



# **THE BRUNEI MUSEUM JOURNAL 2021**

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BRUNEI DARUSSALAM**

## **THE BRUNEI MUSEUM JOURNAL 2021**

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## 2021

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## THE BRUNEIAN CONCEPT OF NATIONHOOD IN THE 19TH AND 20TH CENTURIES: EXPRESSIONS OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY AND NATIONAL IDENTITY

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### ABSTRACT

The Bruneian concept of nationhood is essentially grounded in the country's historical, political, religious, social and cultural reality. The rootedness of the concept in Brunei's unique and rich past endows it with distinctive characteristics. By examining different types of local documents ranging from poems, wills and letters to government documents, such as treaties and enactments, this paper argues that the concept of nationhood in Brunei fundamentally revolves around two core values: state sovereignty and distinctive national identity. State sovereignty manifests in the form of a strong spirit of nationalism, sense of belonging, loyalty to leadership and executive right of the governing power. The documents, composed between 1846 and the 1950s, illustrate such forms of sovereignty. In comparison, the messages on the creation of national identity became frequent and urgent in the documents produced after the 1950s until Brunei gained independence in 1984. The formulation of national identity emphasises the preservation of the country's religious, cultural and political values and its peculiarities that eventually led to the identification of Islam, Monarchy and Malay as the foundational elements of Brunei's national identity.

**Keywords:** Brunei Darussalam, nationhood, state sovereignty, national identity, Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB), Brunei-British Relations

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## INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to identify and examine the articulation and expressions of the Bruneian concept of nationhood in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries in twelve selected local documents. It is a common understanding that the concept and definition of nationhood are flexible and evolved mainly from the following basic principles: a sense of belonging and nationalism leading to extensive rights of inclusivity and global rights (Hastings 1997; Calhoun 1997; Moltchanova 2009). New waves of research have also influenced the focus of conceptual frameworks of nationhood, initially placing emphasis on the question of origin, people and politics to much more contemporary developments and issues (Brubaker 1996; Croucher 2003; Moltchanova 2007; Yogeewaran; and Dasgupta 2014).

There is, however, a growing body of scholarship in studies of nationhood that emphasise the need for a human-centred approach by listening to the voices of the people who articulated what was essential to them in their own space and time, and to accordingly relate this to a broader definition and concept of nationhood (Fox and Miller-Idriss 2008; Goode and Stroup 2015; Bonikowski 2016). This is what this paper sets out to do by tracing and examining the development of the Bruneian concept of nationhood as expressed through different types of local documents ranging from poems, wills and letters to government documents, such as treaties and enactments. The documents we use in this article are presented in chronological order to convey the evolutionary development of the concept of nationhood in Brunei while, at the same time, discussing the two core values of nationhood, namely state sovereignty and a distinctive identity.

## EXPRESSIONS OF STATE SOVEREIGNTY

One of the earliest expressions of a subtle yet evocative sense of nationhood can be found in the *Syair Rakis* (The Rakis Poem), written by Pengiran Shahbandar Pengiran Md Salleh ibnu Pengiran Sharmayuda (also known as Pengiran Indera Mahkota). He was a core noble in the Brunei royal family and appointed by the Brunei Sultan as Governor of Sarawak in the late 1830s. At that time, Sarawak was part of Brunei's territory, rich in antimony and, more importantly, the first Brunei ruled territory to experience foreign interference in its domestic affairs. Unrest broke out in Sarawak because of local resentment of Brunei's interference in the previously independent antimony business. By about 1835, Sarawak was in rebellion against Brunei, which was supported by the Sambas Sultanate that had established links with the Dutch. Complicating the situation further in Sarawak was the arrival of the Brunei Sultan's main minister, Pengiran Muda Hashim, sent by the Sultan to help quell the rebellion. In 1840, Pengiran Muda Hashim made an agreement with James Brooke, a British adventurer. This was to make him Governor of Sarawak if he could put an end to the rebellion, which he duly did. After James Brooke became Governor, Pengiran Shahbandar Pengiran Md. Salleh eventually left Sarawak. In 1846, Sarawak was officially ceded to James Brooke in perpetuity and he became Sarawak's effective ruler. The following year, the Sultan was forced to cede the island of Labuan to Britain as part of the 1847 Treaty of Friendship and Commerce (Hussainmiya 2006).

