

A Kingdom of Unexpected Treasures: Contributions to a National Ethnography of Brunei by UBD Sociology-Anthropology Students

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Abstract

The Sociology-Anthropology programme at UBD has been running for approximately thirteen years, and in that time some quality research projects have been produced by students. The background to the programme is outlined here. Then the topics of all 75 research projects are listed and classified, and the contents of ten of the best projects are discussed in more detail.

Introduction: The History of Ethnographic Research at UBD

About twenty-five years ago, Singapore's Institute of Southeast Asian Studies published a *Select Cultural Bibliography of the Malay World* (Lim, 1986). The section on the ethnography of Brunei cited only six items: three general, two on Kedayans and just one on Malays. Although this listing was far from complete, it was certainly indicative of the paucity of published ethnographic data for the Sultanate.

Just over one decade later, when I joined the UBD faculty in 1999, attempts were already underway to remedy this lack of first-hand ethnographic reporting, in particular under the guidance of Visiting Professor Allen Maxwell, a seasoned scholar of Bruneian anthropology and a Kedayan specialist (see Maxwell, 1980, 1991, 1996, 1997). Moreover, Dr. Frank Fanselow, who had set up the anthropology and sociology programmes at UBD in 1997 (see Fanselow, 2009), had from the start provided for field research in the undergraduate curriculum.

During the initial years, when anthropology and sociology were taught separately as minor subjects, students conducted research projects as the principal component of a compulsory single-semester third-year course on research methods. Under Allen Maxwell's guidance, this had become a hands-on ethnographic workshop, with eleven students working on various field-based projects. In the second semester of the 1999-2000 academic year, following Allen Maxwell's return to the United States, I assumed responsibility for the ethnographic workshop, remaining in sole charge for the next five years.

In the academic year 2005-2006, the status of anthropology and sociology at UBD was significantly enhanced. Till then, we just constituted a 'unit' and were charged only with teaching minor programmes, so we had no fourth-year courses. Now we became a fully-fledged department offering a four-year combined major in Sociology-Anthropology. As part of the changes necessary for the upgrading of the programme, the research methods workshop became a compulsory two-semester course (lasting one full academic year) for all students majoring in the twin disciplines. This new dispensation greatly increased the workshop's potential for generating quality ethnographic work about Brunei Darussalam. Moreover, the burden of research supervision came to be shared among all faculty members with degrees of M.A. and above.

The final batch of third-year students studying for a minor in either anthropology or sociology completed their fieldwork assignments and reports during the academic year 2004-2005, while the new full-year research workshop began in the academic year 2007-2008.

Consequently there was a two-year hiatus in the programme's generation of ethnographic research reports.

Due to the radical restructuring of the programme just mentioned, it seems appropriate to report on the results of student ethnographic research in two parts. In the first part, those studies generated under the old third-year single-semester system will be discussed; in the second part, the projects undertaken over an entire academic year by students in their fourth and final undergraduate year will be surveyed. In both cases, an overview of all the reports will be presented—fifty-seven in the first batch and eighteen in the second—after which there will be more detailed discussion of five of the better works in each batch.

It is not easy to choose ten studies for special mention from a total of seventy-five. While it is unfortunately true that many of these exercises are so poorly researched and so badly written that they are best ignored by all but the most ardent of researchers (for whom, of course, a single new item of data may constitute a precious jewel), nonetheless, there are certainly more than ten that have contributed significantly to our knowledge of social and cultural life in Brunei. Consequently it should be emphasised that these are not necessarily the best ten studies produced, and any students reading this chapter and discovering their work has not be chosen for special mention should not conclude that this is because it necessarily is inferior to all of those among the chosen ten.

First in this paper, all third-year exercises are briefly overviewed before five are discussed in more detail, and then all fourth-year exercises are overviewed before five of them are discussed further. All seventy-five are listed in Bibliography B at the end of this paper.

Third-Year Research Exercises

In the academic year 1999-2000, under Allen Maxwell's supervision, eleven students undertook ethnographic field research, about half of them investigating aspects of Brunei's material culture, including weaving cloth for clothing and pandanus leaves for *tudung dulang* (dish covers), manufacturing boats, musical instruments, and items of silverware. Others dealt mostly with domestic or community rituals.

When I took over the workshop in 2000-2001, I sought to extend the range of topics, encouraging the nine workshop participants that year to consider projects other than those concerning the country's material culture. I also promoted the importance for ethnographers of moving beyond the study of purely traditional socio-cultural institutions. Most students, nonetheless, preferred to stick with the traditional topics, such as indigenous material culture, performing arts, and time-honoured ritual practices. Only two participants chose to focus on non-traditional institutions: one studying life and friendship among foreign students at UBD; and another looking at Brunei's National Day celebrations.

I will here attempt to categorise the focus of the fifty-seven third-year reports, though inevitably some of them do not easily fit into the categories I have suggested and so are omitted from the relevant tables. Table 1 summarises the ethnic focus of the reports.

Brunei Malay	Amzatul-Iffah 2005, Asmali 2000, Fakhrol 2003, Hartini 2003, Hasreena 2003, Hazimin 2005, Hazrina 2003, Irwan 2001, Kartina 2000, Khairunnisa 2005, Masdiena 2000, Masdinawati 2005, Mohd. Yudieswandy 2005, Nasda 2000, Noor Hasharina 2002, Norashiken 2000, Norjanah 2000, Rina Hayane 2002, Rohaini 2000, Shariza 2004, Siti Amal 2002, Siti Ardjuna 2005, Siti Norliana 2003, Siti Nor Nazatul 2005, Umi Kalthum 2002, Zulkarnaen Fadzillah 2001
Tutong	Adi Rohaiyoh 2000, Ahmad Iskandar 2001
Belait	Shafik 2002
Kedayan	Amzatul-Iffah 2005, Latifah 2001, Mardiah 2003, Mohammad Azmi 2002, Mohd. Hamrezal 2005, Rozita 2000, Rumaizah 2005
Dusun	Louisa 2000
Bisaya	Susis 2004, Yusrina 2004
Lun Bawang	Mohamad Jadid 2004
Iban	Hamirul 2004, Jackylen Senun 2004, Naiezam 2002, Roni Ismadani 2004
Chinese	Han 2005, Suziyanti 2003, Yong 2001

Table 1. Ethnic focus of the third-year reports

In terms of ecology, in Table 2, I have tried to classify the projects as rural or urban, though we need to admit that in Brunei it is often difficult to draw a clear divide between villagers and urbanites and many of the research projects encompassed both, albeit with a clear student preference to work in or close to an urban area.

rural	Ahmad Iskandar 2001, Hamirul 2004, Mohamad Jadid 2004, Roni Ismadani 2004, Shafik 2002, Susis 2004, Yong 2001, Yusrina 2004
urban	Jackylen Senun 2004, Khairunnisa 2005, Marfiza 2005, Nur Azlina 2004, Shariza 2004, Siti Ardjuna 2005

