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Diaspora community in Brunei: culture, ethnicity and integration

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ABSTRACT

Over one-third of Brunei's total workforce are foreign expatriates. A huge percentage of them has been staying in Brunei for more than two decades in various capacities. This paper sets out the conceptual imperatives of culture, ethnicity and integration in order to demonstrate how people from different origins, religions and ethnicities settled in Brunei and ended up melting in Brunei society. Setting its arguments in context, this paper engenders the discourse of integrational, religious and cultural ambivalence. A qualitative study was conducted on some diasporas selected based on snow-ball technique. The study reveals that while Diaspora maintain a reciprocal relationship between both ends (origin and destinations), most of them find their hearts in Brunei. In a society religiously and culturally distant from theirs, most diasporas are happy to compromise in order to integrate in Brunei society. Of course, as a natural rule, as time passes, the ties and bond get weaker among generations. The weaker is the tie, the lesser is the linkage. However, the sentimental attachment diaspora may harbour for their countries of birth may not automatically die down nor do their ties with destinations.

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1. Introduction

The community the diaspora built in Brunei and the negotiations of their expatriate life experience keep haunting them. The experiences are the nostalgia for a home elsewhere, the passage of youth, calculations of their successes, the assertions of belonging and the aspirations for a better life (Menon 2016). We think, Menon (2016) depicted a fundamental imagery of what Diaspora culture should be by definition. Culture, ecology and environmental determinism are powerful forces in shaping individuals' cultural traits and development (Byrne 2004). Today, across the world about 200 million Diaspora has command on culture and value system (Gsir and Mescoli 2015; Ullah 2010, 2012, 2015a, 2017). Culture is something that is passed on from generation to generation through imitation, practice, instruction and paradigms (Sigona et al. 2015) which eventually experiences a natural diminish. Though the first generation tends to hold on to their original culture as long as they can, they tend to lose the grip over the next

generations' intention to hold on to it. 'Diasporic communities' may hold multiple homes which may refer to physical home, i.e. where they stay physically, and mental home i.e. where their heart is. The hyphenations, for example, American-Indians, British-Bangladeshi, Chinese-Filipino and Canadian-Bangladeshis, of course, carry a dichotomous and confusing state of cultural values and beliefs. This implies that this community may take a confused identity and carry a blurred tie with their origins. Some of them, of course, chose not to carry confusing identity (Ullah 2017). Nonetheless, they tend to believe that the destination nations are their primary and permanent countries of residence. This, however, may not hold true for the first generation, who were probably not born in the destination countries, but this is very much true for the future generations. However, the notion of dual citizenship may minimize the dichotomy. Those obtained roots in Brunei (i.e. became Brunei citizens) cannot be called a hyphenated citizens owing to the fact that Brunei does not allow dual citizenship.

Southeast Asia is home to a few millions of diaspora population. Early South Asian migration to Southeast Asia is a subject of debate among migration and diaspora scholars. Different views have been expressed about the causes for migration and routes to Southeast Asia. Discovery of natural resources and dependency on the plantation of some countries in Southeast Asia were the primary factors that attracted labour from South Asia and elsewhere during early eighteenth century. The colonial connections and the World War II contributed to a large-scale dispersal of people from some countries of Asia to Southeast Asia (Czaika and de Haas 2014).

Brunei, an ethnically diverse country, has a sizeable number of the diaspora. Historically, Brunei was once a powerful Malay sultanate extending over Sabah, Sarawak and the southern part of the Philippines from the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries (Loo 2009). However, by the nineteenth century, the territory of the Brunei sultanate had been weakened because of internal rebellion as well as the colonial aggression of the British (Loo 2009). However, beginning in 1571 the Spaniards first and then the British invaded the Kingdom causing Brunei itself becoming a British protectorate in 1888. Brunei obtained its self-governance in 1959, and regained full independence as a sovereign nation on 1 January 1984 (Hussainmiya 2006). This constant political shift in the country contributed to enriching Bruneian diversity in terms of population and culture.¹

Southeast Asia was under Indian influence starting around 200 BC until around the fifteenth century when Hindu-Buddhist influence was absorbed by local politics and eventually India had established trade, cultural and political relations with Southeast Asian kingdoms (Reid 1999). Long-distance trade played a major role in the cultural, religious, and artistic exchanges that took place between the SEA regions and the rest of the world. Diaspora has a transnational referent and sometimes transnational populations are diasporic – exile or opposition groups. Transnationalism, according to Basch, Schiller, and Blanc (1994, 18) is 'a process by which migrants, through their daily life activities create social fields that cross national boundaries'. Social scientists come to an agreement that transnationalism broadly refers to multiple ties and interactions linking people or institutions across the borders of nation states. Dual citizenship/nationality – marked a global upward trend in claims through naturalization, marriage and birth, widespread government policy shifts.

Technological advancements and globalization made it possible for potential migrants unstoppably to continue to migrate. This phenomenon could be explained by the theories

of transnationalism and the transnational framework (Mamattah 2006). The diaspora has long been a fundamental element of migration. During the early era of large-scale migration, activities of a transnational type were apparent. Initially, the transnational theory was related to economic and political interconnectedness that migrants maintained with their home country (Remennik 2003). In cases where migrants are well integrated, a transnationalism which is predominately cultural in character can emerge (Hall 1990; Carstens 2003; Moorti 2003). The cultural products and mindsets can 'produce transnational imageries capable of creating and sustaining new forms of transnational publics' (Carstens 2003, 322).

