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## Resuscitating Nationalism : Brunei under the Japanese Military Administration (1941-1945)

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## **Resuscitating Nationalism: Brunei under the Japanese Military Administration (1941-1945)**

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### Introduction

Like in many other areas of historical research, Brunei Darussalam lacks substantial study on the period of Japanese involvement which has been variously termed as the Japanese occupation period, or the period of the Japanese interlude and so on. The disruptive nature of the occupation period aside, it has now been acknowledged that this 'Japanese phase' created a new national and social awareness among the indigenous communities, especially the majority Malay-Muslim population in the region (cf. Abu Talib Ahmad 1995). The period undoubtedly witnessed the birth of a new political awareness among Malay youth, the willingness of the Malays to break off from their oppressive and parochial environment and the flowering of new social organizations in various segments of society including women (Zainal Abidin Abidin Wahid 1983; Aisah Ghani 1992). While it may not have been the Japanese intention, the wartime occupation of Brunei, Singapore, Malaya and the Borneo territories alike gave stimulus to the pan-Malay aspirations of the educated nationalist Malay elites. While pan-Malayism did not take a virulently anti-British form in Brunei as it did in Sarawak (Sanib Said 1985), at the same time Brunei could not remain quarantined from the nationalist currents washing out from Indonesian anti-colonialist movement, another legacy of the Japanese Occupation.

Not all Malay-Muslim communities, which came under the Japanese administration, have been studied in depth, including Brunei. In general, historical research on Brunei Darussalam have lagged behind due to several reasons. The country remained isolated during most of the British Residency rule which lasted from 1906 until 1959 (cf. Horton 1986). Also, the Brunei Malays lack a strong historiographic tradition (Brown 1988: 75-85). Since attaining full independence in 1984, Brunei has become a focus for specialized studies. The establishment of Brunei's first University of Brunei Darussalam in 1985 has contributed to an increased awareness to improve research on Brunei related topics.

Like in the other parts of Southeast Asia, Brunei lacks vital historical material to elucidate the period under study. The War destroyed the rudimentary Archives of Brunei built by the British Residents. The British Administration destroyed important documents to prevent them from falling into the hands of their enemies. The Japanese too would have done the same. According to a story currently circulating in Brunei, a leading Brunei official, namely Pehin Datu Haji Ibrahim Ja'afar, the Chief Secretary during the Japanese period, took care to preserve some selected documents including land grants and State Council

papers (Mohd. Jamil al Sufri 1976).

During the War, a number of Japanese academics and social scientists accompanied the Japanese soldiers who occupied Malaya and the East Indies. The experts investigated social conditions, conducted economic surveys and carried out scientific research. One of them, for example, carried out detailed village studies in Java during the occupation (UENO 1988). It is not certain whether the same study has been done in Brunei. However, Japanese educationists and wartime policy-makers prepared a seminal study on aspects of language, literature, education and especially, Islamic structures and institutions in 1943. This study is entitled '*An Outline of the North Borneo Military Administration.*'<sup>1)</sup> It focuses on the historical circumstances surrounding the establishment of the British Residency in Brunei, including the origins of the Sultanate, the role of the Brookes in Sarawak, the Limbang question and the status of the then-ruling Sultan Tajuddin.<sup>2)</sup>

This paper cannot claim originality in this much-neglected area of research, and stands no comparison to deeper research attempted in other parts of Southeast Asia. The contemporary writings on Brunei for this period include rudimentary works of two local researchers (Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1993a; Rosli bin Madaros 1989/99). A. V. M. Horton (1986: 35-75) and Geoffrey Gunn (1997: 92-120) have provided succinct accounts of the Japanese role in during the War.

What I propose to do here is to collate some facts relating to Brunei, and find some patterns in the way the Japanese rule affected the local society with reference to similar developments in other Malay-speaking lands. A basic hypothesis of this paper is that much of the later nationalist and political developments that took place in Brunei in 1950s were attributable to the inspiration, albeit in a rambling manner, that the Malay-Muslims received due to the conscious policies adopted by the Japanese military administrators between 1941-45. This revelation is by no means new in the literature on the Japanese influence in Southeast Asia during the Pacific War years. Yet, I think it will be useful to append another case study from Brunei.

### ***Background***

Brunei (officially Negara Brunei Darussalam) is the last remaining independent Malay Sultanate in South East Asia situated on the Northwest coast of Borneo. In the North and South, the Sultanate share border with the Malaysian territory of Sarawak. As part of the Kalimantan region, which is better known as Borneo Island, Brunei shares territory with its biggest neighbour, Indonesia.

Brunei is a small country with a combined area of 2,226 square miles split into two separate territories of Brunei-Muara, Tutong and Belait Districts on one side, and the Temburong District on the other. In between lies the Limbang District belonging to Sarawak, an odd reminder to the colonial politics during the famous White Rajah rule in Sarawak.<sup>3)</sup> The majority population of Brunei are the Malay-Muslims, while there are minorities of Chinese, introduced during the colonial period, and other indigenous communities like Muruts, Iban and others.

### *History*

Brunei is arguably one of the oldest Sultanates in the ASEAN region. Established in the middle of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, Brunei, according to official histories,<sup>9</sup> reached its zenith during the 16<sup>th</sup> century (Pehin Mohd. Jamil al Sufri 1993). On the eve of the British intervention in Borneo in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Brunei had lost its luster and economic vibrancy, besides losing chunks of its territories, becoming a moribund State. The British sphere of influence began to spread since Brunei entered into a Treaty of Friendship and Commerce with Britain in 1847. Later, Brunei accepted the status of a British Protected State by signing a Protectorate Treaty with Britain in 1888. Great Britain took charge of the Sultanate's external relations in return for protection from its external enemies. Despite the Treaty, Brunei's position became precarious at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Nibbled by both the neighbouring States of Raja Brooke's Sarawak, which once belonged to Brunei, and the adjoining North Borneo ruled by the British North Borneo Company, Brunei was becoming blotted out from the map of the earth. In order to save Brunei from extinction, concerned British administrators like Stewart McArthur advocated a period of Residency Rule in Brunei until the country's finances and administration could be revamped (Horton 1986). Similar agreements had been already in force in other parts of the Malayan Peninsula beginning from Perak in 1874, following the signing of the Pangkor Engagement. Brunei Sultan Hashim Jalilul Alam signed the Supplementary Agreement in 1905/06 paving the way for a British Resident whose advice must be followed by the Sultan on all matters except the Islamic religion.

### *The British Residency Rule*

The Residency rule lasted more than half a decade. Like in the other Protected Malay States, the powers of the British Resident were left largely undefined. In accordance with the 1905/6, Supplementary Agreement, the Sultan was required to act according to the advice tendered by the British Resident except on matters touching upon Islamic religion. By reference to the overarching 'advise' clause in the Agreement, he carried out drastic reforms in the country's laws, administration and institutions. Brunei's isolation too gave the Resident more clout to act in an arbitrary manner. He was so powerful that as a modern Historian A. V. M. Horton aptly describes it, the Resident combined the functions of both the Prime Minister and the Chief Justice under the British system. The Resident took all the executive decisions, appointed State Officers including the District Officers and *Penghulus* (headmen). He drafted legislation with the approval of the High Commissioner that was passed under the guise of the Sultan-in-Council and sat to give judgment at the highest court of the Resident.

The Sultan was, nevertheless, treated as the absolute sovereign for all intents and purpose, which reinforced a notion that Brunei was not a Colony of Britain. In fact, the British authorities had bolstered the status and authority of the Sultan, when at the beginning of the Residency rule the fiscal and land rights of the Brunei nobles were stripped. Under the old traditional Malay Government, the nobles were a power unto themselves and the Sultan was merely 'a *primes inter pares*.' Although the Residential system boosted the Sultan's power, yet, before 1950, the two Sultans, namely Sultan Muhammad Jamalul Alam (r. 1906-1924), and his son Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (r. 1924-1950) could hardly exercise authority for

a number of reasons.

When the British had imposed their administration upon Brunei in 1906, the country was teetering on the brink of bankruptcy. The British controlled Federated Malay States State lent money to redeem Brunei of its debts. However, Brunei's financial woes ended after the discovery and export of oil from 1930s. The British funnelled much of the income derived from the export of oil into savings and bonds on behalf of Brunei in England, which was managed by the British Crown Agents.<sup>5)</sup> As oil is a non-renewable resource, the administration thought it wise to conserve the income for future needs of the state, rather than committing the funds for development purposes. Thus very few programs were installed to expend monies of Brunei in development schemes to improve the living standards of the local people. Few efforts flowed into improving health, social services and even education of the local people, and as a result, outside influences hardly touched Brunei lives. Until after the outbreak of the Pacific war, Brunei remained as a backwater State in South East Asia. In short, the era of British administration can be best described as a rule of benign neglect.