Table 2. Ecological focus of the third-year reports

In sociological terms, we might classify the reports as based on tradition (even if the tradition is rapidly changing) and those that are essentially modern, as in Table 3.

traditional	Adi Rohaiyoh 2000, Asmali 2000, Fakhrol 2003, Hamirul 2004, Han 2005, Hartini 2004, Hasreena 2003, Hazrina 2002, Haziman Abdullah 2005, Hazimin Hasib 2001, Irwan 2001, Jackylen Senun 2004, Kartina 2000, Kartinah 2001, Louisa 2000, Mardiah 2003, Masdiena 2000, Masdinawati 2005, Mohamad Jadid 2004, Mohammad Azmi 2002, Mohd Hamrezal 2005, Mohd Yudieswandy 2005, Nasda 2000, Norashiken 2000, Norjanah 2000, Rina Hayane 2002, Rohaini 2000, Roni Ismadani 2004, Rozita 2000, Rumaizah 2005, Shafik 2002, Shariza 2004, Siti Amal 2002, Siti Norliana 2003, Susis 2004, Suziyanti 2003, Zulkarnaen Fadzillah 2001
modern	Amzatul-Iffah 2005, Irmaliza 2004, Jasmin 2004, Jepaul 2001, Khairunnisa 2005, Marfiza 2005, Mohammad Faizal 2005, Nur Azlina 2004, Sharul 2004, Siti Ardjuna 2005, Siti Nor Nazatul 2005, Susie Haslinda 2001, Ulmi Kalthum 2002, Yong 2001, Yusrina 2004

Table 3. Sociological basis of the third-year reports

Table 4 is my attempt to categorise the reports in terms of socio-cultural themes. Two of the projects are listed under more than one category.

kinship, marriage, family and the household	Irmaliza 2004, Mohamad Jadid 2004, Noor Hasharina 2002, Shariza 2004, Siti Amal 2002, Siti Ardjuna 2005, Siti Nor Nazatul 2005, Susis 2004
women	Irmaliza 2004, Latifah 2001
infancy, childhood and adolescence	Amzatul-'Iffah 2005, Khairunnisa Ibrahim 2005, Rumaizah 2005, Umi Kalthum 2002
sexual orientation	Nur Azlina 2004
food culture	Marfiza 2005, Norjanah 2000, Siti Norliana 2003
rites of passage	Adi Rohaiyoh 2000, Fakhrol Razi 2003, Hazimin Abdullah 2005, Hazrina 2002, Jackylen Senan 2004, Mohammad Azmi 2002, Rina Hayane 2002, Rohaini 2000, Siti Ardjuna 2005, Suziyanti 2003
calendrical rites	Hamirul 2004, Kartinah 2001, Louisa 2000, Rozita 2000, Susie Haslinda 2001
performing arts	Hazimin Hasib 2001, Irwan 2001
rites for a new house	Mardiah 2003, Masdinawati 2005
rites for religious buildings	Han 2005, Mohd Yudieswandy 2005
spirit beliefs, Islam and medical practices	Hartini 2004, Hasreena 2003, Mohd Hamrezal 2005, Zulkarnaen Fadzillah 2001
religious conversion (to Islam)	Yusrina 2004
traditional crafts	Asmali 2000, Kartina 2000, Masdiena 2000, Nasda 2000, Noni 2000, Norashiken 2000
agricultural production	Yong 2001
formal education and student life	Jasmin 2004, Jepaul 2001, Mohammad Faizal 2005, Sharul 2004
multiple themes within context of a single village or longhouse	Ahmad Iskandar 2001, Naiezam 2002, Roni Ismadani 2004, Shafik 2002

Table 4. Socio-cultural themes of the third-year reports

The data in Tables 1 to 4 suggest a preference among these third-year students for the study of their own ethnic group, preferably in an urban rather than a rural context. There seems to have been a special favouring of topics that fall within the domestic domain and that concern traditional cultural practices (some 60% of the total). Students showed considerably less interest in studying other peoples in other places (apart from, perhaps, the university itself), namely in the study of people engaged in non-traditional and/or unfamiliar ways of life in alien surroundings.

Table 5 summarises the location of the research, according to the district. Clearly, the most popular was Brunei-Muara District, in which Bandar Seri Begawan, the capital city, and also the university are based. Most researchers (63%) worked in Bandar Seri Begawan (including the water villages of Kampong Ayer), only two (4%) studied in Kuala Belait town and none in any smaller urban place. Only eight students (14%) researched in a specifically rural village context.

In many cases, it is evident that these third-year minor students were choosing the softest possible option: stay at home, sit in an air-conditioned room and ask their grandparents, parents or siblings to talk about their life experiences, likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, and perhaps demonstrate a bit of cooking. Alternatively, some preferred to chat with fellow students in the university corridors or classrooms, perhaps administering a brief questionnaire, and thereby obtaining very limited data.

Brunei-Muara District	44 studies (77%)
Tutong District	5 studies (9%)
Belait District	4 studies (7%)
Temburong District	5 studies (9%)
All of Brunei	5 studies (9%)

Table 5. Location of the third-year research

(The numbers do not add up to the total number of research projects due to several being conducted in more than one district.)

Of course, if it is well done and with sufficient reference to the wider anthropological and sociological literature, both descriptive and theoretical, this kind of research is indeed capable of generating finely-contextualised and valuable data. It is unfortunate that only a few students devoted sufficient time to the necessary background reading or to a detailed analysis of their first-hand observations and interviews.

Five Selected Third-year Projects

Turning now to the five third-year research exercises chosen for more detailed review, I have singled out a report on transvestites in Bandar Seri Begawan, one about growing up in Kedayan society, another on a Chinese temple in Muara, a fourth on a village of Hakka vegetable growers in Tutong District and, finally, a study of the dress culture of young people in modern Brunei. The fact that four out of five of these selected exercises have been researched entirely outside of the home and university environments is suggestive.

It is hoped that these detailed observations on five of the best third-year research exercises will have balanced out the negative remarks I felt compelled to make on the fifty-seven projects as a whole.

Transvestites in Bandar Seri Begawan

Among the third-year reports, I have no hesitation in recommending to students of modern Brunei society the 2005 study on ‘Transvestite Culture in Bandar Seri Begawan’ by Singaporean student Nur Azlina Yusoff. This investigation of alternative gender and sexual preferences is sensitively researched and carefully presented. Azlina contextualises and supports her own findings with a survey of some of the relevant theoretical literature. She follows this with a detailed ethnographic portrait of this Bruneian subculture, in which she demonstrates—in the best tradition of participant-observer, non-judgmental fieldwork—her ability to empathise with the people she is studying. She also provides sensitive portraits of three main informants. Though the study is short (just 39 pages), it is excellent. Azlina concludes that the transvestites add spice to wider society, and she believes it would be a pity to see the end to so colourful a subculture.

