

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Publications and Research

Kingsborough Community College

1997

The Deculturation of the Brunei Dusun

Jay H. Bernstein

CUNY Kingsborough Community College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/kb_pubs/34

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).

Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

The Deculturation of the Brunei Dusun

JAY H. BERNSTEIN

WITH THE RAPID modernization of Borneo in the last 25 years, many changes have affected indigenous peoples. "Traditional" ways of life have frequently proved incompatible with the opportunities for new kinds of work and income away from the villages. Subsistence patterns have also been disrupted by environmental changes, notably pressures on forest environments due to intensive logging (see Hong 1987, Colchester 1989). Such changes have, in many cases, led to the redefinition of cultural and group identities. Ethnic classification and allegiances in Borneo (as elsewhere in Southeast Asia) have long been considered problems (Babcock 1974; King 1979, 1982; Rousseau 1990), and it is evident that ethnic group boundaries are often porous, even fluid. In Brunei, ethnic minorities such as the Dusun appear not simply to be changing but to be quietly dissolving, mainly through absorption into the Malay majority (D.E. Brown 1970:4). Apart from the movement of individual persons away from villages, the Dusun seem to be in the process of disappearing as a social and cultural entity. The Dusun, as a group, do not participate

Research in Brunei for eleven months in 1992 and 1993 was made possible by U.K. Economic and Social Research Council award R000 23 3028 to Roy Ellen for a study of "The Ecology and Ethnobiology of Human-Rainforest Interaction in Brunei." The British Academy funded brief visits to Brunei in 1993 and 1994. I thank these institutions for their support. I also thank Roy Ellen, Peter Martin, C.W. Watson, and Robert Winzeler for their encouragement and very helpful comments on an earlier draft of this paper. However, the views expressed here are entirely my own.

in contemporary Bruneian affairs. In adapting to the changing world, they are under increasing pressure to identify with the dominant group and are accepting the devaluation of their own culture.

To substantiate these assertions it is necessary to explain Brunei's political structure, contemporary trends in policy and ideology, and the interests they represent. First, it is important to clarify in general terms what kinds of change constitute "deculturation."

The Concept of Deculturation

Anthropologists have often criticized the effects of "development" on indigenous peoples, noticing that it has led to the end of traditional ways of life. Such criticisms have had the effect of making anthropologists seem, in the eyes of many Third World policy makers, both disingenuous and retrogressive—claiming as they do to support the interests of traditional peoples while actually caring about them only as objects of study. At the very least, these criticisms imply a tendency to sentimentalize the old ways of life. At worst, they are rationalizations driven by hostility toward alternative value systems, such as socialism and Islam, that underlie change in the Third World. The idea that indigenous peoples have suffered as a result of the loss of their traditional cultures in connection with "progress" has been articulated most explicitly by John Bodley (1982). Bodley explores several aspects of the loss of traditional lifestyles, ranging from outright massacre to the decline of myths and cosmological belief systems. Bodley's thesis is that the exploitation of native peoples' subsistence base that has led to the destruction of their traditional cultures is underlain by ethnocentrism—an attitude of superiority by the culturally dominant groups. One aspect of ethnocentrism is what Bodley calls "cultural modification policies: deliberate programs designed to eliminate all unique aspects of tribal culture and to bring about their *full* integration with civilization" (Bodley 1982:103). He provides several examples of customs that have been abolished because they have been viewed as impediments to progress or modernity. A movement to bring about the integration of Brunei's indigenous peoples into the majority by means of eradicating cultural differences can be seen in the articulation of

the national ideology, *Melayu Islam Beraja*, discussed below (see also Braighlinn 1992). Brunei's indigenous minorities may be said, therefore, to be subject to "imposed acculturation" (Teske and Nelson 1974:355).

James Eder (1986) has criticized Bodley for presuming to know where the best interests of tribal people lie, pointing out that change and adjustment "are normal processes in human societies" (1986:5). He calls Bodley's "victims of progress" model of social change theoretically naive, in that "it is often unclear who or what, precisely, is being 'victimized' by progress" (Eder 1986:4-5). Eder replaces the notion of victimization with the less loaded and accusatory one of "deculturation," which he defines, following Isaac (1977:139), as "the loss, without replacement by functional equivalents, of many traditional cultural beliefs, practices, and institutions." Aspects of deculturation include a negative relationship to the wider, dominant society (Berry 1980:13-17), restrictions on traditional mobility patterns, a breakdown of traditional belief systems, and a breakdown of cultural knowledge. Thus, it is necessary to distinguish *deculturation* (the loss of culture) from *acculturation* (the ordinary process of cultural change). Deculturation is a kind of culture change, but not all kinds of culture change constitute or lead to deculturation.

Eder's concept of deculturation corrects the stereotyped and oversimplified model of tribal peoples presented by Bodley, of peoples living in harmonious self-sufficiency only to be disrupted and torn apart by powerful outsiders. A related criticism of the victimization model is that, in ignoring the social, political, and economic processes by which traditional peoples are marginalized, we end up with a fantasy model of "imagined primitives" as "archaic survivors who, for better or worse, are forced to 'catch up with the twentieth century'" (Tsing 1993:7). Such a view tells us more about our own stereotypes about progress and civilization than the actual relationships between minority and majority groups.

