this can have repercussions for those who do not belong to the majority belief group.

Brubaker proposes a quadripartite model for the exploration of the interrelationship between religion and nationalism since he contends that it defies satisfactory definition. The first elides the two phenomena and treats them analogously; the second shows how religion explicates nationalism; the next casts religion as a constituent of nationalism; and the final one proposes “a distinctively religious *form* of nationalism” (Brubaker, 2012:3). His aim was not to attempt to provide any conclusive answers or to advocate any of the four approaches, but rather to show the complexity and infinity of questions generated by the ways these two concepts connect (Brubaker, 2012:15). In Brunei, nationalism, religion

and education are conflated to such an extent that any attempt to conceive of them separately seems futile.

## **Conclusion to Chapter 6**

This chapter has examined the ways participants perceive the power religion wields over their identities' construction and performance in Brunei. Only Islam features in the state ideology, meaning that it is woven into the fabric of society to such an extent that it touches all aspects of everyday life from banking to architectural and textile designs. Brunei's progress along its trajectory towards becoming a *zikir* nation will involve changes in its legislature, further expanding the jurisdiction of *syariah* courts. Brunei is becoming more Islamic, at least on a macro level. Only time will tell how this will impact future generations. The participants in this study had experienced an era when civil law based on British norms was dominant and *syariah* law was existent, but less invoked. By talking about their religious identities in English, participants are almost breaking a taboo. There, religion is something you 'are' and 'do' rather than theorise or interrogate. This is particularly the case for Muslim participants, given the perception of an ongoing linguistic battle between Islam and English (Karmani, 2005:262). The chapter that follows deals with the social aspects particular to Brunei, the features of life there that contribute to Bruneians' assertion of uniqueness.

# CHAPTER 7

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*Socio-cultural Identities*



*Through others we become ourselves*

Lev Semyonovich Vygotsky, 1896-1931

## Chapter 7: Introduction

What it means to be, to become Bruneian is lived out in the daily realities of these participants as they go about their ordinary routines. This chapter explores some of the cultural symbols and practices that they feel most resonate Bruneianness for them in their society. These idiosyncratic preferences, behaviours and attitudes construct the Bruneian self-images of those who live in this locality, as well as revealing them to, and differentiating them from, others. Society in Brunei may not be as organic and self-determining as western democracies aspire to being, given the higher levels of orchestration, concomitant with the ideological apparatus of MIB. Nevertheless, at an individual level, people constantly construct identities in Brunei that they regard as local by their patterns of interaction, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, and their worldly preoccupations. These performances are mediated through the national educational system which exposes them to new identity possibilities. This has given life there a possible duality, or at least a dimension it might not otherwise have had, through the choice of a bilingual model, making identifying in and through the English language as much an assertion of Bruneianness as it is in BNM, their mother tongue. The social themes that have emerged give a sense of participants' ordinary lives, their everydayness, but also capture what is particular to them in their locus. However, SP7 warns, "Bruneians do reserve themselves sometimes, so it's kinda hard to know who they really are, how they really act in real life," [SP7:1709]. It is hoped that how they claim to act will allow some insight into how they self-define.

### 7.1 The Bruneian dream

Life as an adult in Brunei is premised on what P5 laughingly refers to as "the Bruneian dream" [P5:255 and 257] – to secure a government job, get married and have children, preferably in that order. At the time this research was conducted all of the adult participants had achieved the first element; three had also realised the second, and two of these were actually living the totality of this dream. Bilingual education, that is increasingly in English, and subsequent success in English-language-medium, external examinations have made this possible. The eight student participants were pursuing that

same dream by applying for scholarships to study in overseas universities so that they too would have the requisite qualifications to be considered for government employment in the future. However, one of them is critically aware and has already decided to seek employment in the private sector, feeling that this dream may soon have to end because government service is “already saturated” [SP2:926], and if Bruneians persist in waiting for such jobs, there will come a time when “it’s impossible” [SP2:926]. His words were prophetic. That time may be nigh as HM used his 2015 birthday *titah*, typically one of his key policy speeches each year, to entreat his citizens to “improve their work ethics” and to “stop waiting for government jobs (HM: Stop waiting for government jobs, 2015). It could be that Brunei’s days as a rentier state are numbered due to the finiteness of its resources and the prevailing low price of oil (Vanderklippe, 2015; International Monetary Fund, 2015).

The family remains the cornerstone of society in Brunei; its prominence boosted by both religion and tradition. P7 remembers noting that, “Children are much more willing to argue with parents” [P7:615] in the UK. Conversely, he characterises most Bruneian families as being more deferential and respectful. For them, “The idea of speaking against your parents... is an alien thing,” [P7:639]. It is also common for adult children to continue to reside with parents; something P5 considers “so Bruneian – this is what differentiates us from Malaysians and Indonesians,” [P5:197]. She refers to the fact that even though she has seen this practice often ridiculed on television programmes, for them, “It’s just normal. People in Brunei don’t go out and rent a house with friends. Nobody does that,” [P5:197]. Both of these participants have lived overseas for extended periods of study. They have lived in localities in England where they have witnessed alternative mores. Exposure to other ways of living seems to have led to a deeper awareness and re-evaluation of their own social norms and possibly even a more confident assumption of these as the distinctively Bruneian social order. Nevertheless, P7 believes that the time spent abroad has changed him significantly – “and I think it’s for the better,” [P7:365]. He does not think this is true for most Bruneian students, suggesting that many come back as they left [P7:363].

This raises the issue of whether it is even possible for anyone to leave and then return unchanged, despite the fact that outward appearances and behaviour may suggest that this is the case. Taiye Selasi suggests that, “All identity is experience,” (Selasi, 2015, para. 3m51s) and experiences are lived locally in whatever place one finds oneself. Going abroad to study and live for a number of years, means developing and performing new identities adding to existing ones which inevitably change the person involved adding layers to the person who left. The returnee is not the same as when s/he left and cannot but be touched by that experience. The place will also have changed in the interim, nudged by the momentum of our liquid, modern world (Bauman, 2004:26).

## **7.2 Flavours of Brunei**

“I feel food defines Brunei” [SP1:1092]. SP1 refers here to the importance of food in Bruneians’ minds and indexes the intersection of food and identity. Eating as a Bruneian is more than consuming sustenance. It is as much about solidarity, social levelling and rapport as it is about gustation. “Food is culture, habit, craving and identity,” (Foer, 2009:25). This seems like a bold claim at first reading, but on reflection captures the complex ways that food is interwoven socio-culturally. It is not a coincidence that all research interviews were carried out in restaurants or over food which acts as a universal ice-breaker and bonding strategy. Brunei’s food and foodways, while having much in common with neighbouring Malaysia and Indonesia, also have distinctive features, making them uniquely local.

Ten of the thirteen interviews took place in restaurants. The participants chose the venues. The majority opted for mid-range places, serving international fare with the American ice-cream franchise, Swensen’s, being the most popular choice. Pizza was one of the most ordered items, although it soon became clear that some of the participants did not eat this kind of food regularly. A number of the student participants in particular seemed a little out of their comfort zones with regard to menu choices. Only one participant, P7, chose a Malay restaurant; one whose tagline invites patrons to “chill out the Brunei way”. Their choices may have been influenced by the nature of our exchange, by their awareness that

we would be communicating in English, or in deference to my background as a Westerner. Alternatively, they may have wanted to try something new or have selected a restaurant solely for its location. Nobody expressed any excitement about the new cuisines they had or would encounter while overseas. The focus was on having missed or the expectation of missing their local one.

The adult participants had experienced “that craving” [P1:164] for “home food” [P3:646] while studying overseas. P3 “lost about ten to fifteen kilos!” [P3:635] whilst in Australia, having subsisted on what his co-interviewee exclaims as, “Oh my God! That’s the Kellogs diet!” [P4:636]; and while P7 now misses “French food” [P7:417], “Sunday roasts” and “parsnips and all that... and I do miss Christmas dinners” [P7:425 and 427], he concedes that after a time overseas he began to miss *nasi katok* and noodles because, “There are certain flavours that you can’t get when you’re abroad... you can’t really find a substitute” [P7:415]. His words reflect the cultural exchanges his educational sojourn has facilitated and the linguistic features of food which defy translation. *Nasi katok* translates literally as ‘knock rice’. Over time it has become part of Bruneian folklore. It is widely available, especially at night and costs only one Brunei dollar. Its name encapsulates the story of its origin and development. In the past it was common for food vendors to be awakened by after-hours customers seeking a meal. They would knock to request food and a simple dish of rice accompanied by *sambal* (spicy sauce made primarily with chillies) and a small portion of meat or fish would be prepared for them (Purusothaman, 2004). Now the sale of *nasi katok* has become a thriving business as it has captured the soul of the nation and entered its culinary annals.

The juxtaposition of ‘Christmas’ dinners and *nasi katok*, both missed by P7 in different locations, suspend in time his student-abroad, open-to-new-tastes identity with his homesick-exile-seeking-the-familiar one. As he reminisces he is at once both of these. Similarly, P5 recalls her Kenyan housemate’s extreme reaction to her and her compatriots’ use of the highly malodorous *belacan* (fermented shrimp paste) in their cooking. “She’d haaaate it!... she would open all the windows and she’d go out to town and not come back until...” [P5:201]. She concedes that, “There was a part of us that felt a bit offended,”

[P5:201] by this attitude, but roles were reversed when the housemate involved hosted alcohol-laden parties at their shared house. It was then the turn of the Bruneian group to escape the “clash” [P5:201] of culinary and festive inclinations by retreating to their bedrooms until the party ended. The close proximity of bottles of alcohol to the device used to broadcast the Muslim call to prayer [P5:203] in that house also underscores the broader educative value of the time spent away from home in enabling this participant and her friends to identify as tolerant observers of alternative cultural practices whilst all the time performing and reasserting their own religious and gastronomical identities. P5 regarded witnessing at close range such aspects of other cultures that were taboo for her as “part of the human experience” [P5:203] and suggests that her decision to share with people who were neither Bruneian nor Muslim was very atypical for a Bruneian student overseas. Usually a Bruneian would “have a house full of Bruneians and become an all-Brunei house,” [P5:201].

This creation of a home away from home populated only by compatriots may occur for a number of reasons. Students abroad may find comfort in the familiarity of associating mostly with those whose backgrounds are similar to their own, those who know where they are coming from in every sense. This would also enable them to communicate in BNM, ensuring L1 maintenance whilst immersed in an L2 Anglophone environment, and to avoid the kind of culture clashes encountered by P5. Their gravitation towards a kinship group may also be a reaction against the individualism that characterises western societies (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010:23; Leech, 2014:36; Wilce, 1998:81; Hofstede, 2011:11-12). A number of participants speak of the isolation they felt abroad. P3 explains that he did not fit in very well in Australia because he is not interested in “these things which they’re really good at in Australia” [P3:192]. An earlier conversation with P3 sheds some light on what he means. He recalls the difficulty of making friends in Australia, especially if one was not part of the local drinking culture. He also discusses how female students who were strongly feminist in their views dominated discussions in his university seminars with their ‘aggression’ eventually leading to the silence of the other students.

Both P4 and P5 also found the experience of studying abroad alienating. P4 recalls her failed attempts to make friends on her course and reveals that an English girl dropped the course in protest on finding that P4 had achieved a higher grade for an assignment because, “She thought that it was ridiculous,” [P4:665]. This is an example of native-speakerism (Holliday, 2006:49) in action with the said English girl presuming her own ascendancy along linguistic lines based on her English L1 speaker identity. P5 was haunted by feelings of inferiority and talks of being “the only Malay Muslim girl in the class” [P5:283]. Her feelings of inadequacy were intensified by her awareness that the others perceived her as such [P5:295] and that when it came to group work, “Nobody wanted to be with me,” [P5:291]. As this all happened in the immediate wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York, it may even have been reactionary ostracism. It meant that young people such as P4 and P5 who had lived and grown up in a highly group-oriented society were thrust into a situation where they were not only alone, but in some cases were maligned because of one or more of their identities.