Transnationalism has become significant in diaspora study over the last two decades.² Diaspora life affects and is affected by both their country of settlements and homelands. Social, cultural, political and professional networks and investment are the primary vehicles through which Diaspora engage in homeland matters (Gueron and Spevacek 2008, 2; Rai 2009, 7).³ Most bodies of diaspora literature confirm that diaspora ties are defined in political, ethnic, religious, cultural and business contexts. Although they are away from their countries of origin, they are significantly connected to their origin.

Therefore, diaspora used to be referred to the historic experience of particular groups, specifically Jews and Armenians (Bruneau 2010). With dramatic changes in its application and meaning, diaspora was extended to religious minorities in Europe. Faist (2010) pointed out three different characteristics of diaspora: firstly, it relates to the causes of dispersal which refers to the forced dispersal experience of Jews and of Palestinians. The second relates to the cross-border experiences while the third one touches on the integration of migrants and/or minorities into the countries of settlement. The second notion implies a return to homeland to shape a country's future by influencing it from abroad or by encouraging return. Faist (2010) suggests that return should be replaced with linkages across borders. In its previous notions, however, diaspora community does not integrate socially, politically, economically, and culturally into the country of settlement.⁴

By divorcing from previous notions, we can easily perceive how the peoples of maritime Southeast Asia – present day Malaysia, Indonesia and the Philippines – who have migrated southwards from southern China sometime between 2500 and 1500 BC have integrated themselves to the society in Borneo (King 20010).⁵ As mentioned earlier, Indian traders, adventurers, teachers and priests continued to be the dominating influence in Southeast Asia until about 1500 CE, and Indians often ruled the earliest states in the regions (Mittal 2013). The influence of the civilization of India gradually became predominant among them, and among the peoples of the Southeast Asian mainland.

Brunei, in particular, began to allow foreign workers since 1929 for the oil industry. This flows were composed predominantly of elite migrants. Afterwards, mix flows (elite, high skilled, low and semi-skilled) represented migration to Brunei as labour market began to expand.⁶ Present day context is different. These migrant populations are not likely to be diaspora as their stay period may not be long enough. Today, foreign workers, primarily from Malaysia, Thailand, Philippines, Indonesia and some countries from South Asia such as Bangladesh, India and Nepal, account for over one-third of the total workforce in Brunei (Figure 1).

The South Asians who came to Brunei in the 1940s and 1950s used to work in the British Malayan Petroleum Company. In December 1941 Brunei – along with the

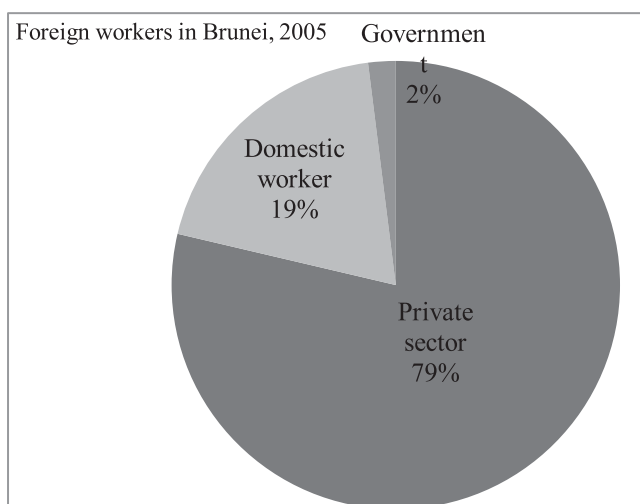


Figure 1. Foreign workers in Brunei. Source: Economic Census, Department of Economic Planning and Development (2002).

neighbouring territories of North Borneo (now Sabah), Sarawak, the island of Labuan, and Dutch Kalimantan – had come under Japanese occupation that destroyed the oil field in 1945 (Menon 2016). The post-war rehabilitation of Brunei was principally aimed at resuscitating the oilfields and building the infrastructure to develop and expand oil exploration (Menon 2016).

Very little systemic study so far has been conducted on diaspora population in Brunei. We bring this article into conversation with scholarship that has focused on the histories of migration and on the cultural resonances of diasporic memory. Despite the presence of a relatively huge number of the diaspora in Brunei, it was notoriously difficult to locate systematic studies concerning that area. As a result, data for background work for this research were scarce to start with.

2. Objectives and methods

The fact is that some interesting and emerging dynamics of migration research escapes the attention of scholars, and diaspora is one such aspect. This paper attempts to advance our knowledge especially about diaspora culture, their genesis, integration issues, links and policy in Brunei. To this end, we demarcated diaspora community from economic migrants and narrated their life experiences through cultural and religious shift they have gone through on various occasions. This paper argues that Diaspora maintains a ‘different’ kind of tie from that of the conventional migrants with their origin. As time passes, they tend to lose roots as they assimilate themselves with the culture at the destination. This paper explores whether the linkage of the diaspora in Brunei with their origin, despite the reputation of altruism and family ties, has been decaying. This study delves into how they maintain their cultural ties with the origin and in Brunei.

Since the late 2014 until early 2017, we endeavoured to locate a sizeable diaspora in Brunei and then began to build a rapport with them to eventually interview them. We

could not verify diaspora in Brunei accounts of the number of them who came to work for the British Malayan Petroleum Company. We were able to access some diaspora members (details below). We asked them to narrate the stories of their lives. For the most part, with little prompting, they recounted growing up in their country of origin and their emigration to Brunei, recollected their lives and the lives of friends and family in Brunei.

We apply the indicators of transnational engagement – (5 Ts-Transportation; Telecommunication; Tourism; Transfer of money; Trade (home country goods) developed by Orozco (2005) in order to explain Brunei diaspora. Orozco et al though expanded the explanation like frequency of contacts with the home country, investments, remittances and businesses in the home country and membership of diaspora or hometown associations, we did not measure them accordingly (Orozco 2005). We rather made effort to see through these lenses whether our target population somehow satisfy the criteria to be our subjects.