It is widely believed that Pengiran Shahbandar composed *Syair Rakis* around this time. At the beginning of the *Syair* he hints of foreign encroachment in Brunei's territories and specifically describes British interest in Labuan, which was considered a strategic location and of benefit to British naval and commercial interests:

The Englishmen came from England  
Establishing a base in Labuan Island  
If our advisers are lacking expertise  
They will there achieve their enterprise

Turning matters upside down  
With the aim of possessing a large country  
If knowledgeable assistants are lacking  
Too clever at questions and answering

The news astonished the writer  
Labuan Island is no small matter  
His heart felt greatly in a fluster  
An omen the country controlled by foreigner

(Translation adapted from Jamil Al-Sufri 2013, 56)

The above stanzas demonstrate the author's fear that if the British were allowed to establish a naval base in Labuan then Brunei's sovereignty would be gravely undermined. Such permission would inevitably open the door for real political intervention that could jeopardise the Brunei monarchy, particularly if inefficient administrators governed the country.

Alas, Pengiran Shahbandar was right. After the signing of the British-Brunei Treaty of Friendship and Commerce, which led to the cession of Labuan to the British in 1847, Brunei's hands were tied by a clause in the treaty that forbade the Brunei Sultan from ceding any land in his dominions to other nations without the consent of the British Government (Irwin 1955). Effectively, the treaty prevented other foreign powers from taking any interest in Brunei, now secured under the British sphere of influence. However, it did not stop British individuals from taking territories that were under Brunei's control.

The Brookes gained massive political influence in Sarawak and in the second half of the 19th century James Brooke, and later his successor Charles Brooke, took Brunei's territories one after the other. In 1853, Saribas, Skrang, Sadong, Batang Lupar, Lingga, Kanowit and Kalakah, known as the Iban Rivers, were ceded to the Brookes for a fixed annual payment of \$1500. Then in 1861, the Brookes took Mukah. In 1877 the North Borneo Company was established and gained a land concession that represented a large part of eastern Sabah from the Brunei Sultan. In 1881, the British Government granted a Royal Charter to the company and it became

the British North Borneo Company (BNBC). This led to increased rivalry between the BNBC and Brookes as they competed for Brunei's remaining territories. The Brookes quickly acquired the present-day Fourth Division of Sarawak in 1882 and Trusan in 1885, while the BNBC took over Padas-Klias in 1884, Kinarut and other small territories in the west coast of North Borneo in 1885.

The British initially did not provide any explicit backing to the Brookes as the former had not shown much interest in Borneo and the land concessions were more an outcome of the Brookes' private enterprise and rivalry between them and the BNBC. In fact, the British Government heavily criticised Charles Brooke when he forcefully expanded Sarawak's territories, pushing Brunei to the verge of extinction (Tarling 2006).

Realising that the loss of territories at an alarming rate was pushing Brunei further into an increasingly dire political situation, Sultan Abdul Momin, the 24th Sultan of Brunei (r.1852-1885), called a meeting with his ministers in 1885 where they made an oath, known as the *Amanah*, not to cede the sultanate's remaining lands to any foreign powers, including the British:

This is a Decree of His Highness the Sultan. After having consulted with the Pangeran Tumonggong and Pangeran Bendahara and Pangeran di Gadong, together with his Ministers and Officers, and with the whole of the population of Brunei, who agree to sanction the Arrangement arrived at herein, and thereby peace may come on the whole of the country.