Allusion to the ascriptions of ‘individualistic’ and ‘collectivist’ to western and eastern cultures respectively is not meant to be reductive or essentialist. It is acknowledged that all societies and people are somewhere on a continuum between these two and that their positioning on it is subject to constant change. However, since a majority of the participants (11 out of 16) expressed a clear preference for shared interviews and/or the presence of the student liaison, it is a salient feature of this study. Brunei’s geographical location in the East means it is likely to have a collectivist orientation. This is compounded by its majority religion and the MIB ideology, both of which emphasise group membership. In this way the participants’ culture as “mental software” (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010:5-6) means they are likely to be ‘programmed’ to favour group level interaction rather than individual participation. Only two of the adult participants (one male, one female – both Malay) and three of the student participants (two male – one Malay, one Malay-Chinese, one female – Chinese) were willing to do solo interviews.

None of the adult participants who are Muslim had encountered any real difficulties in procuring *halal* (allowed) foods while they were abroad. This is likely because of the

significant market for *halal* food in the UK; a market which is growing exponentially with 2014 estimates valuing it at £1 billion (Power, 2014). However, many agreed that, even when attempts were made to recreate Malay dishes in other places, “It was never the right type,” [P2:168] because, “They try and imitate it, but it’s just not the same. They try and make it more English,” [P1:169 and 171], “They can’t do it in England,” [P2:172]. The ‘they’ to whom the participants refer include all chefs and cooks they encountered in restaurants abroad, even famous ones such as Antony Worrall Thompson [SP1:173]. This is in stark contrast to the notion that the former coloniser is the standard bearer in all things. In the words of P5, “You always think like everything British or everything Caucasian is ok,” [P5:73]. This does not seem to apply to food.

The student participants, at that time getting ready to leave, anticipated missing Bruneian food. SP2 listed food before family and friends – “the market food especially.. You know, the ones that you can’t find over there,” [SP2:120]. Like P1 and P2, he finds the foreign approximations of, for example, *satay*, to be a poor substitute for the Bruneian version. He also alludes to problems he expects finding *halal* food readily in Queensland, Australia [SP2:122]. SP4 is “worried about food” [SP4:705] as is SP7, who will miss her mother’s cooking, especially her *ambuyat* (sago) – Brunei’s national dish. SP2 also refers specifically to this dish that is unique to Brunei [SP2:484 and 496]. Eating *ambuyat* is performing Bruneianness in a gustatory sense. For some it functions as a rite of passage, prior to embarking on a course of study abroad, and an act of reaffirmation upon return. It has strong traditional ties and is thought to have been first discovered by the indigenous Iban many centuries ago (Yunos, 2009). However, it is believed that it was during the hardship of the Japanese occupation during World War II that it became more mainstream [SP7:354 and 356]. It is notable that this iconic dish is mentioned by the student participants, rather than their older counterparts, hinting at a possible revival or reassertion of traditional culinary choices in the face of the growing globalisation apparent in the food industry. It may also be that the imminence of departure calls to the fore all that is evocative of the homeland.



### 7.2.1 Untranslatable tastes

Many of the participants list the food items they have missed or expect to miss and those that are prized in Brunei, reciting their names with reverence and love. Almost all of these are named only in Malay, as if translating them would diminish them in some way. Rendering them only their own first language could be interpreted as an assertion of ownership, insulating them from the reduction of literal translation into English; a linguistic approximation of ‘failed’ culinary attempts to reproduce them elsewhere. P1 misses all the *kelupis* and the *rendang* [P1:151]. P2 recalls, “I missed my *roti telur*... my *satay*... my *nasi lemak*... I think those were my three,” [P2:165]. Her spontaneous uses of the possessive pronoun ‘my’, in addition to her highly animated tone, attest to her strong connection to these foods. In the same way, the word ‘delicious’ is rarely uttered. Even the STM equivalent, *sedap*, cannot convey the level of relish and appreciation with which the BNM word, *nyaman*, is infused. Using *nyaman* is insider code, capturing and conveying the essence of the Bruneian sense of deliciousness. SP1 will miss homemade *keropok* and durian (the fruit most favoured in Brunei) [SP1:1101 and 1107]. However, she considers that Bruneians are “always eating” [SP1:1093] and disapproves of the tendency to charge excessive amounts for refreshments to the allocated government budget for events. She also frowns on the habit of unabashedly filling empty containers, that people have purposely brought with them, full of food from these buffet tables [SP1:1093]. This practice is known as *tapau* – a Hokkien Chinese word meaning ‘takeaway’ – and is common in Brunei. In fact refraining from ‘*tapauing*’ may even be regarded as breaking ranks with the group which makes SP1’s sense of its impropriety somewhat unusual. The word has entered the everyday vocabulary of Bruneians and of long-term residents, many of whom may not know of, or stop to consider, its Chinese etymology. This attests to the culinary multilingualism that is a natural feature of food-related exchanges in Brunei.

The key issue that this multilingualism around food raises is that, for the performance of Bruneian gastronomic identity, one language is not enough. English is not enough. Food is naturally multilingual. Participants need at least two languages to discuss this identity in the research context. Similarly, people who go to work and live in Brunei are expected to learn the local food terms, even if these are the only Malay or Chinese words they acquire.

In this way conversations around food blur the arbitrary divisions between languages as discrete, bounded entities (Blommaert, 1996:209, citing Fabian, 1986; Makoni and Meinhof, 2003:7; Makoni and Pennycook, 2007:1-2). So although their use of Brunei Malay food names may be ‘normal’ and unmarked, discussions around food are still notably and necessarily heteroglossic.

Since Brunei is predominantly Muslim, certain food items are proscribed or curtailed. This has implications for those who are Bruneian but not Muslim. The ban on the sale of alcohol began in January 1991, in line with the intensified propagation of the MIB ideology (de Vienne, 2015:140-141). P8 feels the country is becoming increasingly restrictive with regard to social activities [P8:517]. She recalls that when she first returned from overseas there were more venues for socialising, making her feel, “I really have a life in Brunei,” [P8:523]. However, by the time of this interview, many of these had been closed down and internal security personnel were conducting more frequent raids. She contrasts Brunei unfavourably with its Muslim neighbour Malaysia, which “claims itself to be a religious country, but people can drink” [P8:531], and laments, “It seems that Brunei has got no freedom. You know, we’ve got no freedom here,” [P8:531]. SP5 remembers hearing stories of a time in the 1960s and 1970s when, “Brunei was actually really, really free! They had beer and everything,” [SP5:464]. This prohibition of alcohol also gives rise to one of Brunei’s best known identities internationally – that of a ‘dry’ country. This is ironic, given its geographical position and vaunted identity as a guardian and protector of ancient rainforest. P8 suggests it damages Brunei’s hopes of economic diversification, asking, “How would you expect tourists to come to the country because I have heard quite a number of tourists complain this is such a dry country,” [P8:527]. These two non-Muslim views, equating the availability of alcohol with freedom, are counterbalanced by those who regard it as *haram* (forbidden) due to its harmful and mind-altering properties from an Islamic perspective. Alcohol is also associated with ‘western’ behaviour and is one of the temptations parents worry about when their children leave to study abroad. SP5 laughingly recounts her parents’ warnings, “No clubbing. No drinks. No guys,” [SP5:482]. SP3 feels parents are “afraid of the decisions they make as young people... in terms of lifestyle” [SP3:456 and 461]. Similarly, “They think that I will not pray much... because there’s too

much social things happening in the West,” [SP4:491]. Nevertheless, this is a risk they are willing to take, given the advantages that a qualification from an overseas university can bestow.

### **7.3 Being anonymous**

Being unknown or going unnoticed can be difficult if not impossible in Brunei. “You know everyone in Brunei... You can’t be yourself in Brunei,” [H1:236]. He and his wife, P6, are frustrated at the inadvisability of voicing dissent or even constructive criticism for fear of negative repercussions [P6:246 and 260]. They believe that this has a stultifying effect on society and that it limits creativity [H1:245]. SP2 recalls that as a child he enjoyed being recognised when he was out and about. However, now he finds the pressure to interact with acquaintances during chance encounters irritating, feeling, “They kind of judge you and it’s quite annoying,” [SP2:738]. He protests that he does not care about this, but his tone and desire to escape from such scrutiny suggest otherwise. Similarly, P7 suggests that, “Bruneians are known to be very judgemental about people who think they are different from the rest,” [P7:20]. This has the effect of making him “get self-conscious over, you know, minor things like: Am I wearing the right clothes? Am I standing out too much?” [P7:207]. SP2 believes it is “quite natural for us Bruneians who’ve grown up here” to be very conscious of how others perceive them. He is looking forward to going “to a place where no one knows you... It’s privacy,” [SP2:744]. There is a sense that the natural levels of self-consciousness, often associated with youth, are exacerbated by the relative insularity and microcosmic nature of society in Brunei. P4 is more accepting of this, regarding it as “the culture here” and admits, “I often notice myself doing it,” [P4:205].

On returning from overseas, P1 and P2 both missed the anonymity of being in a place where everybody was “just not caring about what other people looked like and what they are wearing. You just get on with it,” [P1:173] and, “I liked feeling less judged. I think there is too much here,” [P2:180]. Both feel that their being ‘mixed kids’ renders them subject to even greater levels of appraisal, laced with negative expectations, especially with regard to their morality. They feel they are perceived as “sluts with low morals” [P2:189]

and as being the “source” of negative western “influence” because of “your blood... because of your white parent” [P2:191].

The conflict they express as a result of their dual heritage, especially during their formative years, is a subject that has given rise to extensive literature. Being British-Bruneian or Bruneian-British puts their lives “on the hyphen” (Pérez Firmat, 1994; Choi, 2010:66). Their lives are defined by it as they identify in varying degrees with one or the other identity according to the circumstances in which they find themselves. The hyphen can function as a bridge between both cultures (Fernandez, 2000) making them mutually complementary instead of oppositional. This suggests that in order to be fully themselves they have to embrace both identities or, as Pérez Firmat expresses it, “Only by becoming double, can he ever be whole; only by being two, will he ever be someone,” (Pérez Firmat, 1987:12). In such a state of biculturality, neither culture is supreme in its contribution. But, both P1 and P2 describe themselves as being “half-half” [P1:79; P2:39] which is suggestive of a more clinical divide into two distinct parts, an either-or rather than a hybridised cohabitation, together constituting a whole. This is explored by Laurel Kamada in the context of Japan. She describes how children of foreign and Japanese parentage are often referred to as *haafu* (half) with its connotations of deficit or incompleteness by their fellow Japanese. This appellation has been rejected by its subjects who have reconstituted it as *daburu* (from the English word ‘double’), giving it implications of a more positive, “additive nuance” (Kamada, 2010:8). Like the participants in Kamada’s study, P1 and P2 later came to appreciate their position, especially in terms of being “privileged in their possession of cultural and linguistic capital of English proficiency” (Kamada, 2010:217) and the advantages which accrue from this with regard to success within the educational system. What had led to their earlier ostracism and marginalisation later helped them to reposition themselves as successful, bilingual, bicultural students. P2 recalls that when she moved to an all-girls school (one of Brunei’s leading government schools) at the age of 14, “I did not feel outcasted for being English... Well, half-English. There, if you were half-English, you were looked up to, so it was completely the opposite,” [P2:89].