A multi-sited ethnography of the diaspora was conducted, therefore, necessarily, the stories of their travel and settlement integration evoking the denseness of the particular imperial geographies that shaped the movement of labour and capital. This genealogy of migration provides a lens through which the quotidian practices that constitute the diaspora and the agency of migrants in historicizing their presence in the diaspora may be explored.

We have interviewed some diaspora selected through snow-ball technique. The respondents mostly were from India, Indonesia, Bangladesh, UK and the Philippines. All of them lived in Brunei for more than 20 years. They are either business persons or working in a range of professions. We interviewed them in Bandar Seri Begawan (barber shop, vegetable market and restaurants), in Kuala Belait (in restaurants), in Gadong (carpet shop and restaurants) in Kiulap (Restaurants), in Sengkuring (restaurants, vegetable market) and in Jalan Muara (Carpet shop, grocery shop).

3. Diaspora, ethnicity and transnationalism: theoretical considerations

During the time of intensification of nationalist sentiment in a globalized world, transnational migration has been playing a significant role (Miles 1993), which contributes to the actions, motivations, and sensibilities of key players within the political processes and debates of both states that have histories of population dispersal and the recipient states.

The terms ‘diaspora’, ‘diasporic’ and ‘diasporization’ have become popular buzz words among social scientists, especially the migration scholars and advocates of multiculturalism over the last two decades (Hall 1990; Paerregaard 2010). Obviously, the notion of diaspora that emerged hundreds of years ago has shifted due to changes in global political and economic landscape (Ullah 2014, 2015b, 2015c; Rahman and Ullah 2012; Barry 2006, 28). Due to the lack of precise definitional boundary of diaspora, there exists some misunderstanding regarding who the diaspora are. It becomes more complicated as we embark Brunei diaspora onto the debate because history, ethnicity and policy have in one hand made some group ‘citizens’ and some other ‘diaspora’ in Brunei, on the other. The primary misunderstanding and conceptual sterility about diaspora are related to the fact that most diaspora research confused diaspora with economic migrants.

Two different streams of conceptualizing diaspora can roughly be distinguished, forming two separate versions of ‘diaspora’. First, diasporas as characterized by either

migration or exile, nostalgia, perpetuation of original traditions, customs and languages, and a dream of return to the homeland. Second, diaspora lie in the evolution of British cultural studies, from the mid-1970s, towards a greater attention to identity issues (Gilroy 1997; Hall 1997). However, this opposition only enlarged the semantic horizon of 'diaspora', making it available to various categories of people who had the opportunity to choose between the several meanings associated with the word: a minority, a migrant community, a transnational community, a statistical group of expatriates, or even any kind of group whose members happened to be dispersed across many territories (Ullah, Hossain and Islam 2015).

Keeping the historical dispersal of Jews during the WWII in mind, Diaspora may be defined as transnational groups of immigrants living abroad in host countries but maintaining economic, political, social and emotional ties with their homeland and other diasporic communities of the same origin' (IOM 2004, 7). Some researchers attached emphasis on transnationalism in conceptualizing diaspora and are widely used in the academic as well as political discourses (Baubock and Faist 2010). The transnationalism is a process whereby trans – migrants forge and sustain multi-stranded social relations that connect the origin with destination resulting in the creation of familial, economic, social, organizational, religious, and political relationship (AFFORD 2000, 4).

The concept of diaspora emerges as a way of rethinking the issue of black cultural identity and representation away from the notion of the essential black subject (Hall 1990). According to Gilroy, for example, (1997, 328) 'Diaspora is a valuable idea because (it is) ... an alternative to the metaphysics of 'race', nation and bonded culture coded into the body', and puts 'emphasis on contingency, indeterminacy and conflict' (334). This is an important claim and lies alongside the view that diaspora involves a conception of identity that avoids the essentialism of much of the discussion on ethnic and cultural identities (Hall 1990).

Bakewell (2009) has offered an extraordinary definition of diaspora: essentially, we can say about a group of people is Diaspora if they meet the criteria of movement from an original homeland to more than one country, either through dispersal (forced) or expansion (voluntary). In search of improved livelihoods; a collective myth of an ideal ancestral home; a strong ethnic group consciousness sustained over a long time, based on a shared history, culture and religion; a sustained network of social relationships with members of the group living in different countries of settlement (Bakewell 2009, 2). This implies that migrants are not always diaspora and diaspora are not always migrants either. Asian states have been contributing significantly to the growing diaspora community around the world (Lucas 2001, 5). A number of waves of human dispersal took place due to ethnic violence; war, persecution and widespread famine in the last couple of decades. South Asia's major dispersal, for instance, happened in 1947 when anti-colonial violence erupted played a part in intra-South Asia and Southeast Asian dispersals. Sri Lanka is a good case where civil strife was a significant reason for the steady stream of dispersals for about three decades since the late 70s.

Identity is an individual's sense of self-image. Individuals identify with people in some categories and differentiate themselves from those in others (Akerlof and Kranton 2000). Ethnic identity is a measurement of the feeling of belonging to a particular ethnic group (Battu and Zenou 2010; Manning and Roy 2010). Ethnicity itself is an abstract concept. The meaning of ethnicity depends on the meaning of several other concepts, particularly

those of ethnic group and ethnic identity. Ethnic identity refers to ethnicity as an individually experienced phenomenon (Isajiw 1993). Though transnationalism began to attract attention among social scientists from the 1970s; however, it has become a popular area of research since the 1990s (Wolf 2002). The interest in this nuanced area was conditioned by fresh views on global migration studies (Yang 2000; Ullah 2017; Ullah and Alkaff 2018). Steven Vertovec suggests multilevel explanations of transnationalism, viewing it as a social morphology, type of consciousness, mode of cultural reproduction, avenue of capital, site of political engagement, and (re)construction of 'place' and locality (Vertovec 2001).