Now concerning Limbang and other countries which still remain under the government of Brunei, they cannot be leased or given away to any other nation, but must remain under our rule and that our ancestors who may be elected Rajahs of Brunei, cannot on any account take rivers, or slaves, or private property, and in the same manner the slaves appertaining to the Sovereign cannot be made private slaves. After us whomsoever property may belong it will remain him, rivers, followers, 'tulin' and hereditary property. And the customs of our ancestors shall be followed by those who came after us. They can on no account be changed while there is a sun and moon, in order that there shall be no complication in the country. (The *Amanah* 1885, translation cited in Ismail Nordin 1998).

The *Amanah* specifically mentions Limbang, a territory situated between present-day Brunei-Muara and Temburong. Given that Limbang was the rice-bowl of Brunei at that time, its cession to either the Brookes or the BNBC would not only separate Temburong from the larger part of Brunei's territories but also that Brunei would lose a primary economic source. This explains why Sultan Abdul Momin put considerable effort into retaining Brunei's sovereignty over territories and toughened his political stance against the unsympathetic Brookes and the BNBC (Mardiah 2019).

This message of a call for unity is a clear indication that Sultan Abdul Momin believed Brunei's sovereignty was at stake and the *Amanah* was a desperate and emotional plea to his people to retain Brunei's remaining lands for the sake of its



political survival. What is more important is that the *Amanah* also emphasises that the responsibility to protect the shrinking sultanate from the British and other foreign powers fell directly upon the shoulders of the nobles and the Brunei people.

However, no matter how hard Brunei fought against the expansion of British influence and the mounting political interference in its domestic affairs, in September 1888, Brunei signed a Protectorate Agreement with Britain. Sultan Hashim Jalilul Alam Aqamaddin, the 25th Sultan of Brunei (r. 1885-1906) who had succeeded Sultan Abdul Momin, and Sir Hugh Low, the British Government representative who was the Resident of Perak, signed the Agreement.

There were, however, different intentions between the two signing parties. On Brunei's side, the Sultan signed the Agreement hoping that it would protect Brunei from further expansion by the Brookes in Sarawak and the BNBC in North Borneo. Sultan Hashim was fully aware that if the territorial scramble between the two continued then Brunei would eventually become part of one or the other, even before the turn of the decade (Ismail 1999). At this point, Brunei was desperate to safeguard what was left of its sovereignty and thus entered into the Agreement with Britain.

The Protectorate Agreement effectively gave the British the administrative right to govern Brunei's external affairs while the Sultan retained his powers to rule the sultanate domestically. Brunei also agreed not to cede any of its territories without prior British consent. In other words, Brunei allowed the British to run the sultanate's external administration, even if this meant Brunei no longer played a role in pursuing its own foreign policies. What is more important, as outlined in Article I of the Protectorate Agreement, is that "[t]he State of Brunei shall continue to be governed and administered by the said Sultan Hashim Jalilul Alam Akamadin and his successors as an *independent* State, under the protection of Great Britain...". [emphasis added] (The Protectorate Agreement of 1888, cited in Ismail 1998).

The above article of the Agreement clearly illustrates how vital sovereignty is to the Bruneian concept of nationhood. Brunei might not deter foreign intervention entirely, but the British's allowance for some degree of (internal) autonomy is acceptable enough and considered a sufficient indication of state sovereignty.

On Britain's part, however, Hugh Low signed the Agreement not so much to protect Brunei from the Brookes and the BNBC, but to secure Brunei against foreign interference, even if that meant it eventually being absorbed into the Brooke's Sarawak or the BNBC's colonies (Crisswell 1971). Moreover, the British were concerned about foreign disruption, in particular by the Dutch, of its highly lucrative India-China trade route that sailed past Borneo's northwest coast. British policy was primarily driven by trade, such as the formation of the Straits Settlements in 1826 and the signing of the Pangkor Engagement in 1874 (Ooi 2020), and policies were often formulated to ensure trade routes would not be disrupted, such as the 1888 Protectorate Agreement. That is perhaps why, when Charles Brooke annexed Limbang in 1890 amid an ongoing dispute over the territory with Sultan Hashim and growing resentment there of over-taxation by Brunei, the British Government eventually gave legal recognition to the annexation. Apparently, they "believed that

the Limbang would not readily submit to the reimposition of Brunei rule and that the region would be better under Sarawak" (Saunders 2002, 93).