It is not only those who are of mixed parentage who rebel against the high levels of surveillance they feel they are under in Brunei. P4, who has two Malay parents, reveals that her sister who was studying in Australia at that time had recently posited the, in her mind, unthinkable notion of opting to live there indefinitely – “She likes the life there. She likes the independence there. She likes that nobody stares at her,” [P4:204]. P4 reacted with outrage, “I said, ‘Are you crazy? Are you nuts?.. Do you know how much daddy has spent for you? And how much the Government has spent for you?’” [P4:195 and 197].

P5 links her teacher-identity to the fact that she cannot go out without being recognised. She is conflicted about this, enjoying it on the one hand, yet missing going unrecognised and envying her sibling, the invisibility he enjoys through living in the Arabian Gulf. At that time she was hoping to embark on another course of study outside the country, but confesses to feeling afraid because this time she would be alone without the support of her compatriots [P5:353]. Nevertheless, she insists, “I want to be away... just get away from everything,” [P5:399].

Bruneian society is marked by higher levels of intimacy and familiarity than are possible in more populous countries. This effect is further intensified by the tightly controlled political situation and the prevailing culture of conformity – “You don’t wanna be the odd one out,” [P6:276]. As a result, people are acutely aware of themselves and those around them. It is common to hear people refer to themselves in relation to somebody else based on, for example, schooldays stratification. Classmates today become colleagues or business rivals in the future and people remain conscious of their own position in relation to those around them. P6 remembers of a colleague, “She’s my junior... two years junior,” [P6:198 and 200]. In the same way P4 recalls one of her younger teachers when she was at school “who’s now my senior mistress” [P4:420]. P1 recollects that there was only one other child of mixed parentage in her year and another “two years my junior” [P1:521]. The endurance and longevity of these associations are borne out in an anecdote P4 relates about her father who received an invitation to the wedding of the daughter of one of his classmates from secondary school, even though there had been no communication between them in the intervening thirty plus years [P4:226]. People remember and expect to be remembered,

giving relationships forged during schooldays more extended significance than is usual in many places.

Bruneians' lingering awareness of school-day hierarchy also extends to knowledge of each other's educational qualifications and achievements. For anyone not born into the aristocracy, education is the key to upward social mobility and success. According to P5, "Almost all the successful people in Brunei now are scholarship holders. None of them paid for their own education," [P5:629]. This means that education, particularly tertiary education, and the associated English language have a pivotal role in enabling Bruneians to perform as educated persons. Their regular repeated actions and words construct this identity into being, yet it is always in a state of becoming with each iterative action or utterance building on those that have preceded it. According to Butler, identity is neither a pre-existing condition which gives rise to related behaviours, nor a role capable of expressing or masking an inner 'self'; a concept whose existence she suggests may be a "form of essence fabrication" (Butler, 1988:519, 528). Enactment of this identity serves as a conduit for the performance of other identities, such as those of student, traveller, foreigner, teacher, among others. In this way it is the gateway to these and the many other potential identities that its achievement can entail.

Remembering people is expected and important, "If not, you slight a lot of people," [P3:230]. Names are also very important and, "You have to get it accurate. Otherwise, you know, you piss a lot of people off," [P4:226]. This is particularly the case at formal events where all the important people present are greeted initially using their full titles, names and positions. P4's neighbours refer to her and her family as *orang bukit* (literally 'hill people') because she lives in a big, impressive house that is incidentally on elevated ground and comes from a wealthy family [P4:98 and 100]. She herself demurs, protesting that her idea of *orang bukit* is "the Jerudong people... those *pehin*, *pengirans*... all those titled people with the flags," [P4:105]. Although the words *orang bukit* may in the past have referred to aboriginal tribes people (Fenton, 2010:1966), they have now evolved a new meaning to reference those perceived by others as having elevated status in society. This is ironic because, although those whose ethnic autonym was *orang bukit* (likely based on their

habitual settlement or foraging locations), remain as one of the dominant Malay groups, their name has been usurped. Now it functions as an internal ‘othering’ device to metaphorically describe people in an elevated social position. “Status here is important,” [P4:247] and those who are “well connected” [P3:208] are subjected to even greater levels of public scrutiny as members of eminent families.

P8’s British husband “always finds it very weird” [P8:616] that Bruneians not only know the make and model of each other’s cars, but actually memorise the licence plates. In addition, they expect to be recognised and acknowledged while driving. I can attest to this from my own experience as a driver there. On many occasions I was chided for not noticing a colleague or friend whilst stopped at traffic lights. At other times I had my car registration number relayed to me to my puzzlement. Having grown up with this, P8 does not find it unusual. She believes, “There are certainly a few things that are, like, very Bruneians,” [P8:624]. This preoccupation with car licence plates is one of them. She concedes it is “not really a western thing” and, although she can’t explain it, “I don’t know either... but if you want to live in Brunei I guess that’s what you have to learn,” [P8:618]. Despite her husband’s disconcertion about this issue, she considers him to have acculturated very well. In her words, he has “adopted some of the Bruneian traits... Sometimes I feel that he’s more Bruneian than I am because he’s, like, too laid back... too relaxed, too go-with-the-flow,” [P8:702 and 708].

“If you don’t have a car in Brunei, it means you’re poor,” [SP8:1205]. “A lot of people see it as a social symbol; social gloss in a way. People can really afford to show off here,” [SP2:1014]. Consequently, it is almost unthinkable for a local to take public transport. P5 emphatically states, “I’ve never been on a purple bus; never ever in my life... I would never go on a purple bus because, oh my god, what does that say about me?” [P5:261]. She initially prefaced this statement with an inclusive ‘we’, indexing all Bruneians, but later retracted it, fearing, “Probably ‘we’ sounds really bad,” [P5:263]. Luke refers to this ‘we’ as “that sneaky pronoun” and advocates consideration of not only who it gives voice to, but also who it silences (Luke, 2000:449-450). Here, and throughout her interview, P5 repeatedly uses this “pronoun[ ] of solidarity” (Luke, 2000:449), exuding the confidence of

someone who feels she belongs and can speak on behalf of her group. On this occasion however she becomes conscious that it may sound arrogant.

P5 elaborates by explaining, “Going on a purple bus means you’ll be going with foreign workers and people who can’t afford a car. I’d rather stay at home,” [P5:263]. She acknowledges that her attitude to this is not good, but it is nonetheless the way she feels. It is also quite unexpected coming from this participant who describes herself as spiritual, frowns on excessive debt, and advocates greater equality of opportunity within the education scholarship sector. She is surprised that another participant, P3, has on occasion taken the bus and, while she admires him for it, for her it remains a step too far. She did take buses in the UK because she had to, but, “I hated it,” [P5:269]. Her strong reaction to the relative inconvenience and, in her mind, indignity of public transport could be just that, but it may also be indicative of how insidiously notions of social status, as evidenced by car ownership, have permeated the psyche of modern Bruneians. P5’s anticipated mortification at the prospect of taking a bus in her home country is likely to be greatly out of proportion with what the actuality would entail, but it is real to her and she would never choose to jeopardise her social standing by using this mode of transport in Brunei.

Cars are not only important within Brunei, they feature in how the country is viewed externally. “Wow! You Bruneians! Look at your cars!” [SP1:305]. SP1 recounts her Malaysian cousin’s comment. While overseas P1 recalls being asked, “How many cars do you think he has?” [P1:402] in relation to the famed car collection of HM the Sultan. “Their perception of Bruneians – rich – the Sultan is rich; he’s got 200 cars,” [P7:717]. The Sultan’s penchant for luxury cars seems to have captured the imagination of his people – “My dad bought a jaguar,” [SP7:1588]. She highlights the importance of a “prestigious brand” and lists car manufacturers Porsche, BMW and Mercedes as appropriate status symbols [SP7:1650]. SP1 also alludes to cars as a public demonstration of affluence and success, and considers that her own father “compensates with a big car” [SP1:1006] for his shortness of stature which compels him to display his financial prowess. SP6 speaks of one of her relatives who “has more than 20 cars... Every one of their cars, it’s either a BMW or a Mercedes,” [SP6:1127]. Prominent families such as these take licence plates a step



further and use them as a family identity. SP6 is aware that, “All the cars have 23” in that particular family. She goes on to discuss the trademark numbers of various high-ranking families in Brunei who choose to be linked and identified by their car number plates [SP6:1139].

Contrary to the prevailing trend towards ostentation, SP4 explains that his father has advised him “to be discreet” in his choice of vehicle so as to not attract undue attention [SP4:213]. This has caused him to re-evaluate his earlier, more typical desire to “drive a Humvee” [SP4:211]. His father’s job in fighting corruption means that, “In my family it’s about discipline,” [SP4:241] and such circumspection fits with his desire “one day, to be a policeman, like high-ranking of course!” [SP4:211]. He is critical of what he regards as a “mostly Muslim” tendency to overreact to minor car accidents which he attributes to people being “too arrogant lah” [SP4:187]. P8 who is Bruneian-Chinese feels it is ridiculous, “If you have an accident..., some Malays get out of the car; the first thing that person will ask you is, ‘What is the colour of your IC?’” [P8:644]. The implication seems to be that the holder of a yellow identity card would be in a stronger position than an individual who had a red or green one regardless of which party was at fault.

In pursuit of ‘the Bruneian dream’ and in keeping with Islamic teachings, marriage is regarded as a natural and highly desirable step. As a result, many young people feel under considerable pressure to find suitable partners. Wedding ceremonies in Brunei retain all the pomp, splendour and traditional rituals of those in the past, and people often feel obliged to attend as non-attendance can cause offence. According to P3, it “all boils down to face... the whole issue of face,” [P3:236]. Attending is a way of showing respect and establishing social cohesion. P6 feels pressurised to attend by her mother who would “rather have us there than having to make up excuses,” [P6:308]. The younger generation’s attendance at these functions may also be connected to their sense of filial duty [P7:617], knowing that the older generations are sensitive about such matters.

P5 reveals that since she is single at that time, “A lot of people have been trying to pair me up,” [P5:433]. However, she reveals that both of her most recent relationships had fallen

victim to the lure of advanced degrees abroad; “I was sort of seeing this engineer from Shell and then he left to do his master’s.” The next relationship involved a lecturer, “but he left to do his PhD,” [P5:433]. P4 feels, “The pressure is real, especially here,” [P4:474] and this is propelling her to pursue doctoral studies overseas in a bid to escape the well-intentioned, but relentless insistence on the need for her to “meet somebody” [P4:340] so that she can stop being “the only one in the group who’s not with anybody,” [P4:344]. This is compounded by her position as the eldest in her family. Malay custom dictates that if any of her younger sisters wish to marry, “It’s sort of embarrassing for the older sister. So, in order to compensate the embarrassment, then you give something... a diamond ring maybe,” [P4:363]. However, P4 insists, “I don’t want that to happen,” [P4:366] and relates stories of cases where parents have not allowed their younger daughters to marry before older sisters. According to Chinese culture, if a younger brother wants to marry ahead of his older male sibling, there is a requirement that he and his future bride symbolically walk under the hanging trousers of the older brother [P3:385]. Unlike the Malay tradition, there is no pecuniary element involved. P3 is prepared for this eventuality, having been gifted a keychain of a pair of trousers by a well-meaning friend [P3:396]. This gesture testifies to the vitality of such customs which younger generations are still willing to adhere to, at least in spirit, even if they do so in a jocular fashion. Their very awareness of these customs reflects the current will to perpetuate them.