4. The emergence of ethnicity in Brunei

Migration and diaspora have through history involved the mixing of diverse groups, in the contemporary context however, the diversity has increased substantially (Hugo, 2005). Diversities have always been inspired by the necessity to address the notion of diaspora and it's broader understanding in the context of changed ambient of increased mobility, globalization and different ways in experientialist cultural diversities. It starts from the argument that today the diaspora in the cultural field has different meaning and forms than it was a few decades ago. Questions may be asked how are ethnicity and diaspora interlinked. There is a long history of institutional racism, and state-sanctioned examples of attempts to control and dishonour Indigenous bodies and diaspora, and they have remained connected across time and space through their shared histories of resistance and oppression (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009). 'Given the worldviews from which these communities hail, unsurprisingly social movements within Indigenous and African diasporic communities have historically informed and inspired each other' (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009, 107).

As Brunei case comes into the debate, confusion may arise which is because of the questions: are Chinese Bruneians diaspora? Are Indian-Bruneians diaspora or long terms stayers in Brunei. In this case, we can define them by the fact whether they maintain connections with their origin. Are protracted migrants in Brunei diaspora? Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference (Hall 1990, 235). Diaspora, however, has by no means replaced nor could it replace a concern with ethnicity. Indeed, our discussion has indicated that diaspora itself relies on a conception of ethnic bonds as central, but dynamic, elements of social organization (Anthias 1998; Chantavanich and Ullah 2015).

Located in the South China Sea, Brunei historically occupied a strategic place along the trading routes between Malaysia, China, the Philippines, and Indonesia. About 9 different ethnic populations (though Brunei recognizes only seven) (Figure 2) have enriched Bruneian diversity: Brunei Malays, Belait, Kedayan, Dusun, Bisaya, Lun Bawang (Murut), Sama-Baiiau, Chinese and Indian. The Belait People, the native inhabitants and overwhelmingly Muslims, reside mainly in Belait district are recognized by the Constitution of Brunei as Bumiputera (Fanselow 2014). They have assimilated with the Malay culture and language which made them indistinguishable from the Malays.

Another prominent ethnic group called the Bisaya/Dusun living in Sabah are mostly Muslim, with a smaller Christian community and in Sarawak they are mostly Christian, with a smaller Muslim community. In Brunei, they are referred to as Dusun, Jati Dusun and Bisaya (Fanselow 2014). Bruneian Malays live in Brunei, Labuan, West coast

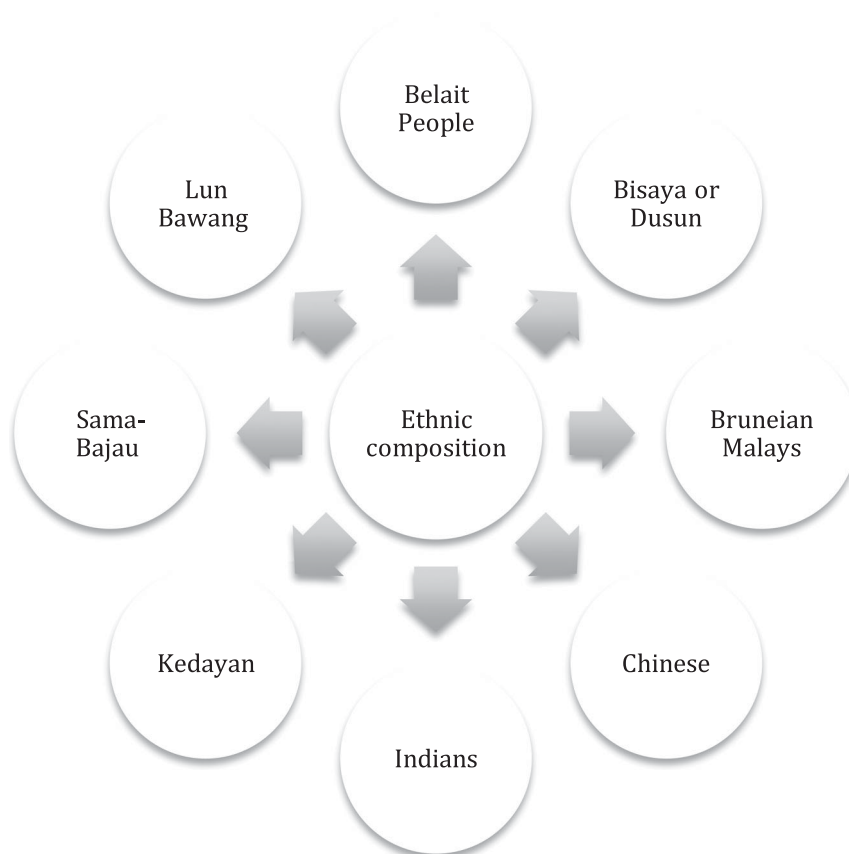


Figure 2. Ethnic composition in Brunei.

Sabah, and the northern parts of Sarawak and are different from the larger ethnic Malay population found in the other parts of the Malay world. Historically, they are descended primarily from the earlier Malayic-speaking Austronesians tribes who founded several ancient maritime trading states and kingdoms, notably Brunei, Kedah, Lankasuka, Ganga Negara etc (Haji-Othman 2005).