Limbang's annexation, without doubt, inflicted a devastating blow to Brunei's survival and sovereignty. Sultan Hashim expressed this sentiment clearly in a letter to Sir Frederick Weld, the Governor of the Straits Settlements. The purpose of the letter was to complain about the annexation of the Limbang territory by Sarawak in 1890:

The treaty brought by Sir Hugh Low we have adhered to, we hold it, and base our hopes upon it, and we trust our friend will see that it is maintained and explained to Her Majesty's Ministers how matters stand so that they may understand the position of affairs in Brunei. Our friend knows well that if Rajah Brooke takes the Limbang River, our town of Brunei must cease to exist and all British subjects trading in Brunei and all Brunei subjects will lose their means of livelihood. We, our council and all our people do not wish to give up the Limbang River to Rajah Brooke, for Limbang is Brunei, and Brunei is Limbang and the government of the two places cannot be divided. (Letter of Sultan Hashim 1890, cited in Ismail 1998).

As shown earlier, Sultan Abdul Momin mentioned Limbang in the *Amanah*. Thus, by asking the British to return Limbang to Brunei, Sultan Hashim acted according to Sultan Abdul Momin's wish to protect the remaining Brunei's territories from foreign intervention. Moreover, the loss of Limbang caused an unnecessary territorial divide that resulted in families being split and falling apart (Nani Suryani, 2012). This situation could have also pushed Brunei to descend into an even deeper political turmoil and incite people's anger against the Sultan.

Sultan Hashim's letter also points out British interference in Brunei's internal affairs as he viewed the Limbang issue as a domestic matter. However, Brunei's view contradicts the British argument where they believed that under the Protectorate Agreement, "the Sultan was bound to accept the decision of the British Government in case a dispute arose between Brunei and her neighbours" (Ranjit Singh 1984, 87). Thus, the British felt it was their duty to intervene and resolve the annexation issue.

The continuing attempt to hold on to remaining territories was again illustrated in Sultan Hashim's letter to King Edward VII of England in August 1902, which was written in response to a Sarawak proposal to the Sultan that suggested Brunei's remaining territories be ceded to the former in exchange for payments. Evidently, after the annexation of Limbang, Brunei's politics were in complete disarray. Rebellions broke out in the Brunei territories of Belait and Tutong, mainly due to heavy taxation on the population, and some rebels even demanded the lands be ceded to Sarawak. Charles Brooke, unwilling to miss this easy opportunity, offered cession money of \$3,000 for the Tutong and Belait Districts with a further \$1,000 for the Muara District, if Brunei was willing to cede these territories. In June 1902, Brooke extended his offer to include all of Brunei, including the capital: the Sultan and the remaining two ministers were to retain their honours and titles and receive annual pensions, the Sultan \$12,000, the Pengiran Bendahara and the Pengiran Pemancha \$6,000 each. However, Sultan Hashim rejected the offer, considering it a breach of

the 1888 Protectorate Agreement. More importantly, the Sultan was aware that if he accepted the offer, then it would push Brunei to the brink of oblivion (Ismail 1999, 49). As a result, Sultan Hashim sent the following letter to King Edward VII to show his disapproval of Brooke's proposal:

I absolutely refuse the proposal, more especially as he has no written authority from Your Majesty or Your Majesty's Ministers to support his action. Even if he had such authority, I would not approve a proposal equivalent to the casting away of my crown, my good name and power. (CO144/77)

The above letter is a reaffirmation of Brunei's stance to protect its sovereignty. Notably, the Sultan makes a point of mentioning the crown, his good name, and power, all of which essentially represent this sovereignty. The crown represents the state's historic identity of the monarchical tradition that has been the governing system since the 1400s. If the Sultan agreed to surrender his crown and give way to the establishment of a non-monarchical system of government, he would be seen as abandoning his people who had pledged their undivided loyalty and obedience to the monarchy. Replacing the monarchical system would also tarnish the Sultan's good name and reputation as protector of his people and remove the monarchy's sense of superiority and power, which has always been associated with memories of past great triumphs and victories.