Both P3 and P4 discuss the tendency to pity those who are unattached, since being part of a suitable couple is regarded as the ideal. Eating out alone is something both of them are comfortable with, but in Brunei, “People look at you as if you’re so pitiful. You’re alone! Eating alone!” [P4:407]. P5 also lists this as something she would not do in Brunei. In fact, the thought causes, “Oh, pain in my heart!” [P5:373]. P3 recounts the greeting of his parents’ friends when they encounter him in a restaurant; “*Bujang ka?*” which literally translates as ‘single’, to which he replies, “Yeah, still *bujang*,” [P3:400]. This perception has the effect of making P3, P4 and P5 rethink a practice they have readily engaged in elsewhere due to its dissonance in their own locality where singledom is still regarded as a lamentable state. Conversely, P1 finds that her status as a married woman now protects her

from having her morality questioned by her relatives; “They have accepted me a bit more because, you know, basically I can’t really be living in sin anymore,” [P1:362].

#### **7.4 Weaving Bruneianness**

Weaving is one of Brunei’s traditional crafts which is thought to date back to the earliest chronicles of the country (Yunos, 2008). The woven cloth or *kain tenunan* is harnessed as a means “through which to express the continuity between the past and the present in the creation of contemporary Brunei national identity (Siti Norkhalbi, 2005:1). Traditional textiles remain in common use as a key component of male national dress on an everyday basis. More elaborate and expensive examples are in evidence at all state ceremonies and at weddings where they are worn by both men and women. They are also used as decorative wall hangings and framed versions are a typical souvenir for visiting dignitaries. Donning these woven sarongs confers Bruneianness, creating a sense of connection with Brunei’s age-old traditions recast in modern times, which is very much in keeping with the MIB ideology. The fact that almost all Malay traditional clothes are tailor made means that all kinds of *kain* (cloth) assume a much greater social significance than is the case in other countries.

“I like wearing them. It looks a little bit more professional than normal clothes. Her use of the word ‘normal’ here could suggest that there is a sense of playing ‘dress-up’ involved almost as if these garments are a costume representing Malayness with its concomitant, elevated levels of acceptability. I enjoy the process of buying *kain*,” [P8:495]. Although she is not Malay, P8 engages in the practice of having her *baju fesyen* (a modern variation of *baju kurung*) custom-made so she feels suitably attired for work. In fact, it is common among non-Malay teachers, including expatriates, since the choice of Brunei’s national dress ensures compliance with all Ministry of Education and institutional dress codes. It may also be viewed favourably as a acknowledgement and adoption of Bruneian norms. None of the participants had consciously interrogated their attitudes to others wearing Bruneian national dress other than to admire it if it looked nice (P4, personal conversation, February 10, 2011).

My own experience with *kain* shopping and with wearing *baju kurung*, *baju kebaya* or *baju feysen* leads me to suggest that, although approval for doing so may not often be articulated, it is latent and can have a potent effect on how an individual is perceived. Wearing these clothes is putting on Bruneianness, albeit on a superficial level. It communicates acceptance and openness to local ways as well as willingness to conform to Islamic modesty standards. Alternatively and more cynically, it could be regarded as an attempt to imitate Malays in a sycophantic way in order to secure the wearer's own position.

From time to time the wearing of national dress is taken to another level and all staff are expected to buy the same *kain* so that they can dress uniformly for an occasion such as a National Day parade. This results in the sartorial performance of institutional identity, instilling feelings of both pride and solidarity. The selection of one pattern from the swatches made available engenders unparalleled camaraderie among staff. I recall engaging in animated conversations with teachers from other departments who had never spoken to me prior to this. Witnessing one such conversation in 2011, a young colleague laughingly told me I sounded "like a Bruneian" due to my impassioned recounting of a *kain*-related anecdote. This led me to question when I had become invested in *kain* to such an extent that I could muster such enthusiasm for something that had once seemed unnatural to the point of being alien; something the 'locals' did; something I at one time observed rather than participated in.

Another trend is for families to coordinate the colours of their bespoke outfits for special occasions. Fathers and sons wear plain-coloured *cara melayu* with identical *sinjangs* and that colour complements the usually floral or patterned *bajus* worn by the mothers and daughters. This performance and assertion of familial identity is a remarkable spectacle to behold and when I commented on it I was informed that it is a very Bruneian thing to do. This assertion of distinctiveness may have been fostered and orchestrated at national level as part of nation-building, but it now seems to have become internalised at the level of the individual citizen. Herein also lies a dilemma; could the reaction of being charmed and

finding this endearing lay me open to charges of exoticising or is some element of such exoticising, be it conscious or subconscious, inevitable in any appreciation of cultural difference? How can our differences be acknowledged and valued as diverse, idiosyncratic ways of being our many selves?

This chapter allows the participants to convey how they self-identify in terms of a number of behavioural and cultural diacritics. In doing so, they reveal the particularity of their normalcy by sharing some of the socio-cultural performances of Bruneian identities. Identities are expressed through culture, but that culture is also a core constituent of the identities it mediates. While these elements are illuminative of a participant's way of life, care must be taken not to exoticise them on the one hand or treat them as if they are the totality of who these people are on the other.

Exoticising is one of the key Orientalist discourses outlined by Said (1978) in his polemic critique of the ways in which 'western' scholars constructed the 'Eastern' 'Other'. Treating cultural practices as exotic is patronising and reductive. Nevertheless, their capacity to be performatives of distinctive identities cannot be overlooked. The key determinant is that they are regarded as legitimate norms and are not treated comparatively or judged exonymatively.

Focusing on the visible manifestations of cultural identity can also be regarded as tokenistic and superficial, equating "multiculturalism with exotic food, costumes, and customs" (Wong, 2007:79) – a type of "saris, samosas and steel bands" (Troyna, 1987:318) engagement with culture.

Culture in Brunei remains to some extent a "spatially localised phenomenon" (Gupta and Ferguson, 1992:18) due to its unusual political system and the high levels of social engineering necessary to uphold the national ideology. Cultural norms exert a strong regulatory force over people's actions, though this may often be largely unconscious. They create attitudes that are "so well-entrenched through habit and ceremony, so broadly, even

intuitively honoured” (Stone, 1988:67) that they require little thought, having an almost inevitable effect on behaviour.

Accepting that, “No one is culture free” (Adler, 1977:27) means that all identity performances are necessarily influenced by the cultural norms of the locality in which they occur. In this way culture becomes an interface between the inner person and his/her environment. It becomes visible and knowable through his/her performances. The issue of whether diverse cultural identities are at risk due to the forces of globalisation and homogenisation is one that has been debated extensively in recent decades.

Globalisation is regarded by some as the modern equivalent or offspring of imperialism, especially as it pertains to economics, culture, and the spread of the English language. Among those who are unequivocal about the ways these are linked with one perpetuating the other into present times are Ake (1995), Boyd-Barrett (2009), Haviland, Prins, Walrath and McBride (2013), Offiong (2001, 2013), Petras and Veltmeyer (2001), Phillipson (2009), and Veltmeyer (2005). Others regard globalisation as a more benign phenomenon that enables integration and reduces barriers by focusing on interconnectivity and translocal relationships (O’Hara-Davies, 2011:312). Its proponents include Fukuyama (1992), Scholte (2005), Streeten (2001), Rugumamu (2004), and Tomlinson (2003) who argues that the proliferation of cultural identities is in fact “much more the ‘product’ of globalization than its victim” (Tomlinson, 2003:269). Friedman (2006) writes of a flattening world, where ‘flat’ is synonymous with equalising. Akinboye (2008) and Mazrui (2000) take less extreme positions by acknowledging the conflicting forces that coexist within what remains such a “nebulous concept” (Ho, 2009:9, citing Matthews, 2009).

Beck espoused the notion of globalisation from within or internalised globalisation (Beck and Willms, 2004:169 and 182) that he later developed as cosmopolitization “which means that the other is in us” (Battiston & Beck, 2015). In relation to this study, all three of the positions outlined are applicable. Brunei’s culture was not untouched by Empire. Having been a British protectorate for almost a century, it felt the effects of what Ferguson terms “Angloglobalization” (Ferguson, 2004: xxiii). The suggestion that colonisation was partly

responsible for the fact that “all cultures are involved in one another, none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated and unmonolithic” (Said, 1993: xxix) means that Bruneian culture has always been influenced by and influenced all others with which it has come in contact. In this way, the transcultural flows (Appadurai, 1990) are not new although technological development may have made them more visible in the past decade or two. Undoubtedly globalisation has resulted in some Americanisation and/or Westernisation of cultures, but it has not had the totally hegemonising effect so feared by its critics. Friedman suggests that this is because of “the constant struggle between the homogenizing and particularizing forces of globalization” (Friedman, 2006:478). He contends that the vehicle most capable of creating cultural homogeneity, the Internet, is also the one that enables resistance by virtue of its “potential to nourish diversity”. He insists that the ability to **upload** [emphasis added] allows for the globalisation of the local. This in turn can be “a very powerful force for the preservation and enhancement of cultural autonomy and particularity” (Friedman, 2006:478).

In this sense the cultural flows are not unidirectional. There is flow, contra-flow (Thussu, 2007:4) and confluence when these flows collide, intersect or mix. When this happens, it goes beyond cultural momentum to “take-up, appropriation, change and refashioning” (Pennycook, 2007a:6) at local levels. Tangible evidence of the lack of subsumption by the global, more dominant culture is clear and can be seen on a facile level in, for example, food items. Friedman claims that pizza, the world’s most popular food, is “a flat piece of dough on which every culture puts its own distinctive foods and flavours” (Friedman, 2006:478). In Brunei, pizza has become Bruneianised with Pizza Hut there serving Honey Garlic Chicken Pizza, its signature Brunei variety (Salleh, 2015; Nosepickingexpert, 2015). The fast food industry appears to be particularly vulnerable to being expropriated in the discourse around the merits and demerits of globalisation. McDonald’s has been particularly besieged, especially with the use of its patronymic prefix used pejoratively to signify American influences in many spheres. Examples include McJob, McMansion, McLibel, McPolicy (Quinion, 1996). These plays on words are made possible and accessible by the fact that English in all its varieties is the language that facilitates much of the interconnectivity that characterises globalisation. A country’s level of engagement with

English is therefore often a key determinant of its ability to fully participate globally. This has likely gained currency as a result of George Ritzer's (1993) book entitled "The McDonaldization of Society", indelibly linking the fast food giant with forces of globalisation where they are at their most visible.

### **Conclusion to Chapter 7**

This chapter has showcased what makes Brunei different. It is through cultural performances that national, ethnic, linguistic, and religious identities coalesce and are brought to life. Participants have revealed what they feel is idiosyncratic within these identities and about the daily preoccupations of people living in this locality. These are the features that make them distinctive. The concluding Chapter 8 synthesises what participants say about how they make sense of themselves in 21<sup>st</sup> century Brunei by revisiting the research questions in light of the rich data voiced in their English blended with Malay, Arabic and Chinese – some of their multiple linguistic resources.



# CHAPTER 8

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*Summary & Conclusion*

## *We and They*

*Father and Mother, and Me,  
Sister and Auntie say  
All the people like us are We,  
And every one else is They.  
And They live over the sea,  
While We live over the way,  
But-would you believe it? – They look upon We  
As only a sort of They!*

*All good people agree,  
And all good people say,  
All nice people, like Us, are We  
And every one else is They:  
**But if you cross over the sea,  
Instead of over the way,  
You may end by (think of it!) looking on We  
As only a sort of They!***

Rudyard Kipling, 1865-1936

## Chapter 8: Introduction

Located in “the most loved repressive regime in the world” (Van Oosten, 2012) – an ‘outsider’s’ description that, though democracentric, captures the apparent contradiction, this research has explored how identities’ construction in Brunei interfaces with social engineering and language in mutually constitutive ways. These interrelationships are complex, multifarious, and subject to unending negotiation. They mirror what is happening on a wider scale in both the world at large, the field of (socio)linguistics, and in the ELT industry. Exposure to possibilities, alternative ways of being and acting through English-mediated education, overseas travel and cyber connectivity has made identity an issue for these participants. The extent to which this may not be true for other Bruneians, especially those who have been less successful educationally, or those who identify more strongly with their two Malay languages and heritage culture, is acknowledged. However, that is an area which is a possible focus for future research and is beyond the scope of this present study.