There was much dissatisfaction and resentment among the royals and the commoners towards the parsimonious attitude of the British administration, which did not pass the benefits of the oil wealth to the people. The Sultan and his principal Ministers had been receiving meagre monthly stipends originally fixed in 1906. They had lost most of their rights to lands and private income.<sup>6)</sup> The people were generally poor without any facilities for upward mobility. The British administration did not invest much money on education and development. As a result, the country remained very backward despite the mounting oil-wealth. Comparably speaking, in Malaya where the British extended their economic and political dominance, they established a few educational institutions to produce intermediary administrators and vernacular teachers through a consistent policy. Unlike the Brunei Sultans, their Malayan counterparts were better off receiving additional income from the British largesse derived from an extractive economy. This is the context then in which we must assess the impact of the brief period of Japanese Administration in Brunei.

When the Japanese assault began, Britain not only failed to safeguard Brunei, but also left entire British Borneo in a defenceless position. Apparently, the British presumed that the Japanese would not be able to mount attacks on Malaya and Borneo simultaneously. However, reality dawned when the Japanese assault began in all fronts in the British controlled Southeast Asian 'Empire.'

### *The arrival of the Japanese*

For the Japanese, the capture of Borneo meant to bring economic as well as strategic windfalls. The region was rich in mineral deposits, especially oil. Therefore, they targeted for domination, the vital oilfields in Miri (Sarawak), Seria (Brunei), Tarakan and Balikpapan (Dutch Borneo).<sup>7)</sup> Furthermore, strategically the island of Borneo was located equidistant from British Malaya and Dutch Java, and if they could be captured, the Japanese could hope for permanent success in operations in the two latter territories. In short, they attached importance to Brunei/Borneo in their *nanshin-ron* scheme of southward advanced ideology described by SHIMIZU as 'a series of calls for a doctrine that the South Seas were vital not just to Japanese economic development but to its very existence as a nation' (cf. SHIMIZU 1987).

Since the outbreak of the Second World War on 3 September 1939, Brunei's economy received a boost from the country's oil production and an increase in the production of rubber and sago. Increasing tensions with Japan since early 1941 made the British authorities take certain precautionary measures such as conserving food stocks and passing emergency regulations including the Official Secrets Act and others. Brunei was important to the British for its oilfields, but they surrendered their own benefits and the interests of the local people when the crunch came, by failing to defend their North Borneo possessions. According to the Protectorate Treaty of 1888, Britain pledged to protect Brunei from external enemies and handle its foreign relations while respecting the sovereignty of the Sultan as independent ruler who exercised full control of all internal administration.

At most, the British could only devise 'scorched earth tactics.' As a last resort in preventing the oil resources from falling into the hands of enemy administration, they executed a plan conceived as early as 1937.<sup>8)</sup> By September 1941, the British cemented all 'naturally flowing' oil wells in Brunei and Sarawak to make them useless for anyone who wish to lay their hands on it for future production, while the machinery for oil refinery in Lutong (in Sarawak) was dismantled and the equipment were shipped to Singapore.

By 13 December 1941, the British-Punjab Regiment left for Singapore after successfully completing the oil-denial scheme, and within three days, on 16 December, the first Japanese troops landed in Brunei. Thus began the almost three and half years of Japanese Military Administration in Brunei until evicted by the victorious Allied troops spearheaded by Australian units in June 1945.

### *The Japanese Phase*

The Japanese intelligence about pre-war Brunei was somewhat scanty, unlike in North Borneo, which accommodated Japanese economic activities and settlements since the early twentieth century. For example, in British North Borneo, several Japanese enterprises had been established when the numbers of Japanese and Japanese labour had increased steadily until 1940. A Japanese Society, which is called 'The Japanese Association of Sandakan' was registered in March 1919. In 1938, there were four Japanese associations; two at Tawau, one at Sandakan, and another one at Jesselton. The Japanese population in 1918 was estimated between 200 and 250, which increased to 1000 from 1938 to 1941.<sup>9)</sup> A Japanese Mining Company, Kuhara and an industrial enterprise, Nissan, were in operation in 1940s.<sup>10)</sup> Similarly in Sarawak, two Japanese Companies, Nissa Shokai and Yamashita Kisen were engaged in estates and agricultural projects (cf. SHIMOMOTO 1986). The colony supported three Japanese schools. Such activities in the nature of low-level experiments in commercial colonization came nowhere near to major economic exploitation carried out by the European imperial powers. However, as the war broke out, the Japanese economic settlers became useful as fifth columnists.

Brunei was relatively free of such Japanese intrusions before the War. Apparently, the Residency Administration, which held tighter control over the Brunei Sultanate jealously guarded the British economic rights. Individual merchants who had their base in the North stopped over in Brunei.<sup>11)</sup> What we know for sure is about the Japanese fancy goods dealer called Mr. SUZUKI who ran a successful business enterprise based in Seria/Kuala Belait. He

seemed to have been a very popular person in Brunei but he was a ‘sleeper agent’ for the Japanese (Turner 1983). According to R. N. Turner, when the Japanese army arrived, Mr. SUZUKI marched with them in victory. His was the appointment akin to that of a District Officer Kuala Belait during the occupation.<sup>12)</sup> Thus, the Japanese had this single person, who was familiar of the Brunei ways to guide them through their phase in Brunei.

### *Japanese administration*

General Kiyatoki KAWAGUCHI’s detachment that proceeded from Canton via Camranh Bay in Vietnam, landed in Kuala Belait as mentioned above. Within a week, on 22 December, they entered Brunei Town led by Captain KOYAMA. Pending the arrival of permanent Japanese administrative staff, General KAWAGUCHI, with the consent of the Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin, handed over the administration of the country to Inche Ibrahim Ja’afar (later Pehin Datu Perdana Menteri) who acted as the Chief Secretary throughout the period. He was one of those few experienced local officers who were retained in their post or elevated to such high positions, which hardly could have taken place during the previous British administration.

To begin with, the Japanese ignored former state boundaries set by the British. Even the island of Labuan was attached to Brunei.<sup>13)</sup> The Japanese 37th Army governed Sarawak, Brunei and British North Borneo as one military unit with its headquarters at Kuching. For administrative expediency, five provinces were created – *Kuchinga-shu* (Sarawak), *Sibu-shu* (Rejang and Central Sarawak), *Miri-shu* (Brunei and North Sarawak), *Seikai-shu* (Jesselton/West Coast State), and *Tokai-shu* (Sandakan/East Coast State), each under a



A Picture of the Japanese Military Administration Officials seen with Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (in the center). Standing third from the left in the first row is Mr. SUZUKI (the Japanese Trader in Brunei).

Japanese Provincial Governor.<sup>14)</sup> A military government (*Gunseibu*) was established. The sinking of four transports carrying Japanese civil affairs staff resulted in the almost complete domination of military personnel in all branches of the administration (Wigmore 1957: 180; Reece 1982: 143).

With the arrival of 500 Japanese officers in late May 1942, the Japanese military administration was set in place. They imposed martial law. They focused on maintaining peace and law and did not want to interfere with local institutions and customary (*adat*) law. They adopted indirect rule, with native leaders employed as the instruments of military government, according to their former status and their ability. For example, Pengiran Ahmad bin Pengiran Lubo (b. 1899) was allowed to keep his post as District Officer of Tutong, and another District Officer Inche Taib was operating in Kuala Belait. Pengiran Kerma Indera Pengiran Muhammad Piut continued as State Wireless Officer. Inche Harun bin Amin, a state Superintendent of Education imported from Peninsular Malaya to whom reference will be made later, continued in his post as well. The Japanese also allowed the Brunei State Council to function as the highest local policy making body, but minus its British promoters. The use of English language to conduct the proceedings was not allowed. Thus for the first time, the proceedings and discussions took place in Malay in the Council, and Jawi (Malay written in Arabic) script was used to keep minutes allowing full participation by the locals in the decision making process at the State level. Thus for the first time, the Brunei Malays tasted the fruits of self-administration, an experience which transformed their psyche from a subservient set of people to demand rights and freedom from the colonial administrators who returned to take control of the sultanate.

## I.

A. V. M. Horton, a prolific Historian of the British Residency in Brunei, has highlighted the adverse effects of Japanese rule in Brunei. Perhaps, his statement quoted verbatim below is a good starting point to discuss the real nature of the Japanese rule and its impact on the local society during the post-war period. This is what Horton says:

If the Japanese had failed to achieve their broader strategic and economic objective in Borneo, their occupation of Brunei was wholly disastrous for the Sultanate and disrupted the country's 'smooth advance towards modern statehood' [citing E. R. Bevington]. It is difficult to suggest a single benefit derived by the people of Brunei from the period of Japan too Occupation. Did the Japanese provide good administration? On the contrary their rule degenerated into 'mere spoliation enforced by the army through the medium of the *kempeitai*. Their policy in 1944-5 was 'the seizure of materials and labour for military needs, and the complete neglect of every other consideration.' The oil production by the Japanese in Brunei was significantly below the pre-war levels and nothing was added to the finances of the country which suffered from massive inflation; trading came to a standstill because of Allied success in eliminating Japanese shipping; roads were allowed to become overgrown; the education system and medical service, far from expanding, had ground to a halt, so that a whole generation of school-children was lost and the people generally were reduced to malnutrition and incapacity through disease. Did the Japanese even advance the independence of Brunei? The first popular political party in the Sultanate did not appear until 1956, eleven years after the Japanese had

been driven out. If the Allies had lost the war, moreover, Brunei must have remained one of the 'Manchukuoos' or Koreans forever tied to Japan. The Japanese had not even brought greater administrative opportunities to the people of Brunei, because most of the senior civil servants they employed had already held high office under the British. In short, for the remainder of the 1940s the returning British had to clear up the chaos inherited from the Japanese to restore decent administration, to rehabilitate the economy, to eliminate fear and restore justice, to rebuild the towns, re-establish and expand welfare services, and reconstruct the roads.