Growing up in Kedayan Society

Turning to more traditional anthropological subject matter, I feel Rumaizah binti Mohammad’s 2005 study on ‘Infancy, Childhood and Adolescence among the Kedayan’ is one of the better ones. This is a well-presented and nicely illustrated piece of work, divided into five chapters. The first presents, from both a review of the literature and personal fieldwork sources, an ethnographic background to the Kedayan people, with sections on various topics including folklore, economic activities, religion, kinship terminology, political organisation and village co-operation. All of these topics are important facets of Kedayan society and culture about which the reader needs to know in order to understand the following three chapters that constitute the core of the work: on infancy, childhood and adolescence.



children's games



girl receiving instruction in *mantra* chanting

Plate 1. Images from Kg. Tanjong Bunut (from Rumaizah binti Mohammad, 2002)

Rumaizah tells us that in the Kedayan community, *anak baru keluar* ('newly-born children') are believed to be susceptible to such supernatural entities as *hantu* ('ghosts') and *orang halus* ('spirit people'). Consequently, Kedayan parents observe a number of *pantang larang* ('taboos') in connection with their newly-born infants. She explains that only when a child is able to talk and understand what is said does it become an *anak besar sudah* ('already big child'). Then the child begins to learn adult roles, largely through games and by listening to stories and folklore, and so the chapter dealing with this focuses on traditional games, stories and proverbs. When girls begin to menstruate and boys have been circumcised, in Kedayan eyes they have become *anak muda sudah* ('already grown-up children'). At this stage in life they no longer play at being adults, because they have become adults themselves, and they are expected to observe more strictly the various traditional behavioural patterns dictated by Kedayan culture and by the Islamic religion.

Rumaizah admits that her study was limited because it had to be researched and written up within a period of less than four months. Furthermore, she tells us that her attempts at observational research did not go as well as she had hoped and that, consequently, most of her data were acquired by interviewing key informants. Finally, she suggests that future research might be directed at attempting detailed research into the changing lifestyles of Kedayan infants, children and adolescents to investigate traditional matters that she discussed as well as a comprehensive study of such topics as modern-day education, sources of employment, and leisure activities.

A Chinese Temple in Muara

A second study on a traditional theme that I believe is well worth reading is Ivy Han's 2005 report 'The Study of Tiam Nam Keng in Muara, Brunei' (where Tiam Nam Keng means 'Temple for Protecting the South'). This forty-nine-page work on a Chinese temple is carefully researched, well written and lavishly illustrated. It has three chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, Han introduces Brunei's Chinese population, focusing particularly on its history in the Sultanate and on the religious traditions these immigrants brought with them.

In the second chapter, Han provides detailed descriptions of the locality of the temple, its major architectural features and its ritual paraphernalia. Describing the main altar, for example, she tells us that it has six deity images on it: in the centre is that of Siew Ong Kang ('Reverend Lord of Broad Compassion'); on his right is an image of Sam Tai Kong ('Ancestral Teacher of the Three Eras'); and on his left, Siong Teh Kong ('Supreme God of the Profound Heavens'). On the far right of the central image is a statue of Na Zha ('Third Prince'), a child deity believed to be a demon catcher, with a second, smaller and older, image of Na Zha in front of it. This second image, Han tells us, was brought here from the previous Tiam Nam Keng temple located in Kampong Dadap. On the far left of the Siew Ong Kang image is another statue that represents Guan Kong. He is popularly known as the 'God of War', but is worshipped also as the God of Wealth and, as such, is popular among the Chinese business community in Brunei. In this way, Han takes us all around the temple, describing and explaining all the artifacts.

Chapter Three deals with how the temple is managed. In addition, Han details its daily ritual activities, as well as those associated with the regular festivals that the temple sponsors. In particular, Han offers a fascinating account of the activities of the *danki*, mediums who, in trance, become mouthpieces of various deities, thereby permitting devotees to pose questions and receive advice from one or another of these divinities.



outside the temple



a committee meeting

Plate 2. The Tiam Nam Keng Temple in Muara (from Ivy Han, 2005)

As Han writes in the conclusion to her report, her investigation shows the continuing vibrancy of traditional Chinese religious beliefs and practices among the Chinese population in Brunei, despite the state's official Islamic-based ideology. She also observes that popular religion among the Chinese is an amorphous collection of folk beliefs and practices, together with a range of philosophical and ethical ideas based on Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian sources, and she observes that practitioners often do not develop a comprehensive knowledge of any of the various strands that have gone into the making of their composite ideology. As a result, it is hard for an ethnographer to formulate a consistent explanation for many of the beliefs and practices encountered during fieldwork. Despite these limitations, she concludes that her study hopefully manages to bring some analytical order into the description of the activities of a Chinese temple.

A Village of Hakka Vegetable Growers

Another useful, if ethnographically not quite so rich, investigation of the Chinese in Brunei is Mark Addy Yong's 2001 study of the Hakka farmers of Kampung Maraburong, a village just under 28 km from the capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, with a total population of 330 people distributed among twenty-three households. The huge majority of the villagers are Hakka Chinese, who claim to follow the Buddhist religion (though, as described in Ivy Han's report discussed above, we may think of this as a mixture of popular Chinese beliefs and practices).

Yong's research exercise is divided into five relatively short chapters, with the entire work comprising no more than forty-seven pages. The first chapter begins with a brief background to the village. This is followed by somewhat more thorough data on the Hakka, how and why they came to Borneo, and their traditional predilection for agriculture. There are also some notes on middlemen (mostly Chinese, but including a few Malays and Kedayans), who purchase produce from these Hakka farmers for resale to retail outlets, ranging from small wet-market stalls to large-scale supermarkets.

Yong reports that young Hakka children start contributing significantly to the farming enterprise at the age of eight, and those that decide on farming as a way of life continue to work on the farm until into old age. Though the children go to school, they are on the farm whenever they have free time, including most afternoons, weekends, and public holidays. This predisposition for farming means, inevitably, that most Hakka children have a poor educational background. The majority acquire no more than primary-level schooling, as they are more concerned with learning ways to help their parents increase their vegetable production than acquiring a formal education.

The Hakka farmers do not deal directly with retailers, as they do not know who the retailers are, and even if they did, they would not know how to approach them. Furthermore, the farmers would not be able to guarantee a constant supply of produce. Consequently they are dependent on middlemen, who own medium-sized vans, to transport the vegetables to the retailers. Middlemen appear in the village only after the farmers have bagged their produce and phoned to request a pickup. The price is negotiated beforehand, with the bargaining taking into account such factors as the demand, the supply, the availability of foreign substitutes, and the quality of the produce.

Middlemen supplying local markets arrive in the village early in the morning so as to acquire the freshest produce, while those supplying supermarkets come in the evening. The latter produce will not be as fresh, but it is destined for immediate refrigeration and then sale on the following day. Yong explains that the middlemen who supply to shops do not come in the morning because that is when the shops are busy getting ready to open. High security is needed as cash is placed into cash registers, and also floors have to be cleaned and tinned food put on shelves.