In Brunei, as appears to be the case everywhere to some extent, there is tension between the ancient and the contemporary. The difference there is that, due to high levels of insularity, and concerted efforts to invoke antiquity, it has been better preserved. It emerges from this research that the old lives on within the new. It is no longer static however, but is subject to dynamic reimagining, acknowledgement, and recasting. Some of this is orchestrated in the historicisation project that manifests as MIB, but some is spontaneous in recognition of the cultural value of tradition in creating current senses of selves.

Education through English, extended periods of overseas study, and quotidian online interaction combine to jolt, if not release, the long-established “reference points for the self” (Delanty, 2010:106). Contrary to Delanty’s assertion that “the capacity for autonomy is no longer held in check by rigid structures, such as class, gender, nation or ethnicity” (Delanty, 2010:106), in Brunei the increasing intensification and propagation of the MIB ideology seeks to do just that, to act as a counterforce that ‘guides’ Bruneians’ identity formation. MIB projects and reinforces the ‘ideal’ self that any Bruneian should aspire to becoming, giving an illusion of autonomy in a guise of acquiescent loyalty and fulfilment

of civic and religious duty. Its reassertion in recent years with the concomitant (re)creation of and greater insistence on its three identities appear to fit the narrative of retrenchment, echoing HM's MIB-as-firewall or fortification. Such a "retreat into identity," especially 'fixed' essentialist ones, is a response to "provocation and [anticipated] crisis" (Godrej, 2009). It defensively proffers the safe haven of the known or relatively knowable "against the unpredictability of the unknown and uncontrollable" (Sennett, 2000:176, citing Castells, 2000). In an absolute state the uncontrollable is necessarily uncountenanceable.

Reverting to the notion of 'essence', the idea that identity involves discovery that is "closely linked with the philosophical concept of the daimon or 'true self' " (Waterman, 1984:332), could be regarded as the default, the security blanket of identity seekers. It offers relative definability and illusory tangibility despite remaining a social construct. From this, the oft-uttered claims, 'That's so me,' or alternatively, 'That isn't me / That isn't who I am,' give voice to a person's sense of who they believe they are, emanating from an integrous wellspring of identity. When exploring identity construction in terms of discovery or creation, Waterman concludes that their dichotomous positioning is ultimately unhelpful. Identity is more likely a fusion of initial discovery of situated selves, accompanied by the local conditions and expectations, to be followed later by the creation of the more autonomous agentive chosen selves. In Brunei, this involves finding out about MIB identities and later deciding to what extent one will accept or resist their parameters.

Data suggest that becoming Bruneian involves a complex web of interwoven influences. Essentialist categories, particularly those defined by MIB, have both a foundational and ongoing impact due to their powerful imposition and iterative reproduction "through hegemonic practices and consent" (Darvin & Norton, 2015:44). The extent of this impact is highly contingent on individual levels of espousal or evasion of their delimiting potential. However, it appears that personal identities' construction relies primarily on the combined forces of perspective and experience. These ever-evolving, mutable influences underlie all of the individuated accommodation, reconciliation, and negotiation that take place in order to perform the selves participants elect to become at any given point in time.

## **8.1 Identity – from vortex to marble cake**

I began this thesis by conceptualising identity as a vortex. This physics-inspired simile occurred to me as I struggled to understand and articulate to myself the nature of the phenomenon identity has become. It appealed for its capturing of the fluidity, momentum and unpredictability involved. I found my choice of comparison echoed by Godrej (2009) writing of his experience as an immigrant in Europe.

This research has clearly affirmed the multiplicity of participants' identities, all contributing to their construction of Bruneianness. However, the vortex analogy no longer seems so apt due to the separation of the concentric circles despite their ripple effect. Similarly, Risse (2003) proposes conceiving of multiple identities as nested or "Russian Matruska dolls, one inside the next," but acknowledges that this may involve a relatively static hierarchialisation of identities which is inconsistent with the lived reality as well as retaining the separation. He also considers, "Identities can be cross-cutting" or "overlapping," but this can result in conflictual identities. His third conceptualisation is that of a "marble cake." This is consistent with what has emerged in this study in that, "The various components of an individual's identity cannot be neatly separated." Instead they "influence each other, mesh and blend into each other" (Risse, 2003) to an extent that it is indeterminate where one ends and another begins. This is also shifting and unpredictable with no two cakes turning out to be exactly the same. Such variation reflects the individually negotiated dynamics of combining and re-combining fragmented identities to achieve ever-changing states of subjective oneness. A food-derived analogy is also more consistent with Brunei's strong gastronomical preoccupation.

### **8.1.1 Beyond identity**

Brubaker and Cooper propose three alternatives that could be used to go beyond identity. These are: identification and categorisation, self-understanding and social location, and commonality, connectedness, groupness (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000:14-21). Data suggest that levels of identification with any particular identity play a key role in the degree of commitment to it as evidenced by the strongly asserted attendant self-categorisation. For example, both P7 and SP8 identify unequivocally as musicians; P5 asserts her Islamic piety and P3 his Christianity. All participants appear to be evolving deeper levels of self-

understanding than they might have if they had been in a less linguistically and culturally diverse setting. There is also a strong sense of social location and a keen awareness of the social stratification inherent in Bruneian society. Participants claim to be aware of where they ‘fit’ and betray internalised senses of the expectation of conformity, even if their doing so remains at a superficial level. Saxena contends that this heightened awareness of societal hierarchy can have a long-term silencing effect on their expressions of opinions, especially in the presence of those they consider to be of higher social status (Saxena, 2008:256-257). MIB strives to create and preserve unifying commonality and connect Bruneians by appealing to their national, ethnic, religious, and royalist identities. Participants however calibrate their degrees of convergence towards group memberships in ways that both conform sufficiently for public approval and are in line with their chosen levels of actual identification at any given time.

## **8.2 Revisiting the research questions**

Two questions have guided this study:

Q1: How does the MIB ideology with its strong emphasis on Malay language and cultural norms impact the identity construction and self-ideation of the participants as individuals?

Q2: In what ways does the English language as deployed through the educational system impact or shape the identities construction of these young Bruneians, given its position as both a long-time local language and as a gatekeeper for educational progress?

These questions undergird the discussion and data selection throughout the thesis. Combined, Chapter 4: Negotiating politico-economic identities, and Chapter 6: Negotiating religious identities, have addressed the three tenets of the MIB ideology. Chapter 4 has explored the prescribed identities of ‘Malay’ as determined by either ethnicity or behaviour, or preferably both; and ‘*Beraja*’ or Monarchism combined with nationalist loyalty to the

nation state of Brunei. It has also explored the interplay of these ethno-nationalist positions and economic concerns. Chapter 6 has explored the central tenet of 'Islam' and the ways in which being Muslim or not affects the construction of a Bruneian identity.

### **8.2.1 MIB: commitment and resistance**

To become Bruneian, according to these three essentialist categories enshrined in the ideology, appears deceptively easy. If one happens to be ethnically Malay, being a Muslim follows automatically, as does the expectation of being ruled over by a king or sultan. However, such identities rely on the premise that each can be readily fixed, clearly demarcated, and that those who subscribe to them are homogeneous. In an age of flux and uncertainty, such assigned identities may offer a modicum of security and assurance. They can be particularly attractive if tolerance for ambiguity and an ability to appreciate infinite identity possibilities have not evolved apace with change at societal level.

It has emerged that the participants in this study agentively and simultaneously comply with and resist the pervasive force that MIB has become. Outright rejection is impossible as this could engender social ostracism. Instead, their responses are highly individual, contingent, and calibrated circumstantially, ranging from those like P5 who understand the country's need for it and regard it as making them "uniquely Bruneian" [P5:123 and 125], and SP7 who feels that those who ignore MIB are less Bruneian as a result [SP7:911 and 913]. Conversely, a participant like SP3 jokes that he thinks of the American movie *Men In Black* [SP3:522]. SP1 rejects the notion that it represents Brunei at all, and SP8 feels it gets in the way of his musician identity [SP8:350], though he does value the emphasis it puts on maintaining traditional Malayness [SP8:413]. P8 never paid attention in MIB classes, claiming she was unimpressed by it: "not in awe" [P8:798], and P7 distances himself from the whole ideology, charging it with being racist and exclusionist in orientation.

The participants' attitudes and identities' construction support the contention that identities cannot be totally coerced. Even in the most absolute of regimes with the most concerted efforts of social engineering reaffirmed daily through all political, educational, religious, and social institutions, people seem to be driven by an almost primal need for some degree

of autonomy. This motivates them to strive for self-determination against the forces that exist to subvert it. As P7 says, “The problem is trying to be yourself,” something he finds “tricky” and “difficult” [P7:79] set against the weight of social expectation. SP1 expressed a longing to go overseas so that she could reinvent herself and break out of the mould she had constructed “to fit them” [SP1:781]. Later she planned to come back changed; a change she felt was not possible while still there.

### **8.2.2 Linguistic shape-shifting**

The roles that languages, particularly Englishes, play in constructing Bruneian identities have been explored in Chapter 5. Ever since its inception, the state of *Negara Brunei Darussalam*, initially guided by an instrumentalist separatist language ideology, has enacted policies that acknowledge the reality of the hegemony of the English language in the world (Canagarajah, 2004:141). By doing so, it has empowered Bruneians by adding the global language to their linguistic repertoires and has not allowed reactionary anti-colonial sentiment to lead to its citizens being marginalised or constrained as has been the case in other post-colonial settings. In perpetuating “the valorization of English” (Noor Azam, 2012:180), insisting on the utility of English-as-necessary-resource and actively attempting to curb its cultural associations by foregrounding its relative ‘neutrality’ on an affective level, a linguistic balancing act between Englishes and other languages, especially STM and BNM, has been established. This has allowed for the increasing dominance of English educationally, being countered by greater convergence towards, and affirmation of, BNM nationally.

The participants in this study are some of the many success stories of Brunei’s bilingual BrSE-STM education policy. They have lived and learned in and through both of these languages among others from their earliest years. They have glided, or are poised to glide, through the gate of educational opportunity, thereby facilitating their construction of the teacher or (overseas-)university-student identities that are associated with success and social status in Bruneian society. They have gained “a profit of distinction by using English in ways that are unique to their multilingual and multicultural sensibilities” (Kramsch, 2001:16), as well as adeptly engaging with the English-speaking world. They have created and activated their own voices in English, voices on and in the world that



simultaneously construct Bruneianness in their locality. In doing so, they have taken ownership of English as one of their languages, they can be ‘users’, ‘speakers’, and ‘talkers’ of Englishes, dependent on the communicative context. While Shibata (2011:72-73) links the word ‘use’ in terms of the English language to a lesser form of expression in that it infers that its ‘non-native’ speakers can never truly own it, but merely employ it as a tool, my designation of research participants as ‘users’ instead acknowledges that on occasion they will use English expediently. In fact, discursively, such an approach to English is promoted in Brunei. Kramersch refers to a distinction made by one of Hinton’s Vietnamese-American research participants between the ability to ‘speak’ a language and ‘talk’ it:

As for English, I do speak the language but I don’t think I’ll ever talk it. English is the language that flows from the mind to the tongue and then to the pages of books. [...] I only talk Vietnamese. I talk it with all my senses. Vietnamese does not stop on my tongue, but it flows with the warm, soothing lotus tea down my throat like a river [...] it saturates my every nerve with healing warmth.