Ethnic Chinese in Brunei are people of full or partial Chinese – particularly Han Chinese – ancestry who are citizens of or residents in Brunei constituting about 15 per cent of the country's population, making them the second largest ethnic group in Brunei (Loo 2009). Many ethnic Chinese residents of Brunei have lived in the kingdom for generations (Tolman 2016).⁷ In the late 1940s–1960s South Asians constituted a significant and visible expatriate community in Brunei. However, their migration to Brunei predates this period. There is a substantial historical evidence of thriving networks of trade between Brunei and different countries in South Asia before the seventeenth century. Until this period, Brunei, whose territory included North Borneo (present-day Sabah) and Sarawak, was a dominant regional power, with its influence extending to the Sulu archipelago and across Borneo (Haji-Othman 2005). Indians in Brunei consist of expatriate professionals and permanent settlers from India to Brunei. The presence of about 10,000 Indians has been notable in the country since the colonial days (King

2001). There are three Associations⁸ that celebrate the Indian Festivals viz: Diwali, Pongal, Onam as well as Independence Day and Republic Day (Saunders 1994).

The Kedayans live in Brunei, Labuan, Sabah and parts of Sarawak on the island of Borneo. In Sabah, the Kedayan mainly live in the cities of Sipitang, Sipitang, Beaufort, Kuala Penyu and Papar (Saunders 1994). The Lun Bawang – indigenous to Kalimantan, Brunei, South West of Sabah and Northern region of Sarawak – is an ethnic group found in Central Northern Borneo. In the Malaysian state of Sarawak, the Lun Bawang (through the term *Murut*) are officially recognized by the Constitution as native of Sarawak (King 2001). In Brunei, they are identified by law as one of the natives (indigenous people) of Brunei, through the term *Murut*. The Sama-Bajau – sometimes called the Sea Gypsies – refers to several Austronesian ethnic group of Maritime Southeast Asia with their origins from the southern Philippines. They usually live a seaborne lifestyle and use small wooden sailing vessels. Within the last 50 years, many of the Filipino Sama-Bajau have migrated to neighbouring Malaysia and the northern islands of the Philippines, due to the Mindanao conflict.

A number of ethnic groups who are indigenous to Borneo are not considered ‘native’ in Brunei. These ethnic groups which make up six per cent of the population are predominantly non-Muslim and include the Iban and Kelabit grouped under ‘other indigenous’ ethnic groups (Loo 2009).

5. Diaspora in Brunei and integration pathways

This article traces the ways in which diaspora assert a definitive place for themselves in modern Brunei and the global labour mobility that made their travel possible. This section analyses what is the new family structure emerging in Brunei including neo-locality (living with or near the husbands family) in order to demonstrate how diaspora emergence and integration have influenced their lifestyle.

The pathways (i.e. marriage, business, work, religious conversion, ethnicity etc.) through which one can assimilate and integrate in Bruneian society have given a neo-locality to Brunei society. According to the Brunei Nationality Act 1961, a person residing in Brunei would be eligible for registration as a Bruneian national if the person has satisfied five conditions: (i) the person has a proficient knowledge of the Malay language, (ii) able to speak it proficiently, (iii) has been examined by a Language Board on the Malay language, (iv) is of good character, and (v) has taken the oath of allegiance (Government of Brunei 2002). It is relevant to discuss a bit about how to obtain roots in Brunei. Once there has been a great ground of obtaining roots, one can integrate in the destination culture. Depending on the circumstances, gaining a root in destination country can be difficult or easy and Brunei is not an exception. Hyphenated nationality does not work as dual citizenship is not supported by policy in Brunei.

Marriage is one of the ways to obtain roots in Brunei. However, not all marriages result in roots. Gender preference is important in determining how easy or difficult is the process to obtain roots. With regard to gender, the role of men and women in the process of accommodation and syncretism may be different. Women are the transmitters and reproducers of ethnic and national ideologies and central in the transmission of cultural rules (Anthias 1983; Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1989; Kandiyoti 1991; Walby 1994). If a foreigner female marries to a Bruneian citizen, she gets Bruneian citizenship in a much easier way

than for a foreigner male marries to a Brunei citizen. This foreign male is entitled to a red IC i.e. a permanent resident only after 10 years of staying in the country. He can only stay in the country if he is employed for that period and is expected to live on a working permit for that entire period (Loo 2009). The foreigner male must, of course, renounce all his citizenships, if any. The process of citizenship through the red IC to yellow IC route has been slow, however.

Could the second generation obtain root that easy in Brunei? This, of course, depends on who their parents are. If the children are the result of a married foreigner woman and a Bruneian man, the children get a yellow IC kind of automatically. If the children are the result of a married foreigner man and a Bruneian woman, citizenship is only provided given that (a) the child is born in Brunei and (b) the father refuses to register the birth with his country of origin. Once those two criteria are satisfied, the child will remain stateless for two years before the government decides whether or not to grant citizenship (Loo 2009).

The orientation of the generation, who grew up in an ambivalent condition, is different from those who grew up in the non-ambivalent condition. Therefore, the strength of cultural ties would vary between these two groups (for more, see Ullah 2017). Human being moves to places where they face different culture, ethnic, social, economic and political differences (Rai and Sankaran 2011, 5), thus diverse community comes into one place. However, the community members do not lose their identities rather they are deeply inter-linked with their own identities. In this circumstance, the role of a family is critical between generations in order to bridge them through being supportive of their children. There are evidences that cross-cultural marriages or relationships of children are generally not approved by parents and as a result occurrences such as honour killing, violence and forced marriages to take place (Thomson 2007, 3).