Yong's second chapter deals with the mechanics of vegetable production: the types of crop that are planted, farming techniques (including a discussion of necessary farming equipment and the application of insecticides and fertilizers), work schedules, labour inputs and the employment of foreign unskilled labour. These foreign labourers are mostly Indonesians (primarily from Java and Kalimantan), who are prepared to accept the lowest wages, but there are also some Thais, Bangladeshis and Indians. Hired labourers are provided with small huts close to the Hakka farmers' homes. The employer pays electricity and water bills, but employees must provide their own food and other basic necessities. Labourers, at the time of the fieldwork, could not earn above Brunei \$600 a month; moreover, if work had to be stopped due to rain, they received no wage at all.

Chapter Three describes the economics of vegetable farming, showing the prices the farmers obtain for their produce from the middleman compared with the cost to the final consumer. Farmers reported that a poor-to-bad monthly income amounted to less than \$1,000, while a good return would be one exceeding \$2,500.

In his penultimate chapter, Yong addresses a number of socio-economic issues that are beginning to impact on the Hakka's long-established farming lifestyle, such as population increase leading to the need to build houses on land previously used for cultivation purposes, and an increasing interest among the younger generation in off-farm employment and, consequently, their greater commitment to formal education. Moreover, many people have been moving into the village recently to build residential homes, but with no intention to farm.

Discussing the future of vegetable farming in the village, Yong reports that many Hakka families wish their children might adopt alternative methods for earning a living, and he notes their feeling of uneasiness when talking about the future. Indeed, it seems that most of the younger informants hoped to work in offices with air-conditioning, so they might be clean and not covered in mud. Despite all this, Yong believes the village will continue to be a farming community for many years, and many farmers still need help from their children.

Yong's brief final chapter reflects on his feelings of humility and empathy towards these Hakka farmers as a result of his fieldwork experience.

Youth Dress Culture in Modern Brunei

It is clear that Brunei's youth culture is of great interest to many of our student-ethnographers. An example of the excellent written work this can generate is Khairunnisa Ibrahim's 2005 report on the image of modern Malay Youth in Bruneian Society. Though it is just 47 pages long, this is among the most competent works produced by the third-year minor students. Khairunnisa reports that she intended at first to cover a much wider spectrum of Bruneian youth culture, but soon discovered the topic too broad for her to tackle in the limited time available. Consequently, she narrowed her research to a consideration of how and why the dress and fashion behaviours of modern Malay youth deviate from more traditional Bruneian norms.

Of course, to comprehend deviant ideas, one must first understand the norms from which they deviate, and Khairunnisa writes an entire chapter on traditional Malay attire, both male and female. Such dress, she explains, generally projects traditional cultural values in the Bruneian way of life. Thus male dress, especially the *songkok* ('Malay hat'), which is customarily worn on religious and educational occasions, projects the idea of piety and learning, while women's dress, covering most of the body, along with the *tudong* ('headscarf'), promotes the image of modesty and the Islamic notion that mature females should not expose their bodies to men who are not their immediate family members or husbands. Importantly, because this is frequently omitted in official discussion on Bruneian

dress codes, she notes that the now ubiquitous *tudong* was not in fact a common item of Malay female attire until the 1980s.

Khairunnisa writes that what the Brunei Government tries to promote as traditional Malay dress may be seen in the compulsory dress code that females must adopt in primary, secondary and lower tertiary level educational institutions, and she observes that the government tries to exert its control over female attire even at the upper tertiary (i.e. university) level. Although female university students are permitted much greater flexibility than their counterparts in other levels of education, they are still encouraged to wear the *baju kurung* ('long close-fitting Malay dress') along with a *tudong*. In addition, most government offices expect their female employees to dress in this fashion.

Khairunnisa concludes this chapter on traditional attire by observing that modern young Malay people, both men and women, generally reject the traditional Malay attire outside of the school or workplace, preferring instead to sport a wide range of clothing, most of which clearly deviates from traditional dress.

Chapter Three is about the tension that young Bruneian Malay women experience as they are torn between traditional and modern sartorial conventions. Khairunnisa summarises the situation by stating that the decision whether or not to wear a headscarf is, for some girls, a daily dilemma. On the one hand, covering one's hair is thought to be required by the teaching of Islam. On the other hand, many young women prefer not to wear a *tudong* in public as they want to appear more attractive and stylish. As a result, many girls have absolutely no problems in leaving home without a *tudong*. One young woman said, "It's our hair, so let us do what we want." Nevertheless, many young Bruneian women tenaciously maintain conservative ideas of modesty and never go out in public without a *tudong*, firmly believing that exposing their hair will bring them *hukuman berat* ('heavy punishment') in the *akhirat* ('afterlife'). Moreover, Khairunnisa notes that many adults approve of the attitude of these young women.

Beyond the issue to wear a *tudong* or not, Chapter Three considers other non-traditional behaviours concerning body decoration and dress, such as hair colouring, the wearing of revealing clothes and body piercing by Malay men. Finally, a subsection on subcultures reports on 'hip-hoppers', local parlance for young people who tend to gather in small groups at various shopping malls in Gadong wearing baggy clothing, white sneakers, and caps, imitating the style of certain African-American males. Khairunnisa further mentions other colourful subcultures without any of the judgmental attitude typically found in the popular press and in government reports.

Chapter Five discusses various factors influencing modern youth fashions. First are the media, especially those, including the internet, which deliver foreign, particularly western, culture directly into Bruneian homes. Second, there is peer influence. Khairunnisa reports that many of her interviewees claimed that they are influenced by their Bruneian friends as well as by foreign celebrities or fashion icons. And third, there are more and more fashion-accessory shops, hair-dressing salons and boutiques competing for young Bruneian clients.

The penultimate chapter explains some of the reasons why modern Malay youth challenge traditional sartorial norms. One is comfort, as many young people feel that Western-style clothes are more comfortable than conventional Bruneian dress. Khairunnisa reports that she heard many people complain that the *baju kurung* is too hot to be worn regularly, one person saying that it is like a rice sack! And a male student told her that he refused to wear traditional Malay clothes to UBD because he would sweat and then the clothes would stick to his body. Khairunnisa also identifies self- and group-identification as a factor, as some informants claimed their clothing and various body modifications were markers of the group with which they identified, as well as an indicator of their personality.

During the course of her research, it became apparent to Khairunnisa that youth itself was an important motivating factor. An informant told her she coloured her hair, pierced her body, and showed off some cleavage simply because she was twenty years old, and she knew she would not get away with it when she was forty. Another stated that she was entitled to behave as she did because she was a teenager.

Khairunnisa concludes that modern Malay youth prefer comfort over tradition and deliberately aim to project themselves as individuals or groups with non-traditional interests and preferences. Doubtless many people in Brunei will be dismayed by these conclusions. Nevertheless, they are honest representations of the situation Khairunnisa investigated and, following in the best tradition of ethnographic research and sociological analysis, she presents her findings in a non-judgmental fashion.