Kramersch (2001:17, citing Hinton, 2000).

Kramersch warns of the need to enable language students to bridge that gap between speaking and talking in helping them to fully appropriate English (Kramersch, 2001:18). Participants’ involvement in, and nuanced responses to, the issues raised in interviews, suggest they can traverse such gaps at will according to situational and interlocutory cues.

Nevertheless, participants continue to negotiate who they are amid the extremes of conflicting forces that abound. Lives are lived and identities are forged in the in-between, the shades of grey, Bhabha’s “third space[s]” (Bhabha, 1994:53-56), between competing rhetorics, ideologies and languages. Movements towards de-territorialisation, economic cooperation, religious tolerance, liberalist social policies, empowering inclusive rhetoric have been beset by backtracking to reassertion and reinstatement of old essentialist ways of thinking that obdurately refuse to die. In the field of linguistics and ELT, calls for

“inspirational pedagogy that is informed by an explicit image of the student as a producer of culture” (Cummins, 2011:60) and educational environments where languages are regarded “as necessarily blended, multiglossic and transcultural” (Luke, 2002:108), often go unheard. Instead, concerns voiced by Phillipson (1992), more than two decades ago, remain at the fore. Colonially-laced discourses and practices still have the power to rise from the ashes as evidenced by the latest retrograde initiative to be imposed on Bruneian English teachers, such as the adult participants in this study, in the form of outside mentors.

### **8.3 Hyphen: friend and foe**

MIB authorises those who are Malay “to position themselves as the ultimate arbiters and managers of national values, traditions and, crucially, space” (Skey, 2011:44). This means that not only do they control the environment and their own presence in it, but they also determine the level of visibility or otherwise of other groups within Bruneian society. Notwithstanding this, even those who are of Malay ethnicity define themselves as Brunei-Malay to differentiate themselves from Malays in Malaysia; while other groups are assigned or self-assign hyphens that separate them from the dominant group. In this way, the hyphen can function as either a tool or a weapon, contingent on whether it is chosen or imposed. If chosen, it is indicative of a conscious desire to blend identities, but if imposed, it can marginalise and exclude. For example, the hyphen in my name is chosen and, though it may be read as ‘feminist’, it is not consciously so, but rather is a combination of my desire to keep my ‘own’ name indexing my Irishness whilst simultaneously accommodating my cultural convention relating to marriage. In this way, I claim a blended identity. It could similarly be argued that everybody in Brunei is “living on the hyphen” (Choi, 2010:66-73) – something that is done even by ethnic Malays in order to assert Bruneianness. “No one [there] is purely one thing” (Said, 1993:336). Their identities are composite, blended and hybrid.

### **8.4 On the tightrope between friend and stranger**

This thesis departs from traditional ethnography by including some of my connected life experiences. This has been rationalised in Chapter 1 and Chapter 2. Nevertheless, who I

am and my relationship with participants needs to be considered for its impact on the data. Potentially, it could have made them more ‘reckless’ than they might have been with somebody they did not know as well. The length, informality and relaxed settings of the interviews may have also lulled them into a sense of security. As the thesis unfolded and their words came to life again, I became more aware of the risks many had taken, especially when it came to discussing sensitive subjects like politics and religion. Taking such risks in performing the identity of research participants further points to their agency and refusal to be mouthpieces for their country’s ideology. There is also the distinct possibility that discussing such issues in English allows for freer expression in that participants may have internalised a sufficiently utilitarian and dispassionate attitude towards the language. Such affective disconnect is insidiously promoted in discourses around language use. This allows for a more assertive, critical stance. In contrast, the umbrella concept of *bahasa* that covers Malay, especially BNM, imbues it with higher levels of emotive connotations which could lead to greater circumspection in expressing critical or, what might be perceived as, ‘disloyal’ sentiments. These would likely resonate more if expressed in Malay, going against its enshrined reserve and non-confrontational ethos. This may be particularly so for those participants who identify more closely with the identity categories of MIB.

I have foregrounded my position of friend and stranger, *orang-puteh-eager-to-belong* and foreigner, from the beginning since my desire to transcend one for the other has been the main impetus for this research. It is also indicative of my positive predisposition towards the locality; a factor which can lead to romanticisation if this is not guarded against. My insider knowledge of the locality has both informed and biased the materials chosen for content analysis, as well as the selected interview data and subsequent thematic structure. Another researcher might, for example, have focused on gender identity in this setting as it is often anticipated as ‘problematic’ in Islamic countries. I chose not to emphasise gender identity beyond having included both male and female perspectives among both adult (two out of eight) and student (four out of eight) participants because it did not emerge strongly in data. Bruneian society is nominally patriarchal, but women have equal access to education and everyone is subject to MIB strictures although it may impact them differently in terms of desirable performances of its associated identities. For example, a recent widely

reported news story juxtaposes the power and opportunity afforded to Bruneian women in contrast to their counterparts in Saudi Arabia. Celebrating Brunei's National Day on February 23, 2016, an all-female crew piloted a Royal Brunei airplane to land in Saudi Arabia where women are still not permitted to drive (Taylor, 2016; Sandhu, 2016). Brunei's drive towards equalisation of educational opportunities has been propelled by its First National Development Plan 1953-1958 which stated,

*mendidek saorang anak lelaki berarti tuan chuma mendidek saorang sahja – tetapi mendidek saorang anak perempuan berarti yang tuan telah mendidekkan satu keluarga* (educating a boy means educating one person only but educating a girl means educating the whole family)

UNESCO (2015:46).

That is not to say that gender parity has been achieved. Females outnumber males in both sixth-form and in university education; although in this study half of the student participants happen to be male. Females also dominate the teaching profession in keeping with its widespread feminisation (Kelleher, 2011; Rich, 2014). This is reflected in the demographic of the adult participants.

The contradictions that gave rise to this research in the first place remain at the forefront of participants' lives. Without them, much of the stimulus for active identity construction and negotiation would be lost. When everything is clear and unambiguous, the quest for meaning becomes redundant. The realities of Brunei's politico-economic, linguistic, religious and social milieus are full of "dilemmas and intractable oppositions [...]; divided consciousness, [as well as at times] dominated minds" (Collins, 1993:134). Of late, levels of MIB domination have been intensified in reaction and proportion to the ever-deepening penetration of the Internet. Although these prevailing conditions may be "pre-structured" to varying extents, nonetheless they can be creatively and agentively "fissured in unpredictable [...], dynamic [and individuated] ways" (Collins, 1993:134) to enable Bruneianness at a personal level

The participant who contends that a “Bruneian could be anybody” [SP6:1542] seems to have meant this in its inverted form based on the context of her utterance. She was protesting that it was possible to ‘be’ Bruneian without being (fully) Malay or Malay-speaking; in other words, anybody could be Bruneian. But reinterpreting her utterance and seeing identities “through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms” (Appadurai, 1996:54), as well as the intersecting web of possibilities afforded by participants’ rich repertoires of cultural and linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991:51), they can become anybody they choose to become.

MIB may seek to curtail and the English language may have enabled, but ultimately these elements colour rather than determine who participants become. They steadfastly and autonomously resist the forces engineered to mould them in order to become Bruneian in their ways. In BNM they can be described as *biar baringgut dicabut inda mau* (although pulled, cannot be shaken or swayed).



## Afterword

My journey as an aspiring researcher-writer required that I live the performativity theory (Butler, 1988), featured in this thesis. It was an identity to which I was both committed and resistant in varying measures over time. In the same way that I have become a teacher by teaching for more than 30 years, it became clear that I could only become a researcher-writer by conducting research and by writing. Calling myself these names was hollow without the action required and bordered on consolatory self-delusion. In pursuing this new identity, I found myself interrogating all the other identities which I had claimed in my lifetime to date. My strong sense of Irish national identity was built by a combination of what I now recognise as biased history teaching (O’Callaghan, 2009:2-3) and nationalist discourses in my childhood environs. This had likely predisposed me to feelings of patriotism which allowed me to easily empathise with assertions of national identity in other places, most notably Malaysia and Brunei. Nevertheless, I wondered at the identity of “attached foreigner” (Hart, 1989:147) that had stealthily crept up on me in Brunei and had ultimately led to this choice of topic. I had worked in many schools, colleges, and universities in diverse locations during my career, but puzzled over why my place attachment (Altman & Low, 1992) – an affective bond between me and the site of this research – had become so strong. As I walked around what had been ‘my’ classroom for twelve years on my last day there, I was happily haunted by ghosts of students past, echoes of past laughter, shared moments of success and disappointment. Even today, I can picture certain individuals sat in their habitual positions as if time had stood still. I draw comfort from the notion that, “We leave something of ourselves behind when we leave a place, we stay there, even though we go away. And there are things in us that we can find again only by going back there” (Mercier, 2008:243). Taking Selasi’s (2015) view that all identity is experience and that this experience is where we are coming from, allows for the possibility that, at times, I too had become a little bit Bruneian.



*Bunga Simpur* national flower of Brunei Darussalam featured on one-dollar bills and in traditional art designs.

# APPENDICES

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## Appendix 1: Road Signs Promoting Use of the Malay Language



Prioritise the Malay language



Malay language: the official language of the country



Use the Malay language



Prioritise the Malay language




Let us together uphold the dignity and sovereignty of the Malay language

## Appendix 2: Recruitment advertisement for foreign 'experts'

iPad 20:55 81%

careers.educationdevelopmenttrust.com



Transforming lives by improving education around the world

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**WHAT MATTERS TO US**      **WHAT WE DO**      **OUR RESEARCH**      **OUR SCHOOLS**

---

**ENGLISH TEACHER MENTORS, BRUNEI**

**Job ref:** 01212      **Location:** Brunei  
**Job type:** Fixed-term contract      **Currency:** BND  
**Salary/rate:** 72000 BND tax free (approx. 36000 GBP)      **Closing date:** 31/08/2016  
**Date posted:** 01/06/2016

**Careers Home**  
**Advanced Search**  
**Register an account**  
**Login**  
**Report a problem**

**Benefits**

Salary status (tax free) : Tax free in Brunei

Be part of an exciting new project in school system reform in South East Asia!

We are inviting applications for English teacher mentors for a new multi-million pound project reforming the teaching and learning of literacy and numeracy in Brunei Darussalam's primary and secondary schools. This 3 year project aims to raise student standards and teacher capacity and prepare schools and school leaders for the PISA examinations.

---

This is an opportunity for experienced, specialised educators to be part of a flagship system reform programme and make a genuine difference to Brunei's school system. The literacy coaches will report to the Heads of Literacy and will be instrumental in implementing the reform programme within government schools, modelling effective teaching practices and collaborating with teachers and colleagues to enhance effective literacy teaching practices.