(Horton 1985: 336-7)

Horton's judgment of the Japanese role is quite harsh. No doubt, historians have frowned upon the Japanese atrocities during the last Great War. On the other hand, Allied bombings in mid-1945 on the Brunei Town and other little urban dwellings like Kuala Belait caused more serious damage to Brunei's little infra-structure built before the War. As Allen R. Maxwell has discovered, the local inhabitants of Brunei especially the rice-cultivators, Kedayans remembered the period at worst as '*susah*,' i.e. difficult.<sup>15</sup> At the tail end the Japanese rule became, indeed, crisis-ridden. During its entire duration, Brunei remained cut off from its traditional oil markets (i.e., the United Kingdom and the United States), Allied destruction of Japanese shipping brought trade to a standstill and only a handful of certain shopkeepers were allowed to remain as distributors of food and essential commodities. The Japanese currency declined rapidly in value. Cash crop production ceased. Therefore, the inevitable hardship followed.

The Japanese Occupation produced different effects in various regions. In explaining the war-time consequences, McCoy states that 'in British Malaya (West Malaysia) and the Netherlands East Indies (Indonesia), war was an event of near cataclysmic proportions in its armed violence and political disruption' bringing about 'lasting political consequence,' or in Burma and the Philippines, which 'left little more than a trail of physical destruction, such as might follow in the wake of a natural [...] upheaval' (McCoy 1980: 8). The case of Brunei leads to none of the above conclusions. Brunei's case fits into both the revisionist views that propounded the 'continuity' thesis as well as the 'transformation' argument of Willard Elsbree, Harry Benda and Josef Silverstein.<sup>16</sup> It is important to know how Brunei's wartime experience conformed to both these themes.

The Japanese invasion bewildered the people of Brunei rather than frightening them. Like others in the region, they underwent adversity during the Pacific War, especially during its late stage when the Japanese military machine faced sure defeat. Even so, the Sultanate faced comparatively fewer and lesser hardships than other places in the region. In Brunei, the Japanese confined themselves in controlling coastal areas and riverine settlements and they hardly penetrated interior villages except on occasional patrols. The Japanese administration had specific targets. '[T]he attainment of independence in the matter of food supply and the increased production of oil, coal and minerals and the economic exploitation of the forests.'<sup>17</sup> To some extent they succeeded in the early phase to undo damage caused by the departing British. For instance, within about two years the Japanese reinstalled damaged pipelines and oil wells to nearly three quarters of the pre-war level. They sank sixteen new oil wells in Miri-Seria (Reece 1982: 143).

In administration, the Japanese faced near catastrophe. From the inception, the Japanese

found it unprofitable to administer the territory and collect taxes. Towards the end (1944-45), they catered to their own military needs, almost completely neglecting people's welfare, as mentioned above. A British source with some exaggeration described,

After invasion the Japanese attempted to carry on the former machinery of government, but there was soon a complete breakdown in the methods of administration and the Japanese rule degenerated into more spoliation enforced by the army through the medium of *Kempitei*.<sup>18)</sup>

Brunei started to totter at the brink of disaster by 1944, by which time the stores of food and medicine stockpiled before the war had shrunk. Lacking food, the Japanese confiscated most of the local harvest in 1944 to remedy the deficiency. As a result,

A serious state of starvation set in (among the people of Brunei), which grew worse week by week. Together with the lack of food, medicines were in very short supply and almost non-existent, malaria spread, and the resistance of the population to disease was broken down. No anti-malaria work was done.<sup>19)</sup>

The lack of means for repairing and replacing equipment made fishing difficult and even a needle became a rarity.

From 1944, people abandoned Kampong Ayer (Brunei's largest settlement) escaping into the interior to cultivate a piece of land. The Kedayan Community reverted to their primordial settlement pattern of greatly dispersed houses, not localized in a village. It was their response to constant Japanese demand in extracting labour, firewood and rice. Even the royal family suffered without basic amenities. Reminiscing about his experiences during the critical days, Brunei's late Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddin said that he and his family lived packed like sardine in a small space in an interior village called Damuan. He admitted that 'he felt so elated at the end of the Japanese rule,' and seeing the returning Allied forces was he felt 'like heaven on earth.'<sup>20)</sup>

No doubt that the occupation brought physical distress to people who were accustomed to a steady but sedentary life during the British administration. Overall, the Japanese presence in Brunei strengthened rather than attenuated authoritarian structures and, even on its own terms, never looked to the development of civil society, beyond that of cultivating a loyal counter elite. For the sake of argument, one can even dismiss this phase as a non-event, because the Japanese occupation merely interrupted the historic process of resuming Brunei's economic and political maturity within a British colonial ensemble linking the Sultanate with the north Borneo territories and, in turn, the Peninsula and Singapore.

In relation to the above view, what were the positive aspects of this period? How did the Japanese put in place their ideology of *nanshin-ron* in Brunei? How did common people react to Japanese rule? And, more importantly, how did an emerging elite in Brunei utilize the Japanese interregnum to get breathing space for their subsequent challenge of the British authorities that returned to take control of their destiny? The next section will try to explicate that phenomenon in Brunei history i.e.; the moral strength injected into the Brunei psyche by the brief presence of the occupying force. This aspect becomes more in focus when examined in hindsight. In order to answer this question one needs first to review what we

may characterize as the history of the benign British neglect in Brunei.

## II.

Ever since European activities came to dominate the region and until the Japanese advent, Brunei had remained in isolation, mostly due to poor or lack of communications with the outside world. Until the end of the War, the style and purpose of the British administration had done little to break this physical isolation. Before the 1950s, Brunei did not have a newspaper,<sup>21)</sup> radio station, airport, or even much in the way of roads to facilitate internal transport. The only link the Sultanate had with the outside world was by sea via the island of Labuan (now a Malaysian Federal Territory), once known as the gateway to Brunei. These conditions, combined with the fact that a large number of people remained illiterate, served to keep the populace in a state of subjugation by ignorance. Their knowledge and experience extended little beyond the confines of their own isolated villages. The Sultan, the territorial chiefs, and *Ketuas* or *Penghulus* (village chiefs) remained the focus of their primary loyalty.

Even as the oil fortunes of the State boomed, the welfare of the common people did not improve. As Nicholas Tarling observed about British colonialism, 'in the plenitude of their power, their policy had been one of sufficiency unto the day, of doing no more than seemed necessary to meet their interests' (Tarling 1980: 131). They cushioned the local society from the disruptive effects of development and 'over-education' that helped to maintain a status quo of conservatism and general backwardness among the people. The largest concentration of the indigenous Malay population centred in the Kampong Ayer, (the Water Village as it came to be known) situated close to the Ruler's little palace. Ordinary folks had been shielded from the similar if not greater dislocating effects of the new economic order of capitalist intrusion, especially from the growth of the oil industry. Its main theatre of action was relatively far away from Brunei District in the confines of the sparsely populated Belait District. In Seria, the Oil Company effectively ran a State within a State dubbed by many as Shell-fare state (a reference to the Dutch Shell company monopoly over oil rights in the sultanate, e.g. Hanna 1964).

This situation began to change gradually, at least by the middle of the century. The spread of education was an important factor. Despite many constraints experienced by the Government in providing school buildings and teachers, there were increasing opportunities for education, and the literacy rate slowly began to register an upward trend. The Government was keener to promote vernacular education instead of English education for the locals (cf. Mohd. Noor bin Chuchu 1990). Thus, an imbalance occurred when the number of Malay-educated locals increased, preparing them for neither white-collar employment nor the skills necessary to serve in the growing oil industry.

In general, the highest paying job available to them was teaching in the Malay schools. The early school leavers had little opportunities other than to end up as minor employees in Government offices or the police, or to be engaged as wage-workers or self-employed in less lucrative occupations such as fishing, agriculture or producing handicrafts. Their demands for reasonable employment and opportunities to learn English to qualify for such employment during the British times often echoed in the Brunei State Council meetings in

the 1940s (Hussainmiya 1995: 50). It was their pent up frustration which later burst into activism spurred by the Japanese presence in Brunei soil during a most critical period.