Thus, we can interpret the Sultan's letter as a demonstration of nationalistic sentiment and a persistent demonstration of a strong sense of belonging to a shrinking sultanate. It is also evident during this period that the crown - the monarchical tradition - is the most potent symbol of Brunei's sovereignty and nationhood. Sultan Abdul Mumin and then Sultan Hashim had been fighting for the preservation of the monarchy amidst the political challenges posed by the Brookes, the BNBC, the British Government and even his own people (certain nobles), who were plotting with Charles Brooke to sell off Brunei's remaining lands (McArthur 1987, 135).

Ironically, the priority to protect Brunei's monarchy led to the Supplementary Agreement between Great Britain and Brunei in 1906. The Supplementary Agreement, signed by Sultan Hashim Jalilul Alam and Sir John Anderson on behalf of the British Government, provided Brunei with full British protection, guaranteed the succession of Sultan's dynasty and the appointment of a British Resident. Brunei's search for security against the Brookes in Sarawak and the BNBC in North Borneo had finally been realised. According to McArthur, who was the first British Resident, "when it is remembered that these evils flourish under nominal British protection, and it is that protection alone which keeps Brunei in existence as a separate state" (McArthur 1987, 31).

On the one hand, the signing of the Supplementary Agreement can be interpreted as Sultan Hashim sacrificing the state's dignity and honour by accepting a British Resident who would act as an advisor to Sultan in running domestic affairs, except for religious matters. Moreover, the agreement specified that the Resident's "advice must be taken and acted upon...", meaning that the Sultan was bound by the agreement to follow the Resident's advice. On the other hand, befriending the enemy was in fact the only solution available to the Sultan to ensure the survival

of Brunei's sovereignty. Similar to the signing of the Protectorate Agreement in 1888 where the Sultan had to surrender his authority in relation to external affairs, the Sultan now went even further than that sacrifice by accepting the Resident's appointment in 1906. However, the Sultan had agreed to this as it meant that Brunei would continue to exist as a state and that its sovereignty, or whatever was left of it, remained intact.

Fortunately, for Brunei the 1906 Supplementary Agreement did indeed guarantee the territorial integrity of what was left of the sultanate and brought to an end the Sarawak and BNBC threats to further loss of territory and its very existence. In terms of the Sultan's power vis-à-vis that of the British Resident, the emergence of capable and strong-willed Sultans, namely Sultan Muhammad Jamalul Alam (r. 1906-1924), Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (r. 1924-1950) and Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III (SOAS III) (r. 1951-1967), evidently at times posed political challenges to the British Resident. Even in the early years of the British Residency, Sultan Muhammad Jamalul Alam openly expressed opposition to the sweeping changes introduced in Brunei. For example, the British Resident immediately abolishing the land tenure system that had existed in Brunei for centuries. The Sultan and his ministers were opposed to this decision, as reflected in the Sultan's petition where he demanded the retention of custom, unbroken and unchanged:

The petition made the following requests:

1. the local hakim (judges) try cases involving the Muslim religion;
2. that warrants shall not be issued against "persons of standing" without consultation with the Sultan and his Council;
3. that the government help to recover runaway slaves;
4. that the Brunei flag be flown over the offices of the Government of Brunei;
5. Whatever customs or laws may have been in force in Brunei those customs and laws shall be kept inviolate and unaltered forever.

(Sultan Muhammad Jamalul Alam's petition 1906, cited in Hussainmiya, 2006, 60-61)

As illustrated in the above petition, the Sultan reminded British officials that there were local customs and traditions practised by the people that should not be interfered with by the new administration. The reminder in the petition thus embodies a strong spirit of nationalism to protect the rights of the people. Likewise, the request that the Brunei flag be displayed over government offices can be seen as a nationalistic expression of state sovereignty.