Education Development Trust already manage a large project in Brunei recruiting and managing over 260 English teachers working in government schools. This new project will be addition to our existing work in Brunei. For a flavour of our work in Brunei schools and what it is like to live in Brunei see [www.cbtvideos.org](http://www.cbtvideos.org)

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The ideal candidate for this role will have:

- Strong educational sector background and knowledge, preferably with some experience in an international context.
- Post graduate training or qualifications in English education
- Significant experience of achieving improved learning outcomes in literacy
- Experience of mentoring or coaching colleagues in a school or educational context
- Experience of working on an educational project to raise PISA test scores

---

Package and Benefits include:

- A tax free salary of around BND 72,000 (approx £36,000) depending on qualifications and experience
- Family size accommodation provided
- Support for dependents at an international school
- Flights and medical insurance provided

---

Deadline for applications 31st August 2016

Source: <http://careers.educationdevelopmenttrust.com/vacancy/1212-English-Teacher-Mentors,-Brunei&page=2>

### Appendix 3: Interview schedule

Total Recording Time: 26hr 13min 19sec

Recording Device: Sony ICD-UX80 Digital Voice Recorder

File ID	Date	Duration of Recording	Location	Those Present (participants in bold)
PILOT	Wednesday, 14 <sup>th</sup> October 2009	1 hr 24min 49sec	The Palm Café, Brunei	R1, PP1, PP2
INT1	Saturday, 24 <sup>th</sup> October 2009	1 hr 41min 54sec	The home of P1, Brunei	R1, <b>P1, P2</b>
INT2	Wednesday, 28 <sup>th</sup> October 2009	2hr 49min 54sec	The Palm Café, Brunei	R1, <b>P3, P4</b>
INT3	Wednesday, 2 <sup>nd</sup> December 2009	2hr 15min 43sec	Higher Education Unit (HEU), Sixth Form College, Brunei	R1, <b>P5</b>
INT4	Saturday, 12 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	1 hr 11min 43sec	Coffeezone, Kiulap, Brunei	R1, <b>P6, H1</b>
INT5	Thursday, 17 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	1 hr 37min 21sec	Mamih Restaurant, Mata-Mata, Brunei	R1, <b>P7, D1</b>
INT6	Friday, 18 <sup>th</sup> December 2009	2hr 44min 25sec	Fratini's Restaurant, Portview, Brunei	R1, <b>SP1, D1</b>
INT7	Friday, 8 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	1 hr 37min 21sec	Matadoe Restaurant, Mata-Mata, Brunei	R1, <b>SP2</b>
INT8	Monday, 11 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	2hr 01min 38sec	Swensen's Restaurant, Gadong, Brunei	R1, <b>SP3, SPL1</b>
INT9	Monday, 18 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	1 hr 23min 23sec	Swensen's Restaurant, Gadong, Brunei	R1, <b>SP4</b>
INT10	Thursday, 21 <sup>st</sup> January 2010	2hr 36min 07sec	Fratini's Restaurant, Portview, Brunei	R1, <b>SP5, SP6, SPL1</b>
INT11	Monday, 25 <sup>th</sup> January 2010	2hr 00min 14sec	Cheebox Restaurant, The Mall, Gadong, Brunei	R1, <b>SP7, SPL1</b>
INT12	Tuesday, 2 <sup>nd</sup> February 2010	1 hr 23min 32sec	The home of P1, Brunei	R1, <b>P8, P1</b>
INT13	Wednesday, 10 <sup>th</sup> February 2010	1 hr 25min 16sec	Swensen's Restaurant, Gadong, Brunei	R1, <b>SP8, SPL1</b>

#### Appendix 4: Conventions of transcription

<P1>	utterance begins
</P1>	utterance ends
@@	laughter
..	brief pause of one half-second or less
...	pause of more than a half-second but less than 5 seconds
(6)	numbers in parentheses indicate timed pauses in seconds
<u>child</u>	underlining indicates speaker emphasis
"text"	double quotes mark speech set off by a shift in speaker's voice
<i>lai</i> ((tr: dear))	non-English words are italicised, and are followed by an English translation or explanation in double brackets
> <	angle brackets pointing inward indicate words or phrases spoken more quickly than surrounding discourse
[ ]	overlapping speech
(people)	if there is a likely interpretation, the questionable words appear within the parentheses
!	an animated or emphatic tone
?	question mark shows rising tone in preceding element
conver%-	word truncation / cut-off with glottal
conver-	word truncation / cut-off without glottal
°she°	utterances spoken more softly than the surrounding discourse are framed by degree signs
{SNIFF}	description of non-verbal sounds or actions
H-O-D	spelling out a word or acronym as letters
e:r the:::	indicates lengthening of the preceding sound
.t	alveolar suction click
.h h h h	long audible inhalation
h h h h	long audible exhalation
→	conversation ongoing when recording started

## Appendix 5: Sample excerpts from interview transcripts:

<FILE ID: INT5

Recording Date: Thursday, 17<sup>th</sup> December 2009

Recording Duration: 1hr 37min 21sec

Number of Speakers: 2

Venue: Mamih Restaurant, Mata-Mata, Brunei

R1 = ORIGIN: Ireland; FIRST LANGUAGE: English; OTHER LANGUAGE(S): Gaelic, French, Standard Malay (STM); ROLE: Researcher; GENDER: female; AGE: 40-50;

P7 = ORIGIN: Brunei Darussalam, Malay Bruneian father / Malay Bruneian mother; FIRST LANGUAGE: Brunei Malay (BNM); OTHER LANGUAGES: English, Standard Malay (STM); ROLE: adult participant, Art teacher, overseas (UK) graduate; GENDER: male; AGE: 20-30;

77 <P7> i think when i was- when i left brunei five years ago! i think it was only in the U-K that i started to actually find out who i was! it took quite a while but you know in a way i was happy that i took the longer route to figuring out who i was when i want to do </P7>

78 <R1> so do you think you know who you are now? </R1>

79 <P7> yeah! but the problem is trying to be yourself! that's the tricky bit especially when you're in a country like brunei where you're expected to do this or do a certain thing! i think the main issue is to actually be yourself! and that's the most difficult thing and you gotta be careful about who you've got to be around certain people so there's a sense of paranoia! that's prevailing </P7>

80 <R1> in what situations do you feel that most? </R1>

81 <P7> erm when you meet new people for the first time! like you don't think or act within the same way as you- you know sometimes you can just tell from a distance that- i mean we- you and i have similar way- views and all that so.. you know when you're just meeting new people new friends </P7>

82 <R1> how about in the work situation? how are you finding that so far? i mean you've only just started so it's not- erm you know gut reactions? first gut reactions? </R1>

83 <P7> i guess you gotta be careful first and then you must.. see how people react to you and that you know once they're O-K with it you just sort of ease in and do your thing! </P7>

84 <R1> do you think as an artist people expect you to be a little bit eccentric in any case? do you think you get a little bit of extra kind of you know "leeway"? </R1>

85 <P7> yeah! yeah but i try not to think in that way! but it is annoying sometimes when people expect you to know how to draw everything! but i

get- i mean there are certain stereotypes that come with being an artist!  
</P7>  
86 <R1> °right O-K° </R1>  
87 <P7> you know to a certain extent most of them are true! @@ </P7>  
88 <R1> @@ tell me of some of the ones that there are here! you know about  
being an artist.. how is it valued here do you think? </R1>  
89 <P7> i think people here expect artists to know how to draw how to paint  
and not really how to go into the other aspects of you know modern art like  
installation and sculpture art.. yeah i mean most people here still have a  
traditional view of the artist so in a way they don't really expect us to be  
crazy with the art but they will still expect artists to be a bit more- a bit  
different! in the way they think the way they dress the way they talk so..  
yeah there are expectations! </P7>  
90 <R1> O-K well yeah i think i've noticed that a little bit in the college that you  
know the art teacher gets a little bit of you know may- especially- i'm  
thinking of the people who've been there who have gone and you know the  
person you're replacing for example she had a very unique style! which in  
somebody else might have been frowned upon! </R1>

<FILE ID: INT10

Recording Date: Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> January 2010  
Recording Duration: 2hr 36min 07sec  
Number of Speakers: 4  
Venue: Fratini's Restaurant, Portview, Brunei

R1 = ORIGIN: Ireland; FIRST LANGUAGE: English; OTHER LANGUAGE(S):  
Gaelic, French, Standard Malay (STM); ROLE: Researcher; GENDER: female;  
AGE: 40-50;

SP5 = ORIGIN: Brunei Darussalam, Indian Bruneian father / Indian Bruneian  
mother; FIRST LANGUAGE: English; OTHER LANGUAGES: Brunei Malay (BNM),  
Standard Malay (STM), Punjabi; ROLE: student participant; GENDER: female;  
AGE: 16-20;

SP6 = ORIGIN: Brunei Darussalam, Bruneian father / Filipino mother; FIRST  
LANGUAGE: English; OTHER LANGUAGES: Brunei Malay (BNM), Standard  
Malay (STM), Mandarin, Tagalog; ROLE: student participant; GENDER: female;  
AGE: 16-20;

SPL1 = ORIGIN: Egypt, Egyptian father / Egyptian mother; FIRST LANGUAGE:  
Arabic; OTHER LANGUAGES: English, Malay (BNM & STM); ROLE: student  
participant liaison; GENDER: male; AGE: 16-20.

980 <SP5> attitude! attitude yeah! the- they're really like laid back and then like  
doesn't wanna do stuff all the time </SP5>  
981 <SP6> just because we speak good english doesn't mean that you haven't-  
no reason to talk to us like that you know because i mean O-K you mi- we  
might not speak- we speak good english and you don't but maybe we don't  
speak good malay </SP6>  
982 <R1> mhm! </R1>  
983 <SP6> so we're about the same because they talk bad about us! </SP6>  
984 <R1> exactly! </R1>  
985 <SP6> and we're not talking about you so- </SP6>  
986 <SPL1> and they don't really do anything about it they said they hate you  
because you speak good english! but they don't go like that- go like "yeah  
we just hate you coz you-" </SPL1>  
987 <SP5> and they think we're arrogant for speaking english! </SP5>  
988 <R1> yeah why do they think you're arrogant? </R1>  
989 <SPL1> i mean- </SPL1>  
990 <SP5> we have good english! </SP5>  
991 <R1> what is arrogant about english? </R1>  
992 <SPL1> probably they see it as a luxury! </SPL1>  
993 <SP5> yeah it's like- </SP5>  
994 <SPL1> you're showing it off! </SPL1>  
995 <SP5> yeah we're showing off! you know we're not being "malay" </SP5>  
996 <R1> just by speaking you're showing off? </R1>  
997 <SP6> yeah </SP6>  
998 <R1> just by speaking english you're showing off? </R1>  
999 <SP5> but they say "kambang eh cukup english eh?" </SP5>  
1000 <SP6> @yes!@ </SP6>  
1001 <R1> kamvan? </R1>  
1002 <SPL1> it's kambang yeah </SPL1>  
1003 <SP6> kambang </SP6>  
1004 <R1> is showing off yeah? </R1>  
1005 <SPL1> yeah... just coz you speak fluent english </SPL1>

## Appendix 6: Information sheet



### INFORMATION SHEET

## BEING BRUNEIAN

Negotiating cultural and linguistic identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century

(UTS HREC Approval no. 2009-229A)

#### WHO is doing the research?

My name is Breda O'Hara-Davies and I am a student at the University of Technology, Sydney (UTS). My supervisor is Professor Alastair Pennycook.

#### WHAT is this research about?

This research aims to find out what it means to be Bruneian in today's global society.

#### If I say YES, what will it involve?

I will invite you to an informal interview with me lasting about one hour which will be audio-taped. I will then follow up with a number of meetings to discuss what you said and to check that I am representing you accurately. In total, the time involved would be no more than three hours.

#### WHY have I been asked?

I have selected you because of the ideas and insights you can offer.

#### Do I have to say YES?

No, you don't have to say 'yes'. It is entirely your choice!

#### What will happen if I say NO?

Nothing. I will thank you for considering my request and I won't contact you about this research again.

#### If I say YES, can I change my mind later?

You can change your mind at any time and you don't have to say why. I will thank you for your time so far and won't contact you about this research again.

#### WHAT if I have concerns or a complaint?

If you have concerns related to the research that you think I can help you with, please feel free to contact me on [Breda.OHaraDavies@student.uts.edu.au](mailto:Breda.OHaraDavies@student.uts.edu.au) or by phone / text message on 8162333.