The brief interlude of Japanese occupation was responsible to a great extent for sharpening a Bruneian national and political awareness as elsewhere in South-East Asia. Quick victory by the Japanese over the British forces dispelled the myth of British invincibility while lowering their prestige in the East. The Japanese did not altruistically encourage Malay nationalism as such, but when the tide of the war turned, Japan promoted certain nationalists, with the hope that their forces would turn against Japan's enemies. The Indonesian example is well known (Reid 1974). In Malaya, for example, the Japanese promoted the cause of Ibrahim Yaacob, who formed a voluntary army, the *Pembela Tanah Ayer Melayu* (PETA, 'Avengers of the Country'), to drive out the British imperialists when they tried to return (Means 1976: 44-5).

In order to win over the local population the Japanese had engaged in various activities. Japanese propaganda was an important feature of the period. Brunei, too, became the target of subtle cultural indoctrination in the ways of Nippon, one that influenced and fed a Brunei Malay nationalist thinking. As AKASHI says that while Singapore was the major locus for the production and propagation of Japanese propaganda activities, the Malay states including Brunei were included in the re-culturalization process of subject peoples (AKASHI 1991: 117-8).

As part of the propaganda, the Japanese authorities in Brunei encouraged a popular art form, the street plays called *Bangsawan*, to reach the public. Such plays were much in vogue in Malaya in the pre-war period. H. M. Salleh, employed by the Japanese as Information Officer, was the creative force behind the production of one such performance. This was '*Kami Gayu*,' a Malay language play of words upon the Japanese national anthem '*Kimi Gayo*.' Apparently, Brunei playwrights and performers including Mat Yassin Haji Metassin, Ibrahim Bongsu, Mohammed Som Hashim and Shahabuddin Salleh (Abdul Rahman Mohamed Yusof 1984) and others injected patriotic themes into their performances which no doubt lived in Brunei minds long after the Japanese left.

A writing of a Brunei history book during the Japanese period is another significant step. The book titled *Hikayat Negeri Berunei* (1942) was the work of a Malayan Agricultural Officer seconded to serve in Brunei, namely Inche Mohamad Raus Haji Mohamad Amin. It was certainly done under the Japanese inspiration to instil the pride of historical heritage into the minds of Bruneians. Earlier, some British Officers like Hughes-Hallet (1940: 23-42) had published transcripts of the Brunei Historical tablet listing the Brunei Rulers from the 14<sup>th</sup> century which was mostly meant for a Western readership. Mohd Raus wrote in Malay, and he received direct encouragement from Inche Harun bin Mohd. Amin, the Malaysian Superintendent of Education (seconded for Brunei in 1939 under the previous British Administration), was retained by the Japanese to make links with the local literati. Indeed, Brunei nobles and literati lent support for this project by lending their manuscripts and other material to the writer who gratefully acknowledged their contributions in his introduction to the booklet. Mohd. Raus brought the information up to date to the Japanese times and did not fail to mention that 'the Japanese army units headed by their Supreme Commander, General KAWAGUCHI, visited Brunei and were eagerly welcomed by the Sultan and people.'<sup>22)</sup>

As elsewhere in Japanese-occupied Southeast Asia, education played a key role in the Japanese wartime program in Brunei. Summed up by the Japanese phrase, *kōminka kyōiku* (皇民化教育), or education for transforming citizens into the emperor's subjects, the Japanese administrators recognized the importance of education for social engineering even more than the British. By comparison before the War, the British hardly cared to win the hearts and minds of the Malays through education or social progress. Instead, the Colonial Administrators were more concerned with conserving Brunei's finances for a 'rainy' day.

The Japanese introduced a major change to the educational system in Brunei. They compelled the local school teachers to learn to read and write Japanese, or at least *katakana* (片仮名, one of the two sets of syllabary), a subject introduced into the school curriculum. By March 1943, a Japanese military officer assumed control and commenced to oversee the transformation of education in Brunei from a British Malayan to a Japanese system. The number of periods reserved for instruction in Japanese language was increased from one to two periods a day, with three periods a week for singing of patriotic Japanese songs.<sup>23)</sup> In Brunei too, like in Singapore, the Japanese set out to disseminate their language with 'unprecedented zeal and thoroughness' (Thio 1991: 96-7).

The Japanese favoured *Rumi* (romanized form) to write Bahasa Melayu in place of *Jawi* script, which was dropped from the curriculum. This system was known as the Ejaan Fajar Asia or the *Fajar Asia* spelling system after the Japanese-sponsored Malay language magazine of that name, produced in Singapore. The new Japanese system, which eclipsed the Za'ba system of spelling devised at the SITC school and the older Wilkinson system, became the basis for later developments in Malay script after the war.

By the end of 1943, it appeared that Japanese replaced Bahasa Melayu as a medium of instruction. Nevertheless, only a limited number of schools were in position to implement this scheme owing to the dearth of trained instructors. In any case, the Japanese authorities promoted the teaching in Japanese for local Brunei assistant teachers and probationers. One such course was launched in early 1944 for group teachers and headmasters. Officers from Miri, Labuan, and Limbang also attended the course. In Brunei Town, Brunei Malay schoolteachers, government officials and clerks, employees of Japanese companies, and a number of kampong people attended Japanese language courses. Classes were held between 3 P.M. and 4:30 P.M. Not only the schoolteachers but also all government officers, even kampong dwellers had to learn Japanese by order.<sup>24)</sup>

A Japanese Education Officer, assisted by a Superintendent of Education and an Inspector of Schools administered the Japanese education system. In July 1943, the jurisdiction of the Brunei Education Department was extended to Limbang and Miri (*Education report, 1949*, Brunei). Therefore, Brunei became the Japanese administrative centre for all the Brunei Bay territory. It must also be noted that in Brunei the Chinese schools were closed down, unlike in Lawas where the Chinese schools were allowed to function side by side with the Sekolah Rakyat.

A Brunei High School, located in a Chinese house near Brunei Town in Kampung Kianggeh operated with Japanese consent. The Japanese language was taught as a subject by visiting Japanese female instructors. This English medium school, which opened its doors in April 1942, essentially catered for those Brunei students whose education in the Government

English School in Labuan had been interrupted and who were otherwise idle once back in Brunei. Its headmaster was V. A. George, a former teacher in the Labuan school and an active member in the pro-Japanese Indian Association (formed under Japanese auspices in Brunei). Eventually the school enrolled up to 100 pupils, although it was obliged to close down in 1944.<sup>25)</sup>

The propaganda and education system was designed indirectly to counter-balance any return of Western colonial governments to the East. Therefore, they selected promising indigenous young people to bear the nationalist flag should the time come. The oft-repeated Japanese slogan of 'Asia for Asians,' which they promoted along with the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere to challenge European supremacy in the economic and political arena, instilled in the minds of the young Malay Bruneians a kind of anti-Western feeling, who then came up with their own slogan of 'Brunei for Bruneians.'

Among the Brunei students trained by the Japanese as teachers were Marsal bin Maun, Jamil bin Umar, *Cikgu* Basir Mohd. Taha, *Cikgu* Tuah bin Hitam, and Haji Idris bin Hamzah. Upon completion of the three-month course, the teachers were posted to such outlying areas as Labuan, Limbang, and Miri. A number of these students were sent for military training to either the Pusat Latihan, Kanri Yosezyo in Kuching (Jamil bin Umar) or to Miri and Labuan (H. B. Hidup and Jassin Affandi). Another notable personality was Sheik A. M. Azahari (Hussainmiya 1995: 95-100). One Brunei student, 18-year-old Pengiran Mohd. Yusof bin Pg. Abdul Rahim, who had been appointed as a teacher in the Kokumin Gakko in Miri joined a select group of Malay youth who were trained in Japan under the *Nanpō Tokubetsu Ryūgaksei* (南方特別留學生; also *Nantokusei*, 南特生) program or Special Overseas Students from the Southern Region program, established in 1943. In this year, Mohd. Yusuf (later known as Pengiran Setia Negara Mohd. Yusuf) joined the Kokusai Gakkai in Tokyo and, in April 1945, the Hiroshima Bunrika Daigaku (広島文理科大学) or Humanities and Sciences University (Personal interview 7 August 1994). He was living in Hiroshima at the time of the dropping of the atom bomb and suffered radiation poisoning. Returning home in September 1945, he went on to become Brunei's Director General of the Information Bureau and later State Secretary.