Plate 3. An image of female beauty that appeals to many young Bruneians (from Khairunnisa Ibrahim, 2005)

Fourth Year Research Exercises

During the first three academic years since the establishment of the Sociology-Anthropology major programme in 2007, five faculty members have supervised a total of eighteen field research reports.

A brief categorization of the fourth-year projects is shown in Table 6.

village-based	Abdul Hamid 2008, Ahmad Fahmi 2009, Liyana 2009, Lizawati 2008, Siti Khairunisa 2008
traditional institutions	Khairunnisa Yakub 2009, Kharunnisa Najibah 2008, Muhd. Saifullah 2009, Noor Raihani 2008, Ruzanna 2009
modern-day developments	Amal Amni 2009, Amir 2009, Effa Rosafazilah 2010, Munjiyyah 2010, Norul Azidah 2009, Nuruljannah 2008, Nurul Nazurah 2008, Qistina 2009

Table 6. Topics of the fourth-year reports

Of the five village-based investigations, three concerned Kedayan communities, one a Tutong village, and one was a comparison between a Dusun and a Bisaya village. These village-centred studies focused respectively on household and kinship (Liyana 2009), home gardening (Siti Khairunisa 2008), political leadership (Ahmad Fahmi 2009), subsistence patterns, socio-cultural institutions, health and political culture (Abdul Hamid 2008) and, finally, economic structures, kinship, marriage and religion (Lizawati 2008).

Another five projects that, roughly-speaking, might be categorised as falling in the traditional domain, though they are certainly sensitive also to modern developments, have included the investigation of traditional medical practices among Brunei Malays, with particular attention to spirit beliefs (Khairunnisa Yakub 2009), the study of a *tamu* or 'wet market' (Kharunnisa Najibah 2008), a report on Brunei Malay circumcision rites (Ruzanna 2009), an enquiry into *gambus* as a form of 'public entertainment in transition' (Muhd. Saifullah 2009), and a study of divorce among Brunei Malay women (Noor Raihani 2008).

The remaining eight projects we may loosely categorize as studies of modern-day developments in Brunei society. A major area of student interest has been sexual preferences and deviancy, resulting in studies of lesbians (Nuruljannah 2008), incest (Nurul Nazurah 2008) and premarital sex and sexual promiscuousness (Qistina 2009). Another focal area has been gender, education and student affairs, with studies of school dropouts (Amir 2009), bilingual (Malay and English) instruction (Norul Azidah 2009), perceptions of the gender gap in education (Effa Rosafazilah 2010) and social network sites and their impact on UBD undergraduates (Munjiyyah 2010). Finally, there is a study of women's beauty salons (Amal 2009).

Fourth-year students majoring in Sociology-Anthropology have tended to investigate a wider range of topics than did their predecessors. In part, this is a reflection of the revised teaching agenda, which seeks to strike a balance between the conventional subdisciplines of sociology and anthropology, such as kinship and marriage, social psychology, social stratification, politics and law, economic anthropology, the anthropology and sociology of religion, urban sociology, and newly-emerging areas of interest, including gender, race, ethnicity, nationalism, the environment, medical sociology and anthropology, popular culture and the mass media (cf. Fanselow 2009).

Overall, the more recent studies suggest greater intellectual maturity and a deeper commitment to the discipline than was evident in the average third-year production, though inevitably the standard is variable. Furthermore, the size of the reports, has substantially increased. Whereas the average length of the third-year reports was under 40 pages, the fourth-year reports average 74 pages. One must, of course, be careful not to judge academic quality by length, as some of the longest productions are actually among the poorest. Nonetheless, our students are now producing works of sufficient length to ensure that all but the very weakest are able to generate some worthwhile data. However, the tendency to prefer close-to-home or close-to-university study locations remains quite evident, as is shown in Table 7.

Brunei-Muara District	9 studies (50%)
Tutong District	3 studies (17%)
Belait District	1 studies (6%)
Temburong District	0 studies (0%)
country, not district based	6 studies (33%)

Table 7. Location of the fourth-year reports (since one study involved two districts, the numbers add up to 19, not 18)

Five Selected Fourth-year Projects

The five fourth-year research exercises singled out for more detailed treatment include a study of traditional Malay medical practices, two village community studies, an investigation into kinship in a village context and, finally, a study of the lute-like *gambus* musical instrument and of traditional *gambus* bands and their modern evolution into multi-instrument rock-like bands, whose performances are often accompanied by dancing.

Traditional Medical Practices

Khairunnisa binti Yakub's (2009) insightful study investigates Brunei Malay traditional medical practices and their association with spirit beliefs. Her work specifically examines the tension between medical beliefs and practices that are categorised as 'superstition' by the religious authorities in Brunei and other traditional practices that are accepted as compatible with Islamic ideology. Ordinary Brunei Malays, however, may not be aware of this tension, or perhaps they are not too concerned about it, since it seems they simply take for granted that indigenous beliefs and practices are an integral part of their daily lives, regardless of what the authorities might say. Although Brunei Malays strongly emphasize the importance of worshipping Allah as the one and supreme God, they still continue to believe in the existence of various kinds of spirits, to whom rituals and prayers are addressed, particularly for the cure of sickness.

Khairunnisa begins with a valuable chapter on the Brunei Malay worldview, discussing traditional concepts such as *alam mati* ('the world of the dead'), *semangat* ('spirit essence'), and spirits and other supernatural entities. She includes also some fascinating illustrations of these entities as conceived by a young Bruneian artist. This first chapter ends with a discussion of *orang pandai* ('wise people'), whom she describes as traditional healers and shamans with an extensive knowledge of herbs, massage techniques and incantations, people who are renowned for their skills in healing sicknesses that are believed to be caused by spirits. *Orang pandai* are highly respected, both because they are seen as sources of *ilmu* ('knowledge') and also because they are able to mediate between *alam nyata* ('the visible world') and *alam ghaib* ('the supernatural realm'). These *orang pandai* are said to acquire their *ilmu* in three principal ways: through *bertarak* ('asceticism'), through inheritance from a family member, or with the assistance of a spirit.

During the course of her fieldwork, Khairunnisa discovered that there were two categories of *orang pandai*: those who are recognised by the Brunei government's Ministry of Religious Affairs, even receiving the official title of *ustaz* ('teacher'), and those who have no such official recognition. The two types of *orang pandai* in modern-day Brunei illustrate the conflict between official religious philosophy and traditional beliefs and practices.

Chapters Two and Three constitute the core of the report. Chapter Two explores Brunei Malay notions about the nature and cause of sickness, with the major divide being between natural sicknesses and those caused by spirits. The great majority of Brunei Malays interpret sickness in terms of spirits that are believed to damage both *roh* ('soul') and *jasad* ('body'), so they often show a preference for traditional healers, the *orang pandai*, over modern medical practitioners.