If you would like to talk to someone who is not connected with the research, you may contact the Research Ethics Officer on +61 2 9514 9772, and quote this number: 2009-229A.

Alternatively, you may contact my supervisor, Professor Alastair Pennycook or Dr Noor Azam, a local academic who is familiar with this research:

Professor Alastair Pennycook  
Professor of Language Studies  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences  
University of Technology, Sydney  
PO Box 123, Broadway, NSW 2007  
Australia

Tel: +61 2 9514 3067  
Fax: +61 2 9514 3939  
Email: [alastair.pennycook@uts.edu.au](mailto:alastair.pennycook@uts.edu.au)

Dr Noor Azam OKMB Haji-Othman  
Deputy Dean  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences (FASS)  
Universiti Brunei Darussalam  
Tungku Link Road BE1410  
Negara Brunei Darussalam

Tel: +673-2463001 ext. 1407  
Fax: +673-2463067  
Email: [azam@fass.ubd.edu.bn](mailto:azam@fass.ubd.edu.bn)

THINK.CHANGE.DO



## Appendix 7: Consent forms

### 7.1 Adult participant (English version)



**CONSENT FORM**  
(Adult Participant)

**Being Bruneian**  
**Negotiating cultural and linguistic identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Approval No. 2009-229A

I \_\_\_\_\_ (write your name here) agree to participate in the above research project conducted by Breda O'Hara-Davies (an English teacher at D.P.M.A.M.B. College, Tel. 8162333 and a student of the University of Technology, Sydney) for her doctoral degree in Education. I have read the accompanying Information Sheet and I understand what this will involve.

I am aware that I can contact Breda O'Hara-Davies or her supervisor, Professor Alastair Pennycook at the address below if I have any concern about the research. Alternatively, I can contact Dr Noor Azam, a local Bruneian academic who is familiar with this study. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

Professor Alastair Pennycook  
Professor of Language Studies  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences  
University of Technology, Sydney  
PO Box 123, Broadway, NSW 2007  
Australia  
  
Tel: +61 2 9514 3067  
Fax: +61 2 9514 3939  
Email: alastair.pennycook@uts.edu.au

Dr Noor Azam OKMB Haji-Othman  
Deputy Dean  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences (FASS)  
Universiti Brunei Darussalam  
Tungku Link Road BE1410  
Negara Brunei Darussalam  
  
Tel: +673-2463001 ext. 1407  
Fax: +673-2463067  
Email: azam@fass.ubd.edu.bn

I agree that Breda O'Hara-Davies has answered all my questions fully and clearly and that access to any information I give will be restricted to her and her supervisor. I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (participant)

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (researcher)

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_

**NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: 02 9514 9615, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

THINK.CHANGE.DO

7.2 Adult participant (Malay version)



**BORANG KEBENARAN**  
(*Penyertaan Orang Dewasa*)

**Sebagai Orang Brunei**  
**Merunding pengenalan budaya dan bahasa di dalam abad ke 21**

Kebenaran Komite Penyelidikan Etika Manusia No. 2009-229A

Saya \_\_\_\_\_ (*sila tulis nama awda di sini*) bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian di dalam projek penyelidikan yang dikendalikan oleh Dayang Breda O'Hara-Davies (seorang guru Bahasa Inggeris di Maktab D.P.M.A.M.B., Tel. 8162333 dan penuntut Universiti Teknologi, Sydney) untuk tujuan thesis PhD beliau. Saya telah membaca dan memahami maklumat yang disertakan.

Saya maklum bahawa saya boleh menghubungi Dayang Breda O'Hara-Davies atau supervisornya, Professor Alastair Pennycook di alamat di bawah sekiranya saya meragui penyelidikan ini. Atau, saya juga boleh menghubungi Dr Noor Azam, seorang akademik tempatan yang sudah biasa dengan penyelidikan perkara ini. Saya juga faham bahawa saya boleh mengundur diri bila-bila masa saya mahu, tanpa risiko, dan tanpa memberi alasan.

Professor Alastair Pennycook  
Professor of Language Studies  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences  
University of Technology, Sydney  
PO Box 123, Broadway, NSW 2007  
Australia

Tel: +61 2 9514 3067  
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Dr Noor Azam OKMB Haji-Othman  
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Tungku Link Road BE1410  
Negara Brunei Darussalam

Tel: +673-2463001 ext. 1407  
Fax: +673-2463067  
Email: azam@fass.ubd.edu.bn

Saya bersetuju bahawa Dayang Breda O'Hara-Davies telah menjawab semua soalan yang saya kemukakan dengan terang dan nyata dan semua keterangan yang akan saya berikan adalah untuk kegunaan beliau dan supervisornya sahaja. Saya bersetuju bahawa semua data penyelidikan yang dikumpulkan akan diterbitkan dalam bentuk apa jua pun tanpa mengenalkan diri saya.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tandatangan (peserta)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Tandatangan (penyelidik)

**PERHATIAN:**

Penyelidikan ini telah dibenarkan oleh Komite Penyelidikan Etika Manusia, Universiti Teknologi, Sydney. Jika awda mempunyai sebarang masalah atau kekeliruan mengenai penglibatan awda di dalam penyelidikan yang awda tidak dapat selesaikan dengan penyelidik, awda boleh menghubungi Komite Etika melalui Pegawai Penyelidikan Etika (tel: +61 2 9514 9615, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) dan sebutkan nombor rujukan Komite Penyelidikan Etika Manusia. Masalah yang dikemukakan akan dilayani dengan sepenoh kepercayaan dan diselidiki sepenuhnya dan hasil siasatan akan dimaklumkan kepada awda.

THINK.CHANGE.DO

7.3 Student participant (English version)



**CONSENT FORM**  
(Student Participant)

**Being Bruneian**  
**Negotiating cultural and linguistic identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century**

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Approval No. 2009-229A

I \_\_\_\_\_ (write your name here) agree to participate in the above research project conducted by Breda O'Hara-Davies (an English teacher at D.P.M.A.M.B. College, Tel. 8162333 and a student of the University of Technology, Sydney) for her doctoral degree in Education. I have read the accompanying Information Sheet and I understand what this will involve.

I am aware that I can contact Breda O'Hara-Davies or her supervisor, Professor Alastair Pennycook at the address below if I have any concern about the research. Alternatively, I can contact Dr Noor Azam, a local Bruneian academic who is familiar with this study. I also understand that I am free to withdraw my participation at any time I wish, without consequences, and without giving a reason.

Professor Alastair Pennycook  
Professor of Language Studies  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences  
University of Technology, Sydney  
PO Box 123, Broadway, NSW 2007  
Australia

Tel: +61 2 9514 3067  
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Email: alastair.pennycook@uts.edu.au

Dr Noor Azam OKMB Haji-Othman  
Deputy Dean  
Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences (FASS)  
Universiti Brunei Darussalam  
Tungku Link Road BE1410  
Negara Brunei Darussalam

Tel: +673-2463001 ext. 1407  
Fax: +673-2463067  
Email: azam@fass.ubd.edu.bn

I agree that Breda O'Hara-Davies has answered all my questions fully and clearly and that access to any information I give will be restricted to her and her supervisor. I agree that the research data gathered from this project may be published in a form that does not identify me in any way.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (student participant)

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (researcher)

**PARENTAL CONSENT**

I give permission for my son/daughter to take part in the above research project. I have read the accompanying Information Sheet and I am aware of what this will involve.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature (parent / guardian)

**NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: 02 9514 9615, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) and quote the UTS HREC reference number. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

THINK.CHANGE.DO

7.4 Student participant (Malay version)



**BORANG KEBENARAN**  
(Penyertaan Orang Penuntut)

**Sebagai Orang Brunei**  
**Merunding pengenalan budaya dan bahasa di dalam abad ke 21**

Kebenaran Komiti Penyelidikan Etika Manusia No. 2009-229A

Saya \_\_\_\_\_ (sila tulis nama awda di sini) bersetuju untuk mengambil bahagian di dalam projek penyelidikan yang dikendalikan oleh Dayang Breda O'Hara-Davies (seorang guru Bahasa Inggeris di Maktab D.P.M.A.M.B., Tel. 8162333 dan penuntut Universiti Teknologi, Sydney) untuk tujuan thesis PhD beliau. Saya telah membaca dan memahami maklumat yang disertakan.

Saya maklum bahawa saya boleh menghubungi Dayang Breda O'Hara-Davies atau supervisornya, Professor Alastair Pennycook di alamat di bawah sekiranya saya meragui penyelidikan ini. Atau, saya juga boleh menghubungi Dr Noor Azam, seorang akademik tempatan yang sudah biasa dengan penyelidikan perkara ini. Saya juga faham bahawa saya boleh mengundur diri bila-bila masa saya mahu, tanpa risiko, dan tanpa memberi alasan.

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Saya bersetuju bahawa Dayang Breda O'Hara-Davies telah menjawab semua soalan yang saya kemukakan dengan terang dan nyata dan semua keterangan yang akan saya berikan adalah untuk kegunaan beliau dan supervisornya sahaja. Saya bersetuju bahawa semua data penyelidikan yang dikumpulkan akan diterbitkan dalam bentuk apa jua pun tanpa mengenalkan diri saya.

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Tandatangan (penuntut peserta)

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Tandatangan (penyelidik)

**KEBENARAN IBU/BAPA/PENJAGA**

Saya memberi kebenaran kepada anak saya untuk mengambil bahagian di dalam penyelidikan tersebut di atas. Saya telah membaca dan memahami maklumat yang disertakan

\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_\_  
Tandatangan (ibubapa / penjaga)

**PERHATIAN:**

Penyelidikan ini telah dibenarkan oleh Komiti Penyelidikan Etika Manusia, Universiti Teknologi, Sydney. Jika awda mempunyai sebarang masalah atau kekeliruan mengenai penglibatan awda di dalam penyelidikan yang awda tidak dapat selesaikan dengan penyelidik, awda boleh menghubungi Komiti Etika melalui Pegawai Penyelidikan Etika (tel: +61 2 9514 9615, Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au) dan sebutkan nombor rujukan Komiti Penyelidikan Etika Manusia. Masalah yang dikemukakan akan dilayani dengan sepenoh kepercayaan dan diselidiki sepenohnya dan hasil siasatan akan dimaklumkan kepada awda.

THINK.CHANGE.DO

## Appendix 8: Invitation Letter for Member Checking



Dear research participant,

### Invitation to read draft PhD dissertation data chapters

I am now in the final stages of drafting my dissertation entitled 'Becoming Bruneian: Negotiating cultural and linguistic identities in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.'

Before I submit it, I would like to invite you to read the draft data chapters featuring input from your interviews back in 2009 and 2010. This is in keeping with both the ethical requirements of the University of Technology, Sydney and the principles of responsible ethnographic research.

Reading through these chapters would give you an opportunity to verify that I have not misrepresented you. If you think I have done so, please feel free to clarify, dispute my interpretation or add anything that may be relevant.

Please reply to this email by **24<sup>th</sup> April 2016** if you would like me to send you these draft chapters. I will then forward them to you in May 2016.

Yours sincerely,

Breda O'Hara-Davies

#### **NOTE:**

This study has been approved by the University of Technology, Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee. If you have any complaints or reservations about any aspect of your participation in this research which you cannot resolve with the researcher, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officer (ph: 02 9514 9615, [Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au](mailto:Research.Ethics@uts.edu.au)) and quote the UTS HREC reference number: 2009-229A. Any complaint you make will be treated in confidence and investigated fully and you will be informed of the outcome.

## Appendix 9: Social Network Support for Syariah Law



# #BruneiUnited

**Appendix 10: HM The Caring Monarch**



Source: [The Brunei Times](#) (February 23, 2014)

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