There have been serious debates on whether the theory of assimilation and the theory of melting pot have anything to do with links to the origin. Social scientists (such as Bhabha 1994; Anthias 1998; Bruneau 2010) argue that melting pots are created when there are opportunities for better life on foreign soil. The notion comes from the pot in which metals are melted at great heat, melting together into new compounds, with great strength and advantages (Maddern 2013). These opportunities were considered tantamount to assimilation strategy which would transform immigrants of different ethnic and religious groups into a single group sharing a common culture—developing common attitudes, values, and lifestyles (Bisin and Verdier 2000). This was also echoed by Adams (2000), that societies formed by immigrant cultures, religions, and ethnic groups produce new hybrid social and cultural forms.

Some of our respondents from the first generations disagreed with the concept of melting pot. They considered this as an insult to them. In their words, they said, ‘We remain as we were. We have not changed. We do not want to change. I believe this country provides sufficient space to practice our own culture.’ There are arguments and counter-arguments that assimilation is a racist terminology, based on the notion that each immigrant’s or family’s culture of origin is respected as independent, hence, they are not expected to melt. Some argue that melting character, in fact, results in assimilation (Adams, 2000).

Trade, culture and religion have greatly influenced Brunei (Thomson 2007, 1). In the last three years we continued to try to understand their way of life, their roots, their

cultural and religious practices and how did they make it to Brunei at the first place, and how do they feel being in a country that is culturally and religiously different and distant from theirs. One of our respondents in his narratives said he is not sure where he belongs to. He left his country of origin about 65 years ago when he was just 13 years old. He, now 85, runs his own business. For a number of years he was in Malaysia and moved to Brunei in 1952 when oil business was booming. He started working as a cleaner cum peon. Eventually, he concentrated on starting a petty business. He became a citizen only about 10 years ago from today. He thought the delay was because of his language issues. For many years he did not go back to his country of origin. He has been busy establishing and running his business. He is planning to go back to his country soon for a short visit. He is a Hindu by religion. He observes his own cultural and religious rites in Brunei. This respondent, however, seems to have lost ties with the host country and his own homeland. He doesn't represent the views of the first generation mentioned above.

Most barber shops in Brunei are run by South Asians, especially Indians. There are Indian tailors and dressmakers along with TV and shoe repair shops and restaurants. When all the Indian barber shops are joined as dots, they seem to form 'Little India'. Unlike the stereotypical 'Little India' community we hear so much about, there are no colourful temples, no strong, heady scent of spices and jasmine garlands—cheap and quick hair cuts. Along with hair cut customers can have an Indian massage (neck and shoulder). We interviewed a number of them. They said irrespective of the nationality, all customers like their massage. They as well feel good to be able to practice and apply their own style of massage. One of them in Bandar (who has been in Brunei for the last 27 years) said he feels connected to his country of origin by the fact that he can practice his own religious and cultural rites. This respondent seems different from the earlier one, in a way that this respondent feels close to India. It could be because of the fact that he feels is a part of the 'Little India' and the earlier respondent is not.

Religion and culture are powerful factors in the life of Asian people and they represent diversity because of their multi-dialects, pluralistic religious and multicultural traditions. Diaspora populations hold the influence of the homeland language and culture alive in their destination land. Thomson (2007, 1) argues that one is born into the community first then comes culture and religion. We call the cultural and religious life of the diaspora as 'diaspora life'. In some instances, Diaspora's ties with religions have become weak and ethnicity becomes the core element in determining Diaspora (Rai and Sankaran 2011, 6). Nevertheless, there are exceptions where religion and ethnicity are combined together in addressing diaspora. For example, Jewish experienced intertwine of religion and ethnicity since the Holy land became their homeland (Rai and Sankaran 2011, 7) (Figure 3).

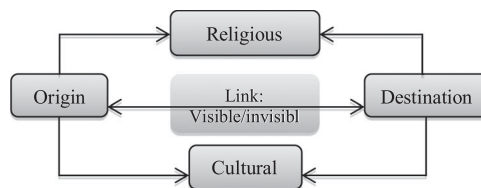


Figure 3. Culture- religion nexus. Adapted from Ullah (2014).

We emphasize that the relation between diaspora and homeland and emphasize the historical value of conditional and ingenious re-imaginings of home and origins (Hollifield 2000; Castles 2004; Seol 2005; Boswell 2007).

Bruneian men often intermarry with Filipinos, Indonesians, Singaporeans, Scots, British and neighbouring Sabah and Sarawak women (Az-Zahra 2015). Bruneian men, however, find it fairly easy to marry Indonesians. There are certain stereotyping of Indonesian women, for example, when Indonesians try to find employment in Brunei and end up as maids and waitresses and they have been portrayed as 'husband-seducers' to find an easy life (Az-Zahra 2015). We got no data on how many foreigners (male and female) married to Bruneians. We, however, came across a number of couples (either husband or wife from abroad) who have been living in Brunei for more than two decades. In order for them to marry to Bruneians (Muslims) they have to convert to Islam. One interesting trend is noticeable in marriage market in Brunei is that grooms (in mixed marriage) generally are from western world while brides (married to Bruneians) are mostly from the Philippines, China and Indonesia.

Marrying to Bruneian Muslim means conversion to the same religion is a must. Therefore, the other spouse is automatically considered a Muslim when married. Here comes the question of cultural and religious conflict or compromise. One respondent was expressing her experience ...

being a Catholic, I was very uncertain about how my life would be marrying a Muslim. I do not know how I was able to cope with the adjustments. Regarding my uneasiness about renouncing my religion, my husband however, was very reassuring and he told me that although I had to convert to Islam, the conversion would be a mere formality. The conversion is to conform to the policy only, nothing to do with practice.