Chapter Three describes six healing methods that *orang pandai* commonly employ: (a) verbal communication (including the use of *jampi* 'ritual incantations' and Qur'anic *surah* 'verses'), (b) exorcism, (c) *tawari* ('neutralization', meaning attempts to stabilize the client's body-soul relationship using charmed water and herbs), (d) massaging the patient's body, (e) *guris* ('mystical barriers against malicious spirits'), and (f) amulets.



Tual



Bunian



Pontianak



Orang Halus



Orang Jagau

Plate 4. An artist's impression of various spirit categories (from Khairunnisa Yakub, 2009)

In summary, Khairunnisa writes that while the *orang pandai* utilize the ancient animistic, Indic and Islamic heritages of the Brunei Malays, most of these healers nowadays lean heavily towards Islamic rather than animistic and Indic elements.

In the best tradition of anthropology, Khairunnisa emphasises that the intention of her report was not to contradict Islamic orthodoxy or to dismiss animistic and Indic beliefs and practices as superstition, but rather to understand religious syncretism in Brunei Malay culture, especially from the participants' own viewpoints.

Two Village Studies

Several studies have investigated one or more village communities, but only two such village-based works may properly be classified as community studies rather than the investigation of a socio-cultural institution within a rural setting. These two are: Abdul Hamid's (2008) study of the Kedayan of Kampong Madang; and Lizawati Suhaili's (2008) comparison between Kampong Ukong and Kampong Bebuloh. Both these village studies are well researched, presented, referenced and illustrated.

The title of Hamid's study of the Kedayan community of Kampong Madang refers to the 'remembered past and observed present', which makes it clear that the research involves both recall ethnography and participant-observation. The first four chapters include a background to ethnic categorization, an overview of the village, a study of the community's subsistence patterns, and an investigation into major socio-cultural institutions such as kinship, household, gender, marriage and religion. The final chapter considers the community's health and political cultures, the two domains traditionally linked in the person of the *orang tua* ('elder') of the village, who functioned both as medicine man and political leader. The report is replete with both modern and period photographs, the latter a fascinating visual record from the personal collection of the author's maternal grandmother.

Hamid's third chapter, on past and present subsistence patterns, demonstrates that the combination of the swidden farming of dryland padi and the gathering of forest produce was the economic bedrock of the old subsistence pattern. But this pattern has been much modified over the past fifty years or so, first by the introduction of rubber cultivation and subsequently due to the movement of villagers into government employment, at first as manual workers and then, as a consequence of educational advance, largely as white-collar administrative workers.

Chapter Four seeks to demonstrate the crucial importance of institutions, such as kinship, family and gender roles, in sustaining both physical and socio-cultural life in Kampong Madang. Although these traditional institutions remain important to the villagers, at the same time they have undergone substantial change because the community is no longer a demographically small, ethnically homogeneous one, engaged in agriculture and forest gathering. Instead, it is now a multi-ethnic suburban community administratively part of the national capital, Bandar Seri Begawan, where most of the villagers work either as white-collar employees of the government or for private enterprises.

Matters of religion and politics are dealt with in both Chapter Four and Five, and Hamid demonstrates how closely Islamic and traditional belief systems are connected in the minds and practices of the villagers in Kampong Madang, constituting essential components in the community's traditional farming culture.



Kedayan woman *circa* 1940



An elementary school attended by Kg. Madang children in the 1950s



Traditional Kedayan home with grass-thatch roof, walls of tree bark, and verandah wall of split bamboo



Modern house in Kg. Madang: a traditional village becomes a city suburb

Plate 5. Images from Kg. Madang (from Abdul Hamid Awang Moslim, 2008)

Modernization is an inevitable process, especially in a well-educated and oil-rich country like Brunei Darussalam, and Hamid's report suggests that most of the villagers of modern-day Kampong Madang maintain a positive attitude towards the changes that have occurred in their lives over the past few decades. However, although they acknowledge that they are far better off than they were in the past, there is still a certain nostalgia among the elders for the old Kedayan way of life, even though it is now no more than a memory for them, and is completely unknown to their children and grandchildren.

Lizawati's comparative study of the Dusun village of Ukong and the Bisaya community of Bebuloh is an exemplary undergraduate exercise, especially in that it makes a serious attempt to survey the extant literature on both ethnic categories. It is unfortunate that so many of our UBD students fail to relate their own work to the often quite rich relevant literature.

For the Dusun, Lizawati examines works in both Malay and English, citing English-language materials by Abdul Latif (1969), Bantong Antaran (1985, 1993a,b, 1994), Eva Kershaw (2000), Eva and Roger Kershaw (1998, 2006), Roger Kershaw (1998a, 1998b), Pudarno Binchin (1988, 2001, 2004, 2008) and Yabit (1994), and Malay-language works by Akau Beruang (1980), Chong (1984, 1986), Matussin (1986) and Yabit (1990, 1995, 2004).

Lizawati observes that less research has been done on the Bisaya than on the Dusun, and that most Bisaya live in Sarawak, not Brunei. Nonetheless, she takes care to review materials on the Bisaya in both Brunei and Sarawak, for example Brewsher (1956, 1957, 1962), Carroll (1960), Harrison (1965, 1976), Headley (1950), Hussain and Newman (1987), Kahiti (1990), Mustaffa (1993), Peranio (1959, 1972, 1977), Punchak (1989) and Sandin (1971).

The report consists of six principal chapters. The first offers a general introduction to the two ethnic groups, covering exonyms and endonyms, demography, population distribution, the historical and legendary past, and language and linguistic affiliations. Then, resisting the temptation to treat each village separately and so produce two mini-reports, Lizawati integrates the data she collected from the two communities under economics (Chapter 2), kinship (Chapter 3), marriage (Chapter 4) and religion (Chapter 5).

The first chapter reports the two communities as speaking mutually intelligible languages, but each having its own distinct dialect. Indeed, the relative linguistic similarity of the Dusun and Bisaya communities is the main reason they are so frequently identified as a single ethnic category. However, there are certain ritual differences between the two communities. For example, in a Dusun wedding in Kg Ukong, there is no stepping on a *parang* ('machete'), spitting *sirih* ('betel') leaves, spitting *sirih* juice, nor any circumambulation of the groom's parental house. Moreover, the Bisaya ritual of *berbasu batis* ('cleansing the feet') is not similar to that of the Dusun, while the Bisaya custom of *nguli angai* ('driving off bad omens') is not practised in the Dusun community.

The economic base of both communities was traditionally focused on irrigated-rice farming. However, in recent times, each has seen substantial change arising from the engagement of the villagers in wage labouring. The kinship system of both Dusun and Bisaya communities is based on the same bilateral principles and both groups recognise bilateral kindreds, which are termed *waris*.