It is also worth noting that the petition illustrates the early construction of a distinctive national identity as the Sultan emphasised both Islam and the preservation of customary laws. In fact, the selected documents after the 1950s, discussed below, illustrate a similar or even a stronger emphasis on Islam, Monarchy and Malayness. In hindsight, since the 1950s, Brunei had been taking definite steps towards forging a distinctive national identity that later became one of the core values of Brunei's nationhood. The fundamental step towards realising this vision was for Brunei to have its own state constitution, which eventually transpired in 1959.

## DISTINCTIVE NATIONAL IDENTITY

Effective formulation of Brunei's national identity and retrieval of total state sovereignty would not be possible without promulgating the first written constitution. In Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III's (SOAS III) *Syair Perlembagaan Negeri Brunei* (the Negeri Brunei Constitution Poem), the Sultan highlighted the need for Brunei to promulgate a state constitution for the benefit of the people. In fact, a state constitution would be the only plausible way to overcome situations of political adversity posed by the British Resident that made the Sultan's effort to govern Brunei difficult and challenging:

The Constitution of Brunei is its appellation  
 Having been proposed for the nation  
 For the benefit of the country's citizenship  
 Overcoming the misfortune of hardship

Before taking the final action  
 A committee appointed to give information  
 Going to the districts to meet the population  
 Seeking views and final expression

Villages and districts the Committee visiting  
 Head and village residents they were meeting  
 The objectives of the proposals were fully explained  
 Everyone agreed no one objecting

(*Syair Perlembagaan Negeri Brunei* 1998; translation adopted from Pehin Orang Kaya Amar Diraja Dato Seri Utama (Dr) Haji Awang Mohd Jamil Al-Sufri, 2010, 79-80)

The poem narrates SOAS III's wishes to pave the ways for Brunei to have a first written constitution that would enable Brunei to regain power and responsibility for its own affairs from the British Resident. SOAS III was strong-willed, had a mature political conscience and his main principle was to work for the benefit of the people and the country. As shown in the first stanza of the above excerpt, SOAS III believed that a state constitution would realise his ambitions and efforts to modernise the country and improve the living conditions of the Brunei people. SOAS III became even more determined to run state affairs himself and was increasingly uncomfortable and impatient with the British Resident's advisory role (Hussainmiya 2011; Yusop 2013). The increasing political tension between the Sultan and British officials are evident in many parts of the poem. For example, the line "overcoming the misfortune of hardship" in the first stanza of the excerpt has been interpreted by local scholars as one of many signals in the poem that illustrate

the growing political conflict between the Sultan and British officials (Haji Kasim 2009; Ampuan Brahim 2013).

The promulgation of the Constitution of Brunei Darussalam on 29 September 1959 paved the way for the return of internal sovereignty. Following the abolition of the British Resident position in the 1959 Anglo-Brunei Agreement, the Constitution that followed then empowered the Brunei Sultan to act with executive authority in the government. The Constitution set out several councils to assist the Brunei Sultan in the exercise of his powers and duties: the Privy Council, the Executive Council, Council of Ministers, and the Legislative Council, all of which were presided over by the Sultan (Perlembagaan Negeri Brunei 1959 n.d.).

The Constitution also stipulated that a *Menteri Besar* (Chief Minister), appointed by the Sultan, would be responsible for handling the state administration and that other important positions, such as State Secretary, State Financial Officer and Attorney-General, be appointed from among local people by the Brunei Sultan. With the new administrative structure, the British High Commissioner would replace the British Resident but with much less authority and a greatly reduced advisory role than previously.

In essence, the promulgation of the Constitution strengthened the Sultan's political position. SOAS III was pleased with the outcome of Brunei-British constitutional talks as he strongly believed a Constitution would enable Brunei to embark on a period of greater stability and prosperity (Hussainmiya 1995). What is also of equal significance to the promulgation of Brunei's Constitution is the declaration of Islam and Bahasa Melayu as the official religion and language of the country. Together with strengthening the monarchical (*Beraja*) system (the return of sovereignty to the Sultan), Islam and Bahasa Melayu laid a stronger foundation for the germination of the state philosophy, Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB, Malay Islamic Monarchy), and the concomitant formulation of Brunei's national identity in the coming years.