It is clear that the link that the respondents have with their original faith somewhat remained strong. This could be caused due to the fact that the respondents failed to assimilate themselves to the religion they embraced and the cultural lives of the Brunei people despite being married to a Muslim wife/husband two decades ago. Here Portes and Xhou's (1993) assimilation model is appropriate to analyse whereby the individual does not necessarily give up his own identity. He explained assimilation in three different ways. (a) *Linear assimilation* whereby groups slowly integrate socially and culturally; (b) *selective assimilation* whereby a strong ethnic group is maintained with deliberate strategies to preserve or adapt their homeland culture; and (c) *marginalized assimilation* where racial discrimination or lack of opportunity is the norm that creates lower class and poverty.

Culture plays a fundamental role in building and holding the connection between the origin and the destination. The denser is the connection the better is the likelihood to engage in development at the origin. Bruneau (2010) argues that family bonds, which is a part of culture, constitute the fabric of the diaspora, especially those who stem from Asia and the Eastern Mediterranean. She also adds the rationale for mentioning Asia because of the extended family nature that most Asians have been nurturing.

Countries are geographic, political and legal entities, but their cultures extend beyond such boundaries to encompass the virtual community of people who identify with the culture (Kilduff and Corley 1992). Cultural ties and networks seem to be the defining characteristics of diaspora as newer notions emphasize cultural hybridity (Bhabha 1994). Scholars tend to use the notion of 'transnational communities' to emphasize the

idea of movement and exchange between home and host countries, and to attract attention to the existence of informal networks that contribute to what are often circular movements (Ionesco 2006).

We were able to decipher interesting facts that may challenge the melting pot notion. As we visited a number of vegetable markets in Sengkurong, Gadong, Jerudong and Kianggeh, we talked to many local sellers. Interestingly, many of them spoke some survival level of Bengali and Hindi. As we took further interest, we wanted to know how and why they have learned these languages. Most common answers were that in order to communicate easily with the vast number of South Asians coming to buy vegetables. They picked survival level of language skills from the customers. Their long presence and regular visits to the market helped them learn the language. This, in fact, weakens, if not dispels, the melting pot theory. This implies that diaspora to some extent has influenced the culture of the host country. Now a question may arise as to why the assimilated people have to maintain linkage with their country of origin? One of our respondents who we started talking to us in Gadong vegetable market. She is an Indonesian while his father was from South Asia who settled in Brunei after his father served in the Brunei military during the WWII. She has a positive outlook in life despite the hardships she endured after the death of her husband.

I am in love with Brunei. I spent about four decades in Brunei, this means I spent more time here than in Indonesia. I would like to spend the rest of my life here as my husband was buried here. I am more a Bruneian than an Indonesian. My kids are here. Some are working and some are still going to study. I was born in Indonesia but my heart is in Brunei.

Another respondent (from the UK) has been in Brunei for the last about 29 years married to a Bruneian. He had to as well convert to Islam. His name is now ... (English name) Mohammad ... (English name). My long stay enabled me to learn the language. May be at some point of time I will go back to my country of origin. My time in Brunei has been fulfilling. I had no issue of cultural or religious difference with my wife. Though I converted to Islam but I really don't have to stick to practicing Islamic rites. I know I am spotted anywhere I go (shopping, walking) due to my skin colour, otherwise I am totally fine. I know at least five of my colleagues who married to Bruneians, who so far I know, are happy as well.

As we look at how they see their life here we see compromises and conflicts too. Globalization is sometimes called a crushing machine that can mix together cultures and civilizations, nations and religions. We may sometimes call it melting pot.

We always take part in Hari Raya celebrations (the way locals do). On that day we wear traditional garments and other items that have the Bruneians elements on them. Especially on the day of any celebrations, together with friends we try to show our love, wishing each other the best, something that people forget to do on their ordinary days.

The narratives of the respondents may raise questions whether international marriages reproduce mixed culture and mixed religious practices. The answer may be yes or no. One respondent (Filipino) married to a Bruneian said she did not change much religiously as she used to be before her marriage. She is happy that her husband got no objection. She sometimes wears shorts and does not use hijab always (except in time when they join any family gathering).

Questions may arise if the respondents who have mixed marriage can be considered as diaspora? It is, of course, a definitional nuance. They do not seem to budge much from

their original faith and there is no indication that they are interested to adopt Brunei's way of life fully. This may contradict the argument that the diasporas lose roots due to the assimilation into the culture of the host country. The fact is, however, Diaspora never lose origin roots entirely. Of course, roots erode from generation to generation.

Another respondent who married to a Bruneian said

here, family is more important. My husband's parents, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins and their in-laws are a fairly tight-knit bunch. Sometimes, I find this rather exhausting. However, I see many positive sides of my mixed marriage as well. I don't regret

Partners in mixed marriages may be supportive of each other's religious beliefs but still often run into unexpected issues, which is natural. Differences in the way people in these marriages celebrate certain holidays or have dietary restrictions are to be expected. However, other problems may arise, which may have a much bigger impact on the partners in mixed marriages.

When it comes to religion, a thin dividing line appears among the diaspora groups as there is no visible cross-connection between Muslims, Christians or Hindus with regards to religious and cultural activities.⁹ Religion is a unique identifier of diaspora when they live in a broader community that has a different religion.¹⁰ There is another diaspora group who formed a multi-country apolitical platform to link all generations through spreading the true message of Islam (Garbin 2005, 7). Another respondent (39) mentioned that he had a hard time understanding people with strong religious views. However, his personal situation became even more complex when he met his wife.

I'm an expat who was raised as a Catholic, but I became an atheist in my teens. She is local and a practicing Muslim. We often clash over specific issues, like food. I don't like that she does not even let me cook pork. I think our arguments have gotten worse since the last two years. We weren't sure how to raise our kids. Whose culture and religion do we pass on to them?