As a matter of policy, the Japanese favoured the indigenous Malays and persecuted the Chinese. Under the Japanese, the Malays were left in charge of the local administration and police. The Chinese of Brunei bore the brunt of the Japanese rule partly because as elsewhere they resisted the Japanese and were unwilling to collaborate. Moreover, the Chinese were known to have been involved in fund collections for China Relief Fund. The local Malays who had no other loyalties lent themselves easily for Japanese manipulation, while a number of them, in fact, harboured grudges against their British masters. As Gunn says,

[T]he Malay population of Brunei, on the other hand, was coddled by the new occupier or at least spared the most coercive labour and military mobilization. Rather Malays became the objects of fairly intensive cultural propagandization in favour of the Greater East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. (Gunn 1997: 96)

Some of the Malay-educated young men who would have been passed over by a snobbish

English colonial officials were given respectable positions under the Japanese. Importantly, Malays began to gain confidence to assert their rights over the recent immigrants, mainly the Chinese, whom the Japanese suppressed. As in Malaya, ethnic sentiment among the Brunei Malays became increasingly sharpened under Japanese stimulus which soon erupted against other ethnic interests.<sup>26)</sup> As Gunn states,

Proof of the pudding, as seen, was demonstrated by the act of the British Military Administration in Brunei in removing from office and detaining former pro-Japanese collaborators, otherwise feared as nationalists, or worse, demagogues. (Gunn 1997)

### III.

All nationalist activities in the post-war period cannot be attributed to the Japanese stimulus alone. Political consciousness among the Bruneians had emerged a decade or so earlier. Nevertheless, a catalyst was needed to goad them into direct action: that was what the Japanese Occupation did in the post-war period. As such, the next section will delineate some important features of early political consciousness in Brunei before the Japanese interlude.

By and large, the rising political consciousness among the Brunei Malays was a natural extension of the political upheaval and nationalist demands taking form everywhere in South-East Asia, but especially those in Malaya and Indonesia. Brunei could no longer remain a backwater: its peace and isolation were soon to be breached.

Given the fact that such Malay-educated and Japanese-pampered school teachers, as H. M. Salleh,<sup>27)</sup> Pengiran Mohd. Yusuf Rahim, Mohd. Jamil Umar and others, were in the forefront of agitation in Brunei after the Japanese occupation, one is tempted to look for early influences originating from the oft-noted role of the renowned Malay vernacular teacher's training college in Malaya where they received their training. Maktab Perguruan Sultan Idris (MPSI), or the Sultan Idris Teachers College (SITC), was founded in 1922 in the small town of Tanjong Malim at the Perak-Selangor northern boundary.<sup>28)</sup> As the leading training college for vernacular Malay teachers, drawn largely from the rural areas of the several Malay states. It provided the first opportunity for them to mingle and exchange ideas with their fellows. Beginning with a self-analysis of the shortcomings of Malay society, as time progressed the teacher trainees developed a far more critical approach and became radical in spirit:

The teachers from Sultan Idris College who were alive at least to many of the problems facing Malays took with them when they returned to the villages not simply a new spirit of confidence and endeavour but new ideas about personal, social, and ultimately political relationships.

(Roff 1967: 157)

From the 1930s the College became a hotbed of Malay political awareness, influenced by the radicalisation of the Indonesian nationalist movement. Thus, the need for a politically oriented Malay association, Kesatuan Melayu Muda, surfaced in Malaya with the founding of Belia Malaya (Malayan Youth), which was modelled on similar movements in the

Netherlands East Indies (Roff 1967: 225-6).

The first to join the MPSI from Brunei (in 1929/30) were two teachers, Bashir bin Thaha and Marsal bin Maun, who returned after training in 1932. Among the other notables to follow were H. M. Salleh, Pengiran Mohd. Yusuf Rahim, Pengiran Mohd. Ali Daud, Mohd. Jamil Umar, Othman Bidin, Mohd. Ali Thamin, Abdullah Penyurat Abu Bakar, Ibrahim Haji Mohd. Said, and Abdullah Alimin.

Away from the repressive atmosphere of their homeland, these students were infused with the new political thinking current among their fellow students. On returning to Brunei, however, they could not preach or practice openly what they had learnt since they were under the watchful eye of the foreign administration. Opportunities for free expression within the country were limited. The small size of the reading public precluded publication activities, in contrast with Malaya where journals like *Saudara* or *Majallah Guru* were popular among the teachers. Some local teachers may have subscribed to them, but very few actually wrote in them from Brunei. However, contemporary Malay journals such as *Kenchana*, *Hiburan*, *Waktu* and *Hikmat*, which devoted much discussion on the Indonesian revolution, freely circulated in Brunei (Zaini Haji Ahmad 1989: 28).

#### *Consolidating political-consciousness*

Compared to events in Malaya and Indonesia, 'political' movement emerged rather late in Brunei. In the absence of a local press or even an intellectual class, Brunei did not participate in the agitation over issues of Islamic reform and modernism that raged in Malaya.<sup>29)</sup> Nor is there any trace of a Malayan type tussle between a *Kaum Tua* vs. *Kaum Muda*, analysed ably by William Roff (1967), pitting the conservative doctrines of a traditional court-centred Muslim hierarchy on the one hand against proponents of a pan-Islamic modernist and reformist ideology on the other.

Under the Japanese influence, interest among the Brunei elites was rekindled to revive the *Persatuan Melayu Brunei* or Brunei Malay Union, the earliest Malay Association originating in the 1930s.<sup>30)</sup> Aiming at a social uplift, such an association may have acted as a pressure group to attract the attention of the British Resident's administration to the needs of the local population in education, health and general welfare. *Persatuan Melayu Brunei* had the strength of nearly 200-300 members before World War II.<sup>31)</sup> Having been revived during the Japanese times, it gave way to a more militant BARIP (to be described below). Both joined hands to protest against certain actions of the post-war British administration such as the appointment of Captain M. R. Ireland Blackburne as the Secretary to the Resident in 1946.<sup>32)</sup> *Persatuan Melayu* is said to have lost its steam after its President, Pengiran Muda Tengah (later Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III) gave up his positions in public bodies when he was appointed the Pengiran Bendahara (First Minister) in July 1947. The Association did not officially de-register until 1957 (Matasim Haji Jibah 1983: 26).

#### **BARIP**

Brunei scholars have tended to seek the nucleus of a Brunei nationalist movement in the short-lived *Barisan Pemuda*, or BARIP (Youth Association), a voluntary association known to have been founded in 1946.<sup>33)</sup> It was not a mere coincidence that such a 'militant'

association emerged just after the Japanese occupation had ended. In the formation and aims of BARIP, one sees a distinct new level of political consciousness among the Brunei Malays.<sup>34</sup> BARIP was something nearest to a political organisation, if judged by the intentions of its founders and the consternation with which the British administration viewed its activities.

BARIP indeed survived too short a span (c. 1946 to c. 1948), having represented the interests of wider sections of the Malay community. Its importance lies in the fact that it was the first quasi-political 'nationalist' movement, a forerunner to the Parti Rakyat Brunei (Brunei People's Party) founded in 1956. Registered as a social welfare organisation (to meet the requirement of the Brunei Societies Registration Enactment of 1933), BARIP's real interest lay to promote political aims. In support, Matassim Haji Jibah quotes Pengiran *Setia Negara* Mohd. Yusuf's recollection of the movement as follows:

After the (Second World) war, Brunei was put under the British Military Administration (BMA). At that time, there was a desire among the few educated Brunei Malays to set up a (political) party to take Brunei towards independence, as the wave of nationalism was burning everywhere in the Malay Archipelago. But, in Brunei, we couldn't (form a party) because the state was under military rule. So, we tried other means. We set up BARIP with the aim of social and economic advancement of the Malay community. In fact, BARIP's main objective was in politics (to get independence from the British Government). [...] A secret meeting was held in a house situated between Kampong Sungai Kedayan and Sultan Lama (in Brunei Town). It was there BARIP was born and registered with the Government. (Matasim Haji Jibah 1983: 26)

A visiting British official in late 1946 was probably referring to BARIP when he said,

[A]s an inevitable result of the war, the Bruneians have become politically- and nationally-minded. [...] They have formed political movements. Malay teachers, the better educated section of the population, figure in the rank of the Malay Youth Movement of which an ex-teacher (H. M. Salleh) is a high official.<sup>35</sup>

BARIP indeed illustrated a point as to how the activities of left-wing Malay nationalists could have kindled the imagination of the frustrated Malay youth of Brunei like others in their shoes nurtured by the Japanese.<sup>36</sup> By 1948, the British administration in Brunei saw a connection: 'the younger generation who formerly supported the Barisan Pemuda Youth Association [...] look to the left wing in Malaya for their political opinions.'<sup>37</sup> In fact, after the founding of BARIP in 1946, it quickly formed part of a larger network of branch organizations that had spread to Labuan and elsewhere in North Borneo.<sup>38</sup> A fairly representative group of Malay teachers, clerks and minor Government servants patronized BARIP.

An expression of a new wave of political consciousness among the Bruneians, it was a force to be reckoned with, and the British administration viewed with anxiety the formation of such political movements among the Bruneians. Probably BARIP was granted registration due to the exertion of the then Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin, who patronised the association.

Soon the British viewed the activities of the organization with characteristic suspicion, and brought it under strict surveillance. BARIP certainly had among its members people with

radical tendencies who later rose to prominence in Brunei politics in the Parti Rakyat Brunei, which promoted anti-British and anti-colonial feelings. An example was H. M. Salleh, who was an elected President of BARIP. The election took place about six months after BARIP's formation, when the British released H. M. Salleh from detention for his alleged collaboration with the Japanese during the occupation period (Pehin Mohd. Jamil al Sufri 1992: 7; Monks 1992: 116-9). As President of BARIP he earned public recognition and was received with much respect and pomp during his visits to the BARIP branches in Labuan and Jesselton (Sabihah Osman 1986: 80).