One of the richest chapters is that on religion. It states that the indigenous beliefs of the Dusun and Bisaya are quite similar and that they may be described as 'animo-theistic'. They are animistic because of the belief in the existence of many spirit entities that protect or harm humans depending on whether or not they have received proper respect; and they are theistic because they affirm the existence of a high god as well as other deities.

Both the Bisaya and Dusun attribute many sicknesses to super-human entities that get offended by people who fail to observe taboos or infringe on their territory. To deal with such sicknesses, people seek the assistance of *balian* ('priestesses') and *dukun* ('medicine men'). The principal ritual occasion, apart from rites of passage, is the padi harvest festival that is

known in both communities as *temarok*. But *temarok* rites extend beyond a concern for rice and include the consumption of other foodstuffs, obtaining cures for sicknesses, and cleansing houses of ill-fortune. A mystical force deriving from the high god (the Mpuan Inan of the Dusun and Allak Tallak of the Bisaya) is available to spirits, animals and certain kinds of human beings, such as the *balian* and *dukun* mentioned above. This force may be used either for good or bad. Its positive role helps regulate the community's ethics and provides people with answers to their questions about illness and misfortune. Its negative role takes the form of evil magic and sorcery.

The initial impetus for Lizawati's comparative research in Kg Ukong and Kg Bebuloh was not just to generate ethnographic data on these two communities, but rather to answer the question whether Dusun and Bisaya are two separate ethnic categories (as is recognized constitutionally in Brunei) or are actually one and the same people (as is suggested by some writers, who use the terms Dusun and Bisaya interchangeably). Unfortunately, the report does not come to a clear decision on this issue. One informant opined that, although the two groups understand each other well, the Bisaya still consider themselves as separate from the Dusun. It is clear, nonetheless, that the Dusun and Bisaya are closely related. The report concludes that further research is needed to resolve this issue, not just on two individual village communities, but on a representative sample of all Dusun and Bisaya people in Sarawak as well as in Brunei.

There is, of course, another possibility: the answer may lie in individual self-identification rather than in socio-cultural similarities and differences. That was beyond the scope of the report and its absence does not undermine the value of the detailed ethnographic observations the report contains.

A Village-based Community Study

Liyana Tassim's 2009 study on kinship in Bukit Panggal is exceptional among research reports by UBD undergraduates for its theoretical thrust. It is a potentially exciting attempt to challenge the theoretical framework for the description of Kedayan kinship adopted by earlier writers such as Allen Maxwell (1980). Liyana re-examines Kedayan concepts of family and household, previously interpreted on the basis of kinship ties, by using Janet Carsten's (2004) notion of the importance of negotiated relatedness. However, although Liyana appears to challenge the argument put forward by Maxwell (1980, p.235) that it is the Kedayan practice of uxorilocal post-marital residence that allows non-Kedayan men to be absorbed and their offspring by Kedayan women to be considered Kedayan, in fact her own observation that kinship within the household is affected by the manner in which a person is affiliated to a house actually appears to parallel rather than contradict Maxwell's analysis.

Given the potential in this report for stimulating theoretical discussion of the anthropology and sociology of Bruneian society, it is regrettable that it is poorly presented, at least in comparison with the eight studies discussed above and the one to follow, with lots of grammar and spelling errors, misuse of quotation marks, and inconsistencies in the use of references. Lack of care and over-hasty workmanship is evident also in the production of maps and figures and the single photographic illustration seems more-or-less irrelevant. Furthermore, it is a pity that so many secondary sources are cited, such as American introductions to cultural anthropology for first-year undergraduate students, rather than using the original documents.

The fieldwork was conducted in the Kedayan village of Kampong Bukit Panggal, some 30 km from Brunei's capital, Bandar Seri Begawan. But this is not a village community study like those by Hamid and Lizawati discussed above. Instead, Liyana has conducted a detailed investigation of the origin, expansion and contraction of six of the village's ninety-two

households, all of them Kedayan (though there remains a problem with the definition of Kedayan) and all related to her Kedayan husband. The principal data are presented in the first chapter that contains interesting material on household histories, though a few more details would have been useful about the prerogatives for parents to expand the houses for the benefit of themselves and their children.

Chapter Two considers relationships within the house, distinguishing between fixed occupants and those who are associated with it but have no fixed place in it. This “fixedness” reflects the status of the person in the house rather than an actual place to stay. For example, there is the case of a married daughter who still has her own room in her parental home even though she now lives in an apartment at Penanjong Camp, the Brunei military headquarters. Despite having her own space in the parental home, she is no longer regarded as a fixed occupant of the house. On the other hand, unmarried children of the couple that established the house still retain their fixed status, even though they may actually reside there less often than some non-fixed members. Then there is a third category of people, who neither reside in the house nor retain a designated space within it. Liyana cites the example of her husband. He is not a fixed member of his parental home, and his space as a non-fixed member has been appropriated by his brother. Yet he remains an associated member, albeit one with little say in household affairs. Liyana concludes this interesting chapter by remarking that the status of an “unfixed” associate of the house may help resolve conflicts between married siblings, especially in terms of sharing resources.

The third chapter deals with economic contributions by various categories of household associates, as well as consumption, sharing and eating together, and exchanges of food within and between houses. There is much detail in this chapter that will interest students of Southeast Asian family life more generally.

The final three-page chapter, which deals with the general characteristics of bilateral kinship systems and also the relationship between kinship and the division of land, is really too superficial to do justice to these complex topics.

The conclusion to this study offers the important, if not particularly new, observation that although the house is a physical entity, the immaterial and material exchanges between its occupants facilitate kinship itself and therefore affect the ideas on which kinship is constructed. And in her final sentence Liyana writes that her study of relationships in the houses allows us to see how people become kin or *orang lain* (‘other people’).

From Musical Instrument to Raucous Party: The Gambus in Brunei

The final report selected for detailed comment is Muhd. Saifullah’s 2009 study of the *gambus* in Brunei Darussalam. This is a fascinating and particularly readable account of cultural change in Brunei, encompassing the performing arts, youth culture, and religious ideology. It shows how the term for a lute-like musical instrument of Arab origin, the *gambus* (Arabic, *qanbus*), has now come to signify also a musical event, somewhat like a Western party, with live music in which the *gambus* has given way to electric guitars, its sonorous notes replaced by those of rock music, the once-popular Malay *mukun*, *joget* and *zapin* dance forms by disco-dancing, and the decorous Malay dress styles by jeans, hot-pants, T-shirts and sports shoes.

To enable the reader fully to grasp the significance of this transformation of a major aspect of Brunei’s musical culture, Chapter Two carefully describes the Arab origins and subsequent Southeast Asian development of the *gambus*, discussing its previous use during the formal observation of Brunei Malay life-cycle and religious events, as well as in less formal entertainment for villagers in pre-radio, pre-cinema, pre-television and pre-video days. In fact, the Religious Department (subsequently Ministry of Religious Affairs) used to utilise

gambus bands as part of its strategy to attract converts to the Islamic religion. Saifullah believes that *gambus* bands probably once played exclusively at the royal court, but subsequently became popular in non-aristocratic circles as well; by the 1960s, there were around twenty different bands in Brunei, with the *gambus* player and his instrument regarded as the core of the ensemble.