6. Conclusions

Diaspora members in Brunei represent the link between their countries of origin and the host country. The familiarity of and integration into local culture, religion and language by Diaspora members offer them additional benefit to build trust and open up opportunities for investment. While persons living in Diaspora are one group, they represent a variety of traits such as language, culture and ethnicity. However, one goal that unites all Diaspora is to support their homeland (Gueron and Spevacek 2008, 3). They have been the best mediator in any matter related to their homelands such as culture and ethnic issues (Lucas 2001:3). They reinforce multi-layered links between countries of origin and destination.

With the advent of globalization, travel and communication have become easier than ever which undeniably enabled transmigrants to engage more intensively in the patterns described by scholars as transnationalism. That is, 'transnationalism' has helped us not only to understand recent changes in migration patterns but also to see that earlier arguments about assimilation had overlooked patterns of transnationalism in earlier migration streams (Smith 2003). In terms of identity formation, the diaspora population irrespective of the origin, they are for maintaining relationships with their adopted country and the

origin because it is still important for them. They have encouraged their children to do the same. Most of them had to make extra effort to get into Bruneian customs and traditions.

Assimilation is often seen as an issue most commonly associated with transnational migration. The belief is that migrant communities are not easy to assimilate into the mainstream host culture. Therefore, the trend is that people move from areas of high political, social, or economic insecurity to what migrants tend to perceive as areas of lower insecurity (Heisler and Layton Henry 1993).

To the cultural bafflement, Diaspora community in Brunei and their generations are at the crossroads to choose to live in a mixed culture or accept a 'leave one and take one' situation. Ullah (2014, 2017) categorized three groups of the diaspora in the North American context. If we were to study cultural erosion then this categorization we guess is applicable to the current context. The first group, the totally disinclined group, finds no good reason to maintain cultural attachment to the origin, except for development engagement. The potential group has strong feelings for their culture but almost failed to uphold it, and the last group, however, has been trying to uphold their ancestral culture and transmitting it to their next generations. Based on Bruneau (2010), we would like to highlight the typologies of diaspora with a hope that the concept would be clearer. The first typology is the diaspora that is formed around an entrepreneurial pole and the Chinese, Indian and Lebanese communities are the best examples of such a diaspora. In this case, religion does not play a prominent role and this is why Chinese diaspora is not known as the Buddhist or atheist diaspora. The second category is primarily structured by religion such as the Jewish, Greek, and Armenian diaspora. Historical facts also contribute to the formation of the category of the diaspora. The third category of diaspora is organized around a political pole. The last category is structured along a racial and cultural pole and the Black diaspora is a good example. This is defined first by 'race' a social construct – which is, of course, a contested concept – and then by culture (Gueron and Spevacek 2008, 3).

Diaspora scholars generally suggest a number of instruments in order to better shape the relationship between diaspora and countries of both origin and destination. One of the instruments suggested is diplomatic advocacy through which origin state can influence the policies of the host state. This research has crucial policy implications as Diaspora accumulate human, financial, and social capital for the development of the country of origin. The challenge for policy makers remains that they create an environment conducive to encouraging and supporting contributions by migrant Diaspora to development.

Notes

1. Brunei occupies 5765 square kilometres, with less than half a million population with a 2.8 per cent rise in the number of permanent residents, which totalled 28,900 in 2015 (Piri 2015), with an estimated per capita income being B\$54,800 in 2013. The revenues largely generated through oil and gas resources (AMRC 2003).
2. However, transnational migrant populations are not diaspora. Often migrant, transnational and diaspora communities are confused (Faist 2010) with each other. Levitt (2004) adds that it is normal, in the 21st century, that people belong to more than one society at the same time.
3. Although they are far away from their homeland, they are still connected to it in different ways.

4. Thus assimilation would put the diaspora to an end. For example, emigrants from the north-western coast of Scotland settled in Nova Scotia (New Scotland) around four hundred years ago. There could be an ongoing debate if the Canadians with Scottish descendant living in Nova Scotia are still Scottish diaspora.
5. In the last 8 years (from 2005 to 2013) the number of foreign workers increased by 17,358 (in private sector). Out of 141,852 employees in the country's private sector (based on the 2013 Employee and Employer Census), 92,007 (64.9%) were foreign workers while 40,620 (28.6%) and 9,225 (6.5%) were Bruneian and permanent residents, respectively. About 39% of foreign workers in the private sector were employed in low skilled sector, especially in construction sector (Department of Economic Planning and Development 2002). No precise data is available on how many diasporas are there in Brunei.
6. The labour market in Brunei got a dual structure: the government and Brunei Shell Petroleum. This represents the primary sector and a number of small enterprises together with other independent employers and their employees representing the secondary sector (AMRC 2003; Department of Economic Planning and Development 2002).
7. Locally, the term 'red IC' – referring to the colour of national identity card given to permanent residents. Foreigners receive green cards and citizens receive yellow cards. These cards are necessary for every aspect of administration in the country to claim the entitlements. In lieu of a passport, stateless permanent residents are issued with a Bruneian International Certificate of Identity. While this certificate theoretically allows international travel, many nations are skeptical of the document and do not accept it – if they do it is with strict conditions.
8. Indian Associations, Indian Chamber of Commerce as well as Brunei India Friendship Association
9. Christians among Asians communities are considered a minority within Diaspora communities. Differences in language affect religious meeting in the church which isolated Christians from Asia. Churches in host countries 'have found it difficult to relate to people of a different culture and established faith and have either given up or left them alone' (Thomson 2007, 4).
10. In the UK, a particular community from Sylhet, north-eastern part of Bangladesh, fast growing in numbers. There are more than 45 mosques in Tower Hamlet which signifies the number of Diaspora and their identity (Garbin 2005, 5).

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