In addition to BARIP, three other associations came into existence at almost the same period. One was known as the Malay Old Boys Association or *Persekutuan Murid Tua Melayu Brunei* (MUTU), launched in December 1947 (Ismail Ibrahim and Matasim Haji Jibah 1986). Another was known as the *Angkatan Pemuda Brunei* (APB).<sup>39</sup> The third one was for women: the *Kesatuan Kaum Ibu Melayu Brunei* or Brunei Malay Women's Association.

Of these three, detailed documentary information exists only for MUTU. The three objectives of MUTU were to strengthen bonds of unity between the Malay Old Boys, to improve the condition the Malay Old Boys, and to improve and increase the knowledge of the Malay Old Boys (Ismail Ibrahim and Matasim Haji Jibah 1986: 16). The British administration detested the birth of yet another youth organisation, a youth wing appendix to BARIP. The Constitution of MUTU submitted for approval to the Government was almost identical to BARIP's. Thus, when MUTU applied for registration, on 7 April 1947, the Chief Police Officer (who also functioned as The Registrar of Societies) squashed it on the grounds of duplication.<sup>40</sup> Although the President of MUTU admitted that although their rules and regulations were based on BARIP, he denied political objectives, and said that MUTU only aimed at uplifting the welfare of the Malay Old Boys of Brunei.<sup>41</sup> MUTU's membership consisted largely of young unemployed and employed school leavers, some of whom, as mentioned earlier, later became leading members of the PRB, including Hapidz Laxamana who became the Vice-President of the Parti Rakyat Brunei.

The Brunei Malay Women's Association was formed during the Japanese times as in Sarawak (Reece 1982: 132-7), and aimed at the improvement of their welfare, especially in the field of education. It appears that the selection of the first Brunei woman to be sent for teachers training to the Malay Women's Teachers Training College at Durian Daun in Melaka came as a result of representations made by the Association (Zaini Haji Ahmad 1989: 30). Its membership included a wide cross-section of women, including the wives of the then Pengiran Pemancha Mohd. Yasin and Pengiran Kerma Indera Dato Pengiran Mohd. bin Piut. Another notable member was an elder sister of Jassin Affandi, later the Secretary General of the PRB.

Why this sudden rush to form associations in Brunei? With the Allied victory in World War II, the British returned to take charge of their old possessions. Although it was a welcome relief to the people who underwent the trauma of the Japanese occupation, the Bruneians began to worry about their future under the British. Their experiences under the British Military Administration, which ignored Malay sensitivities, woke them up to the perils of their situation, surrounded by a seemingly multiplying alien population, especially the Chinese, who enjoyed economic and educational advantages over them.<sup>42</sup> There was a

persistent feeling as in Malaya that foreign rule had provided undue privileges to immigrant communities. Rt. Hon. Malcolm MacDonald, the British High Commissioner, visiting Brunei in 1946, became aware of the 'indications that young Malays are beginning to be apprehensive of a policy in Brunei which would result in Chinese influence increasing at the expense of themselves.'<sup>43)</sup>

Apparently, certain misguided actions of ignorant but haughty BMA officials who arrived in Brunei shortly after the Japanese defeat in mid-1945 were most unfortunate. Unfamiliar with local customs, some of their actions seem to have antagonised the local Malay population in several ways. Malays had expected sympathetic treatment from the British, but since the latter did not understand Malay there was a communication breakdown. Moreover, the BMA officials insisted on recruiting minor officials with some knowledge of English, and only a handful of local Malays could meet the requirement. Instead, a fair number of English-educated Chinese found employment. In fact, when the posts were advertised in Labuan, only Chinese were encouraged to apply for posts in the Brunei Customs Department (Sabihah Usman 1986: 80). To make matters worse, the services of Malay-educated officers were either not required or those in the service were asked to relinquish their positions.<sup>44)</sup> The BMA officials perhaps did not have much time on their hands to bring back normalcy after the devastating effects of the Japanese period, and perhaps they were indifferent to the seething discontent in Brunei. Heussler, therefore, correctly notes the 'serious [...] criticism by pre-War Malayan Civil Service officers in the BMA that the new administration was making grave errors of judgment due to unfamiliarity with local peoples and conditions.'<sup>45)</sup>

In Brunei, the BMA personnel were either too ready to dismiss or detain able Malay officers, accused of collaboration with the Japanese. Presumably it was done at the instigation of non-Malays especially the Chinese who had an axe to grind.<sup>46)</sup> In the neighbouring Sarawak too, according to one British officer's report, 'the Chinese got up on their hind legs and tried to dictate the policy in regards to collaborators and refused to be ruled by Malay Magistrates in the future.'<sup>47)</sup> It was the detention of H. M. Salleh, who had never hidden his displeasure towards Chinese interests, that seemed to have upset the locals most. Before Sheikh Azahari rose to prominence as the leader of the Parti Rakyat Brunei, it was H. M. Salleh who had been looked upon by the local intelligentsia for his outspoken opposition to the foreign administration. He received a hero's welcome when released after six months in detention for his alleged collaboration with the Japanese as their propaganda secretary. Also, he became the unanimous choice as the new leader of BARIP (the incumbent President, Abdullah bin Jahfar, made way for him by resigning his position after only 5 months in office) (Pehin Mohd Jamil al Sufri 1992: 7; Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1986: 147; Monks 1992: 115-9).

When Rt. Hon. Malcolm MacDonald visited Brunei in late 1946, BARIP submitted a petition to him calling for 'independence for the Sultanate' (Matasim Haji Jibah 1983: 26). Although no trace of this petition exists, oral sources confirm that the Brunei quest for independence began as early as that (Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1986: 148-9). The British could feel a growing national feeling to claim 'Brunei for Bruneians.'<sup>48)</sup> Pehin Mohd Jamil al Sufri, a one-time BARIP activist, recalls that its members decided to deliver the message to MacDonald when he arrived in Brunei town in late 1946 (to re-establish civil rule). A

decoration arch was erected in Brunei Town to welcome him, bearing the slogan, 'Sole Right of the Sultan and His Subjects,' inscribed under the Brunei flag; under the Union Jack was written, 'Restorer of Peace and Justice.' The arch was intended to convey to the British administration that if they desired to bring peace and security to Brunei, they must respect the rights of the Sultan and his subjects. The British authorities ordered the erasure of the former slogan, but Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin intervened on behalf of the local youths to retain both slogans, and he appreciated their 'national spirit.'<sup>49)</sup> A few months earlier, in July, BARIP demanded pride of place over the representatives of the Chinese and Indian communities, to make the welcome address during another visit of Rt. Hon. Malcolm MacDonald (Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1986).

The British authorities came to regard BARIP as a nuisance, if not a threat to their interests. A contemporary British observer described BARIP as a 'virus' that needed to be eliminated.<sup>50)</sup> One of the reasons for British animosity towards BARIP was its adoption of the red and white flag of the Indonesian anti-colonialists. As the Indonesian revolution was anathema to the British colonial administration, it had little tolerance for adoption of its symbols by the Bruneians. On the occasion of the first annual celebration of the founding of BARIP, held on 12 April 1947, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin consented to hoist its red and white flag (Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1993: 122). It sent a chilling message to the British administration that the Sultan covertly supported the BARIP which was known to be working stealthily to promote Indonesian-style revolutionary sentiments. During the celebrations, the President of BARIP, H. M. Salleh, in front of an estimated crowd of about 2,000 people, pledged the undivided loyalty of the Association to the Brunei monarch (*ibid.*).

Apart from H. M. Salleh, of the Japanese vintage, there were many others who had nurtured ambitions for freedom from colonial rule in Brunei. Sheikh A. M. Azahari, who received training under the Japanese, took Brunei's political struggle against colonialism to new heights. Returning to Brunei in 1952 after spending time in Java as an anti-colonialist fighter, Sheikh Azahari became the portent force to galvanize Brunei against British colonial interests. In 1956, he along with H. M. Salleh helped to found the first political Party, Parti Rakyat Brunei (PRB), in Brunei, for that matter in entire British Borneo which challenged the British to yield political and economic concessions to the locals. What is important in the context of our present analysis is the emergence of an organized political movement in Brunei, the links for which existed in the Japanese period of occupation as well.

Aside from the organized anti-colonialist movement in Brunei, one should also examine the silent role of vernacular-educated teachers in challenging the British supremacy in the early 1950s. Some worked with the Parti Rakyat Brunei headed by both Azahari and H. M. Salleh. Others like Pengiran Mohd. Yusuf Rahim, Marsal bin Maun and Mohd. Jamil al Sufri joined hands with Brunei's Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddin III to frustrate the colonial agenda of the British in formulating a written Constitution for Brunei. I have examined these phenomena extensively in my monograph 'Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin and Britain' (1995).