The Brunei Nationality Act, passed in 1961, further bolstered the formulation of national identity. The first mentioned proposal to define Brunei citizenship was in the Constitution Advisory Committee report of 1954. When the Constitution was promulgated in 1959, who were citizens of Brunei and thus subjects of the Sultan was only loosely determined under the provision of a written nationality law. The need to determine Brunei citizenship grew stronger in the early 1960s due to the tumultuous political situation instigated by Partai Rakyat Brunei (Brunei's People Party), who demanded Britain grant full independence to Brunei. The Party also repeatedly demanded the Brunei Government hold the District Council Elections, which had been set out in the Brunei constitution, and an electoral register thus needed to be prepared in order to determine the eligibility of voters based on the Nationality Act (Haji Zaini 2004).

The Brunei Nationality Act identified seven ethnic groups as indigenous to Brunei and therefore citizens of the country: the Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut and Tutong. These seven were considered to be Brunei's original inhabitants, regardless of the strong religious and cultural differences between them; of the seven, the Belait, Bisaya, Dusun and Murut were mainly non-Muslim at the

time. It is also important to highlight that the Act set out a new classification that constitutionally recognised these seven ethnic groups as being Malays. Despite various differences and similarities in religion, culture and way of life, the seven groups were assimilated into a single Malay community. Examining this new 'Malay' classification within the context of Brunei's politics and the new internal independence in 1959, the Nationality Act can be seen as the state's effort to promote ethnic integration and the development of a mainstream Malay society in order to aid political consolidation and for the purpose of nation-building (Asiyah az-Zahra, Siti Norkhalbi and Noor Azam 2017). What is more, the re-definition of Malay as a race that encompasses the seven groups provides a more substantial political relevance to Malay as the integral element of Brunei's national identity. It can thus be argued that Brunei's national identity has essentially become defined by the notion of nationhood rather than purely ethnicity.

It is also worthwhile to note that the ability to bestow official citizenship is an illustration of the state sovereignty's exercise of core power. In other words, the granting of citizenship implies a self-governance value. For Brunei, passing the 1961 Nationality Act shortly after the promulgation of the Constitution was a significant political achievement and provided a much-needed boost to the Sultan's confidence in terms of governing the country.

SOAS III abdicated from the throne in 1967 and his eldest son, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, succeeded him. Amongst the first things he taught his son was the art of leadership and statecraft, as illustrated in the SOAS III's *Syair Asli Rajang Hari* (*Rajang Hari* Poem):

There are many kinds of politics  
There are those of good and healthy politics  
There are those conditions of evil politics  
All these are so called politics

Politics with soul and aware of surrounding  
That is politics which is good and sound  
That kind is not a bad politics  
Not breaking the law and always doing good deeds

Bad politics have deaf ears  
Only know how to eat "kabuli" rice  
Even though often times, being criticised  
Not even they take any notice

Bad politics involve lots of lying  
No truth in their promises and words  
No truth in their master of planning  
Solely just telling lies

(Muda Omar 'Ali Saifuddin 1994; translation adopted from Pehin Orang Kaya Amar Diraja Dato Seri Utama (Dr) Haji Awang Mohd Jamil Al-Sufri 2010, 90-91).

In analysing the content of the poem, one of the main themes that emerge is the concept of political responsibility. The logic of politics, as depicted by SOAS III, is simple. Good politics are those that would greatly benefit those in power (the ruler) as well as those who are ruled. Good politics also means the ruler would take care of the people who in turn would pledge their loyalty to the ruler. This would thus allow the Sultan to have great integrity, compassion and tolerance towards those who are in need of benevolence.