When *gambus* performances were mostly associated with life-cycle events, the audience, young and old, comprised the circle of invited guests, relatives, neighbours, friends and colleagues. But by the 1970s, the audiences had shrunk to mostly older married people; at the time it seemed that *gambus* performances were going out of fashion among the younger generation.

However, by the early 1980s traditional *gambus* ensembles began to transform themselves, incorporating electric keyboards and drums and playing livelier, fast-tempo music that encouraged dancing. The dances were traditional favourites, such as the Brunei all-female *mukun* accompanied by poetic song, the lively Peninsular Malay's Portuguese-derived *joget*, in which men and women dance face-to-face but without touching, and the *zapin*, originally an exclusively male dance of Arab origin, but among Malay peoples performed by both sexes and, like *mukun*, accompanied by poetic songs.

The third chapter, on modern *gambus*, begins by noting the perceptible decline in recent years both of *gambus* and the associated *zapin* dance form. At weddings and other celebratory life events, it seems that karaoke has supplanted in popularity more traditional entertainment. Meanwhile, as mentioned above, the term *gambus* has acquired a new meaning among Bruneian youth. When they say *bergambus* ('participating in *gambus*') they mean partying, or joining in an event that involves modern music and dance, sometimes also drinking and gambling and even occasionally fighting, all a far cry from a traditional *gambus* performance. And even if a few bands still use the *gambus*, it nonetheless will generally be playing rock music on electronic equipment, with all the trappings of a rock band: mixer, large amplifier and several over-sized speakers, ranging from three to five feet in height. With six to twelve members, including females (mostly singers, but a few instrumentalists), a band's reputation is based largely on its ability to persuade the audience to dance.

The carefully choreographed and standardised group dances of former times have quite disappeared; in their place there is highly individualistic disco-style dancing performed *en masse* in front of the band. The dancers include men and women, almost always Brunei Malays, clad in Western-style youth clothing. Members of the 'third gender' frequently take an active role in encouraging the audience to participate in the dancing.

The concluding chapter of this report is concerned with music and religion, and it tries to make sense of the transformation from traditional to modern *gambus* in the context of present-day Brunei Malay society. It begins by stressing that the public performance of music was a common feature of traditional Bruneian society and reminds us that *gambus* bands were once pressed into service by the religious authorities in their campaigns to have non-Muslims convert to Islam. In contrast, in more recent times the attitude of religious leaders towards music and dance has become more ambiguous and, as a result, some sections of society have begun to perceive public music performances as forbidden. However it is not just a question of the music, for it is the associated forms of behavior, including dancing and drinking, which are seen as subversive. Whereas traditional dancers were married couples, the participants at modern-day *gambus* parties are mostly unmarried couples, dancing in close proximity with sexually suggestive movements under subdued light. In the eyes of the religious authorities, mixed dancing and the consumption of alcohol are seen as leading to unlawful intimacy and promiscuity, thereby undermining the traditional family values of Malay culture.



a traditional *joget* dance



a modern *gambus* event

Plate 6. Modern and traditional dancing
(from Muhd. Saifullah Abdul Azim Abdullah, 2009)

Privately-organised public entertainment is controlled in Brunei, as the organisers for events such as weddings or birthday parties are required to obtain written police approval by submitting a letter of request through the local village headman. Provided such approval has been obtained, the police seem to veer on the side of leniency, so long as there is no serious threat to public order.

Saifullah's conclusions are especially noteworthy. Traditional *gambus* performances have largely faded away, surviving today mostly in public performances organized by the Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports in order to showcase traditional Bruneian culture. In their place as public entertainment, especially for youth, the modern *gambus* performance has emerged to occupy the social space of clubs, pubs, discotheques and pop concerts that are prohibited in Brunei. Thus, the modern *gambus* can be defined as a kind of mobile club that shifts each weekend to a different site, but is attended by a network of more or less regular *gambus*-goers, who keep track of the venues and meet up regularly at such events in much the same way as young people might go clubbing elsewhere. Although they are legally in the private domain, in practice anybody who learns of a *gambus* party may attend.

The status of modern-day *gambus* performances in Brunei is a highly ambivalent one. They are no longer private family celebrations, but neither are they fully public concerts. They are no longer organised by and for relatives, but neither are they commercial events. They are no longer a traditional art form, but neither are they entirely modern music clubs. Finally, they are not entirely legal, because of the banned activities associated with them, but neither are they entirely illegal, since they occur with official knowledge and even permission. And it is this ambiguity that may be the key to understanding the phenomenon. As opportunities for the expression of youth pop culture are limited in Brunei, so the *gambus* has evolved to occupy a space in which public music and mixed dancing may occur in a context that is formally and legally not in contravention of existing laws and morals.

Like several other of the research reports chosen for special discussion in this chapter, Saifullah's study may not be welcomed officially. It is nonetheless a valuable contribution to the anthropology and sociology of modern Brunei, conducted according to the best traditions of non-judgmental participant-observation research.

Conclusions on Ethnographic Research at UBD

If all seventy-five anthropology and sociology research reports between 2000 and 2010 had achieved the quality of the ten exercises chosen here for special comment, we would by now have a huge amount of data on which to base a pedagogically much-needed work on the peoples and cultures of Brunei Darussalam. Unfortunately, the great majority of the finished products, especially the third-year ones, have been far too superficial to allow us to achieve this goal. Indeed, the standard of their presentation has frequently been so low as to question whether they should be preserved in the public domain at all. Stripped of preliminary and end matter, and of photographs, tables and diagrams, the texts of some of these reports barely reach half a dozen poorly-written pages.

My sense is that, overall, there has been a lack of serious commitment to the research projects. Too often, it appears, students have simply equated their report with a term paper in an ordinary course, with its completion frequently left to the last minute. We should acknowledge that this situation has improved to some extent since the workshop became a year-long exercise and its participants became fourth- not third-year undergraduates, as well as being majors, not minors, in Sociology-Anthropology. There is, nonetheless, still much room for improvement. This must surely depend upon a greater commitment to, and initiative during, fieldwork, coupled with the realisation that the written report that follows belongs to a very different genre of academic production than the standard course essay.

From the start, the best of our students have been able to generate fascinating ethnographic data that contribute significantly to our store of knowledge about both traditional and modern socio-cultural institutions in Brunei. Moreover, there has been further improvement under the new arrangement for sociology and anthropology at this university. However, even though the tourist brochures tell us that Brunei is “a kingdom of unexpected treasures”, we still have a long way to go before we obtain the treasure trove of sociological knowledge that is available, for example, at the National University of Singapore, where generations of student academic exercises have focused on almost every conceivable facet of the social and cultural life in that island nation.

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