Returning to my main theme, all those Malay-educated teachers who had been associating with the Japanese became vocal critics of the returning British administration in one way or other. The methods used by these teachers were subtle. They collaborated with Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddin (r. 1950-1967), to challenge British supremacy in Brunei.

These teachers belonged to a politically minded Brunei Malay Teachers' Association or PGGMB as it was known in Malay. In challenging the British, they used age-old Brunei methods of prevarication to frustrate British schemes in the post-war period. The British did not have much respect or faith in them to hold the mantle of Brunei's political culture. However, the British were also unable to succeed in suppressing their ego boosted during the Japanese presence in Brunei.

Possibly one can see some parallels with Indonesia where the Japanese presence aided the emergence of the *Kiyayis* (religious elite) as a political force under the Japanese stimulus. The vernacular-educated teachers of Brunei in this sense stand in comparison with the *Kiyayis* of Indonesia. As Harry Benda has stated that, if the politicization of the *ulama* was the most important aspect of Japanese Islamic policy in 1943, it was not its only feature:

Whatever the individual *kiyayi* and *ulama* may have taken back to his home, however, he was no longer allowed to seek refuge in his cloistered other-worldly aloofness. Nippon had forcefully moved him into the day to day life of the Indonesian community. (Benda 1983: 135)

Similarly the *Cikgus*, the vernacular-educated teachers of Brunei, played no less significant a role in Brunei's political development in the post-war period.

### Concluding remarks

Much of the significance of the Japanese interlude in Brunei history can be studied from the point of view of hindsight. Brunei presents a unique case in the British de-colonization process when the monarchic Brunei rejected independence offers from Britain until 1984. Yet, below the top layer of a monarchic history of Brunei were hidden the undercurrents of strong anti-colonial sentiments throughout 1950s and 1960s. I have traced these sentiments to the Japanese period in Brunei history.

First of all, I have identified the major group, the 'Cikgus,' whose self-image was augmented by the Japanese presence. But equally important is the fact that their leaders had leaned to the left during the anti-colonialist struggle in the post-war period. The leaders of this movement in the Malay world, such as Ahmad Boestamam and Ibrahim Yaacob inspired by the Japanese, acted as role models for the Brunei nationalists. Besides, all of them pursued the idea of a larger *Melayu-raya* or a pan-Malay world in which their respective societies would seek freedom after the Japanese left. In Brunei, the political boundaries imposed by the colonial British administration were wiped out by the Japanese, when Brunei became the administrative centre for larger areas including Limbang, Lawas and Miri at one time. The closed mentality of the Bruneians were opened up as a result leading to a clamor not just expecting Brunei to gain independence but as an entity in the macro-state of Kalimantan Utara (Northern Kalimantan). During the height of political struggle carried out by the Parti Rakyat Brunei, a majority of the locals seemed to support Azahari's vision of a United Kalimantan Utara which included Sarawak, Sabah and Brunei.

For the first time since the British Resident ruled Brunei, a Malay Pehin Ibrahim Ja'afar was appointed by the Japanese as the State Secretary, the highest executive position. He bore

all the responsibilities of the previous British Resident including the conduct of the Brunei State Council that continued to function under the Japanese aegis. Pehin Ibrahim became the first *Menteri Besar* (the chief minister) in 1959 when the first Brunei written Constitution was promulgated leading to self-government. Even Sultan Haji Omar Ali Saifuddin (r. 1950-1967), the dynamic Brunei Sultan who became the 'architect of modern Brunei' was inducted into administrative service during the Japanese times (Hussainmiya 1995: 58).

More importantly, Malay became the official language of the State Council proceedings with due recognition to the indigenous script, the Jawi, to write down minutes of the proceedings. The Japanese introduced/imported Jawi typewriters for use in the Brunei State Council. Considering the fact that Jawi holds such importance in contemporary Brunei,<sup>51)</sup> it could be no mere coincidence that official status assigned to Jawi by the Japanese could hold some significance to this historical trend. As Gunn states,

[...] the Japanese indirectly helped to propagate the use of Bahasa Melayu – as much as Japanese – and that even compared to the British, they helped to make Brunei people aware of the value of education. Gunn (1997: 9105)

It cannot be denied that the Japanese war time methods of education, propaganda and the demonstration of the vulnerability of the European colonizer acted positively in the minds of the Brunei Malays who were then consumed by the fire of nationalism of unprecedented proportions. The Japanese propaganda was not aimed at the indigenous ruling class just like in Malaya and Sarawak. Instead, the Japanese successfully discredited the British in the eyes of the local Malays who until then looked upon the foreign power with awe and admiration.

The annals of the Japanese interlude period in Brunei history need to be re-opened again, and serious effort in oral history must be put in place to understand and analyse the latent effects of the occupation not only on the rise of political nationalism but a continuous Brunei psyche of preserving Brunei as Malay Islamic Monarchy or MIB State, a philosophy ardently promoted in the official circles. Anthropologists and historians need to work more closely to explicate the phenomenon. My study provides a kindred interest to the anthropologists as much as to historically minded scholars.

## Notes

- 1) *An outline of the North Borneom military administration*, Military Government of the 37<sup>th</sup> Armed Forces, the Military Headquarters Nan Shu Group, 1943 (cited in Gunn 1997: 98).
- 2) The 27<sup>th</sup> Ruler of Brunei, Sultan Ahmad Tajuddin (r. 1924-1950).
- 3) Limbang, once considered the rice-bowl of Brunei, was forcibly annexed by Charles Brooke, the White Rajah of Sarawak, in 1890.
- 4) As taught in Brunei Schools and the University, and the emphasis laid in the Brunei History Centre publications.
- 5) See, for example, the following quote from Gent of the British Colonial Office: '[T]he chief risk to the Brunei administration is the risk of interruption to oil royalties and for that reason it will be a sounder state of things when there is a general reserve fund of a substantial character which the Government can fall back on in case of emergency to ease the [...] from its present affluence to its

old time poverty' (CO 717/117 (file 51535), Minute by Gent, 16 March 1936).

- 6) The Sultan's stipend was \$12,000, and two other Ministers, Pengiran Bendahara and Pengiran Pemancha, received \$6000 per annum, a state of affairs that continued until late 1940s.
- 7) For the economic importance of Borneo, see the persuasive arguments put forward by Koichirō ISHIHARA and the writings of members of the *Shōwa Kenkyukai* (昭和研究会), which in large measure influenced Japanese military planners. See Lebra 1975: 44-5, 64-7, 99-103, 116-7. See also Robertson 1981: 62-3, 68-9; Kirby 1957: 47-78 and 481-3.
- 8) 'We have also made proposals for the inauguration of a form of defence force for the oilfield in Brunei in association with Sarawak.' (CO 717/123 (file 51535), Minute by Gent, 6 March 1937)
- 9) C0874/874,05, North Borneo Governor's secret dispatch, 19 December 1938. Japanese population in North Borneo from 1931 to October 1938. Also C0874/874, f.60, Japanese memorandum, dated 31 October 1938.

| 1931 | 1935      | 1937  | 1938  | 1938    |
|------|-----------|-------|-------|---------|
|      | September | March | June  | October |
| 450  | 697       | 762   | 1,265 | 1,374   |

- 10) In 1934, the Company was independent as Nihon Sangyō Kabushiki Kaisha (Nippon Industrial Company), and it was renamed to Nissan Nōrin Kōgyō Kabushiki Kaisha (Nissan Agricultural Industry Company) in 1939/40 but its English name was changed to Nissan Agricultural And Forestry Manufacturing Co. Ltd.
- 11) Gunn (1997: 94) refers his interview with a pharmaceutical dealer based in North Borneo who visited Brunei in the pre-War days.
- 12) SUZUKI was held in high respect by the locals: '[They] remember him as kind and humane. He committed suicide just before the Allied Forces captured Kuala Belait' (Turner 1983: 183, footnote 22).
- 13) The British jettisoned the island and brought it under their control from 1846, denying the only sea outlet Brunei had to the outside world.
- 14) A post-war Australian document dated September 1945 lists the principal Japanese administrators in British Borneo as follows: General Masataka YAMAWAKI, Commander-in-Chief, Japanese Expeditionary Rim in Borneo; Taneki KUNABE, Governor, East Coast State (B.N.B.); Yoshimasa MURAKAMI, Governor, West Coast State (B.N.B.); Roichi KODAMA, Governor, Miri State (Brunei and N. Sarawak); Sotojiro TOKUNO, Governor, Kuching State (Sarawak) (WO 208/105, 'British territories in North Borneo,' extract from Australian Landing Force South-East Asia, No. 52, 28 September 1945, p.23).
- 15) Allen R. Maxwell of Alabama University, USA (Visiting Professor 1999-2000, Universiti Brunei Darussalam) conducted field work among the Kedayans of Brunei in Temburong District and recorded the adverse conditions faced by the group during the Japanese Occupation period (Personal communication, 15 November 1999).
- 16) For some prominent works of the "transformation" school, see Elsbee 1953; Bastin and Benda 1968; Benda 1972; Benda 1967: 65-79; Silverstein 1966; Steinberg 1971. For the proponents of the continuity thesis, see the collection of essays in McCoy 1980, particularly the pieces by Benjamin A. Batson (Thailand), Robert H. Taylor (Burma), David G. Marr (Vietnam) and Alfred