In contrast, bad politics would tarnish people's loyalty and trust in the monarchy's leadership. In the poem, SOAS III seems to stress more on bad politics and the grave consequences that such politics could have on the new Sultan, the people and the future of the state. He illustrates bad politics as the kind practised by those who abuse their power and privileges and 'turn a blind eye' to the suffering of others. In many ways, the poem is a means to send a message that sitting on the throne is a real political responsibility and success in handling such responsibility strengthens people's loyalty to the new Sultan's leadership, as well as bolstering further their sense of belonging to the state.

The messages conveyed by the *Syair Rajang Hari* are without a doubt in line with the long-held social contract that defines the relationship between the Sultan and the people. This social contract revolves around the understanding that the "*Raja tidak boleh dzalim dan ra'ayat tidak boleh derhaka kepada Raja*" (the ruler should not harm his people and his people should not disobey the ruler) (Yusuf 1975, 43). This convention has effectively inculcated loyalty and national sentiment and is the glue that gels social cohesion between the people and the six centuries-old Brunei monarchical system.

The formation of Brunei's national identity and the concept of nationhood reached its final stage in 1984 when Brunei proclaimed full independence. This was not an easy road. As with Brunei's internal independence in 1959, the Sultan continued to work tirelessly and determinedly in his efforts to achieve real and full independence. The British Government generally supported the idea as it also endeavoured to relinquish gradually its control over colonial possession in Southeast Asia. Hence, Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, alongside SOAS III, continually held talks and negotiations with the British Government, resulting in the amendment to the 1959 Anglo-Brunei Agreement in 1971, where the British government altogether ceased from performing its advisory role in government affairs except in matters relating to security and defence. However, the most crucial document was the 1979 Treaty of Friendship and Co-operation between Great Britain and Brunei, which signalled that Brunei would become fully independent at the very end of 1983.

On 01 January 1984, His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah proclaimed full independence, making Brunei "the only independent Malay monarchy in the world" (Tarling 1998, 20). His Majesty declared Brunei as a sovereign, democratic and independent Malay Muslim Monarchy that would observe the Ahli Sunnah Waljamaah School of Islamic faith. The declaration effectively consolidated and centralised the position of Islam and Malay in the country. The proclamation was also regarded as the declaration of Melayu Islam Beraja as the state philosophy,



upon which the political, economic, religious and social development of the country has been modelled since 1984. The social contract between the ruler and the ruled was also manifest in the proclamation as His Majesty pledged to look after the Brunei people's well-being. This declaration to be an independent nation also meant the transfer of international responsibilities and duties from the British Government to the Government of His Majesty Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah. Thus, Brunei's immediate moves after gaining independence were securing membership of international organisations, including the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation and the United Nations.

Brunei's declaration of independence unquestionably embodies both state sovereignty and a distinctive identity as the core values of nationhood, the culmination of Brunei's persistent efforts to preserve and secure its sovereignty. Bolstering state sovereignty was the creation of a Malay identity and community based on the 1961 Nationality Act that fostered a sense of social cohesion and "we-ness" that transcended both cultural and religious differences.

The state philosophy of Malay Muslim Monarchy further cemented Islam, the monarchy and Malay as the cornerstones of Brunei's national identity. Although some argue that this national identity was a deliberate creation to support the nation-building processes (Naimah Talib 2002; Derichs and Heberer 2006; Tey 2007; Fanselow 2014), one cannot deny that the integral elements of this national identity did not simply appear from nowhere but were in fact constructed from the country's historical traditions and experiences.

## **CONCLUSION**

As we have demonstrated, this examination of local documents reveals that the Bruneian concept of nationhood evolved distinctively according to underlying political circumstances and processes. This study also resonates with past studies that have shown substantial divergences in the conception of nationhood across different countries. In addition, the two core values, state sovereignty and national identity as the basis and main sources of Bruneian nationhood, have been considered and examined thoroughly. We also highlight that Brunei's relation and interaction with foreign powers further define the articulation and expressions of this nationhood. Thus, there is little doubt that the concept of nationhood in Brunei is rooted in its unique and rich past that endows it with distinctive characteristics. These distinctive characteristics became much more conspicuous after the 1950s, and particularly in 1984, with the declaration of MIB as the state philosophy.

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