- W. McCoy (The Philippines).
- 17) *World economic news* (Hamburg, Germany), 22 January 1943.
  - 18) WO 203/2400, Macaskie, 'Final report of the British military administration in Borneo, 10 June 1945 to 15 July 1946,' n.d., para 3.
  - 19) *Brunei annual report*, 1946, p. 7. Cf. *Borneo Bulletin*, 6 December 1975,
  - 20) *Borneo bulletin*, 18 September 1986.
  - 21) Brunei's first newspaper, *The Borneo bulletin*, appeared in 1953. It was an English language weekly with a small subsection in Malay.
  - 22) Mohamed Raus bin Haji Mohamed Amin 1942: 25.
  - 23) Information extracted from interviews with Pehin Mohd. Jamil Al Suffri, (during 1994/95/96 in Brunei).
  - 24) An official British education report of 1949 stated that 'This was setting a high standard for a population, the bulk of which was illiterate and it is difficult to understand the Japanese embarking on such a colossal task.' The only possible explanation, he surmised, was that even as late as 1944, the Japanese must have considered their occupation lasting and final (*Education report, 1949*, Brunei).
  - 25) See for details in Gunn 1997: 99-100.
  - 26) See Vorys 1975: 59. For a first-hand account of tensions between Chinese and Malays in Brunei immediately after the Pacific War, see Monks 1992: 65, 116-7.
  - 27) Better known as Yang di Muliakan Pehin Orang Kaya Shahabandar Haji Awang Muhammed Salleh bin Haji Masri. (1919-1997), he was one of the well-known early Brunei nationalist activists. Educated at SITC (1934-37), he became a headmaster in a Brunei Town Malay School. Briefly imprisoned by the British for his role as a propaganda officer during the Japanese period, Salleh was not re-employed, and became the president of BARIP in 1946-47. A founder member and the Vice-President of the PRB, he resigned from the party in late 1958. From 1961 to 1974, he served as Commissioner of Social Welfare, and in 1979 as Brunei Government's Chief Information Officer (Personal interview with Pehin H. M. Salleh at Bandar Seri Begawan, 7 November 1994).
  - 28) Named in honour of the late Sultan Idris ibni Raja Iskandar of Perak. For details of the College see Roff 1967: 142-57.
  - 29) For details see Zaini Haji Ahmad 1989: 56-90.
  - 30) No definite date is known. Matasim Haji Jibah (1983: 25) puts it vaguely as 1930s based on oral evidence. As in Malaya, its pioneers came from the traditional aristocratic elite group. Pengiran Muda (later Sultan) Omar Ali Saifuddin himself is said to have once served as its President, while at one time or another key offices were held by some of his closest kith and kin from the Palace group. Pengiran Muda Omar Ali Saifuddin probably became its President sometime after his return from his studies in Kuala Kangsar in 1936 and before he quit his Government job in 1938.
  - 31) Information from Muhammad Hadi Abdullah of Pusat Sejarah Brunei.
  - 32) See Pehin Mohd. Jamil al Suffri 1992: 10. Pehin Jamil misspelt the name as lack Burn. Captain Blackburne, who served in Brunei during the period of British Military Administration, seemed to have hurt the Malay sensitivities due to some of his high-handed actions. When he was appointed as First Magistrate of Brunei and Muara, and later as Secretary to the Resident, W. J. Peel, there was a mass protest from the local Malay community. Chief *Kathi* Pengiran Haji Mohd. Salleh

brought the matter up at the State Council to express disagreement 'for the reason that Captain Blackburne as (*sic*) is not conversant with the Malay language and customs.' The Resident bowed to the request, and informed the Council he would consider the appointment of a Malayan Civil Service Officer for the post. Before the War, Inche Ibrahim Jahfar held that post (BA/FC/RBM/ Minutes of the State Council 1907-1949, State Council minutes, 6 August 1946).

- 33) Documentation is scarce on the origins, strategies, and activities of BARIP. Useful insights can be gained from the following works, all of which are heavily based on personal reminiscences or oral sources that can rarely be substantiated with contemporary materials: Pehin Mohd. Jamil al Sufri 1989: 1-13 (the Pehin claims to have been the founding secretary of BARIP (*ibid.*: 7) but unfortunately he has not kept any records); Matasim Haji Jibah 1983: 25-7; Zaini Haji Ahmad 1989: 24-32; Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1986. There is considerable overlap in these writings since they draw on similar oral sources, including such respected citizens as Pehin H. M. Salleh, Pengiran Mohammad Yusuf and others.
- 34) The leader of the now defunct-PRB, A. M. Azahari, when interviewed at his home in Bogor, Indonesia by the author on 4 April 1994 emphasised that BARIP was the progenitor of his party.
- 35) CO 943/1 (59705), item 22, Frisby's report of an educational survey of the Department of Education, Brunei, 25.9.46 to 8.10.46, Para 64(2).
- 36) Pengiran Setia Negara Mohammad Yusuf also said during an interview with me on 3 November 1994 at his office in Bandar Seri Begawan that the name BARIP itself was inspired by the term *Pemuda* (The Youth) which in the context of Indonesian revolutionary nationalism of the period carried a firebrand theme.
- 37) CO 943/1, (59706), L. H. N. Davis, the Resident's report on tour of Brunei to announce forthcoming (Brunei-Sarawak) administrative change, n.d. (C. 1948) para 9.
- 38) For details of the formation and activities of BARIP movement in Labuan, Jesselton, and Papar in North Borneo, see Sabihah Osman (ed.) 1986: 79-82. It is claimed that BARIP in its hey day had nearly 10,000 members, but this is difficult to substantiate.
- 39) See a brief reference in Zaini Haji Ahmad 1989: 31.
- 40) BA/0060/1983 (SUK Series 3, Box 6), H. Spinks, Chief Police Officer of Brunei to the President of MUTU, 27 June 1947, item 2.
- 41) *Ibid.* The President, MUTU to the Chief Police Officer, Brunei, 10 November 1947, item 3.
- 42) Before the War, the growth of the Chinese population in Brunei had indeed been substantial. After the War the growth of the Malay population outpaced the growth of Chinese, but this may not have been so evident at first. The following chart shows percentages of increase for specified periods:

|         | 1911-21 | 1921-31 | 1931-47 | 1947-60 | 1960-71 |
|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Malay   | 14.5%   | 8.8%    | 12.9%   | 169.6%  | 97.8%   |
| Chinese | 93.3%   | 88.5%   | 209.4%  | 162.6%  | 46.5%   |

Source: Niew Shong Tong 1990: 6

- 43) CO 537/1613, MacDonald to CO, telegram No 94, 18 July 1946. See also Monks 1992: 65, 116.
- 44) Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1986: 146. He has not cited any evidence to support this important piece of information. Yet there may be some truth in it when Pehin Mohd. Jamil al Sufri (1992: 4)

makes special reference to the frustration felt by the Malay youth during the period of the BMA: '[As the BMA insisted on the knowledge of English] aliens took this opportunity not only to become their assistants but also brought accusations against the clever locals.'

- 45) Heussler 1985: 85-111. Monks, who served as a District Officer in Brunei immediately after the War, also had misgivings about seeming to favour the Chinese in choosing officers and assistants (1992: 65).
- 46) Among the Malays detained by the BMA were H. M. Salleh, Haji Hasbullah bin Mohammad Daud, Mohammad Yusuf bin Rajid, Marsal bin Maun, and Othman bin Bidin (Pehin Mohd. Jamil al Sufri 1992: 5). T. S. Monks, who served briefly also as Magistrate during the post BMA Period, on the other hand, gives a different picture, when he said that he was sceptical of the accusations, and that he agonised over the moral and legal issues and tended to think there could be little basis for trials. Compare Monk's version (1992: 68, 117-9).
- 47) Mss. Pac.s.71, (Rhodes House Library) Oxford, UK., *Macaskie papers*, Adams to Macaskie, 15 November 1945.
- 48) CO 943/1, (59705) file 2, item 1, A. W. Frisby's report of an educational survey of the Department of Education, Brunei, 25.9.46 to 8.10.46, ppara 64(2).
- 49) Personal interview of the writer with Pehin Mohd. Jamil al Sufri on 8 February 1993. The incident is also explained in Muhammad Hadi Abdullah 1986: 149.
- 50) The wife of a senior British official (quoted in Horton 1985: 494, note 114).
- 51) Currently in Brunei, public name boards of shops and institutions must compulsorily carry Jawi writing as well. In primary school it is mandatory to learn Jawi as part of the Malay language course.

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