It is in the context of these issues that the changes now taking place in Brunei need to be seen. The concept of deculturation was developed to refer to the situation of demographically vulnerable tribal peoples living in abject poverty, such as the Siriono of Bolivia (Holmberg 1969; Isaac 1977) and the Batak (Negrito hunter-gatherers

of the Philippines) described by Eder (1986). Unlike these peoples, the physical survival of the Dusun people is not threatened. They eat enough food, have roofs over their heads, need not fear crime, war, or revolution, and are not exposed to life-threatening diseases. Nevertheless, they are being incorporated into the majority Brunei Malay society on terms which they perceive to be disadvantageous (cf. Kershaw 1992). In common with other ethnic minorities in Brunei, they are gradually losing their own identity as members of a distinct social and cultural grouping. Their status as Malays is uncertain, and they are often under pressure to conform, especially through conversion to Islam and adoption of a Malay lifestyle. Because they lack the privileges of the majority Brunei Malays, it is often difficult for them to be accepted as their equals, and hence to be fully integrated. Assimilation in this sense of outgroup acceptance (Teske and Nelson 1974) occurs for some individuals but not for the whole group. Perhaps the most easily available form of social mobility is open to women: marriage to a higher-status Malay. Indeed, out-marriage by both men and women appears to be one of the main factors contributing to culture change as well as culture loss. Marrying outside the Dusun community not only allows a person to identify him- or herself with the spouse's group, but tends to assure that the children will not be raised as Dusun.

With the economic booms of the 1970s and 1980s, the pace of social change in Brunei has been phenomenal. Formerly a peasant society based on a fishing and agricultural economy (Lim 1986; Leake 1989), Brunei's population has been transformed into an army of civil servants. In recent years, the competition for jobs has increased, and, at the same time, preferences both for ethnic Malays and an Islamized work force have worked against the Dusun. The younger generation of Dusun—boys and girls coming of age in the 1990s, who yearn to participate in the modern consumer society—often finds that it is able to get only low-status jobs with little possibility for advancement. Although Dusun youth have relatively poor qualifications, the disappointment they experience personally and see in their brothers, sisters, and cousins leads to a vicious circle of apathy and underachievement.

Brunei's Political System

Brunei's neighbors, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore, have party politics, elections, and institutionalized representation, even if their leaders show little enthusiasm for Western models of democracy and human rights. Brunei, by contrast, lacks representational government. It is an absolute monarchy: the sultan serves as both prime minister and defense minister, and two of his younger brothers hold other leading cabinet positions. This "traditional" system is underpinned by revenue drawn from royalties on petroleum and gas.

Brunei is one of the few countries in the world (the others are Bahrain and Qatar) that does not tax personal income. On the contrary, citizens benefit from comprehensive welfare provisions, including bonuses, subsidized rentals, noncontributory pensions, and interest-free loans on houses and automobiles. The politics of "hydrocarbon societies"—those countries that earn more than 85 percent of their income from oil and gas—are determined by a set of factors unlike those found anywhere else. John Davis (1986), in the course of discussing hydrocarbon societies in general and Libya in particular, sums up Brunei's position succinctly: *

Since the citizens pay no taxes, the Prince [read Sultan] does not need any consensus among them that taxes should be paid, which releases him from many of the constraints on industrial rulers. For if it is a general principle of democracy that there should be no taxation without representation ..., there is also the intriguing converse: without taxation it may be possible to do without formal representation altogether.

(Davis 1986:18)

Bruneians are in effect bound to approve of the sultan and his government because they depend so heavily on their beneficence.

Although Brunei villagers are represented by village headmen and *penghulus*, they do not have a say in the appointment of these officers. Likewise, the role of the Consultative Council is not comparable to that of a parliament in a democratic country, which makes law and policy. A recent statement by the Minister of Home Affairs indicates that policy in Brunei is crafted at the top and implemented by lower officers:

The councils and the rural leaders will have the responsibility to cooperate in safeguarding [the] close relationship and goodwill especially to avert any undesirable elements or untoward activities that could disrupt the peace and social stability in their locality Their duties involved [sic] the imparting of the right attitude to their residents and assisting the authorities in the smooth conduct of the minor administrative matters.

(*Borneo Bulletin* 1993:18)

Local leadership personnel and the direction of leadership must be approved by district offices. This has led to a great sense of vulnerability to the decrees of government. It has also led to frustration at interference and lack of support from the government, particularly on the part of non-Malays.

Dusun Culture, Society, and Economy

Orang Dusun ("Dusun people") has no official status as a grouping of people in Brunei. Dusun are counted in all censuses since 1971 as Malay. The number of Dusun in Brunei is thus very difficult to calculate with any certainty. Bantong Antaran (1993:19) estimates that there are about 5,000 non-Muslim Dusun in Brunei, and similar figures were given by my informants.¹ Likewise, it is impossible to know the birth or death rates for Dusun.

Dusun is a Malay word meaning "orchard," and its use as an ethnonym suggests their identification by Malays as a distinct category related to a kind of economic specialization. The very marginality of their economy vis-à-vis that of the focal Malay economy may even be an ethnic marker. The term Dusun, incidentally, links the Brunei Dusun with their namesakes in Sabah, though any linguistic, biological, or historical connection to them is difficult to prove.² Indeed, the term Dusun specifically excludes certain groups who may be more closely related to some of the various groups called Dusun than they are to each other (cf. Appell and Harrison 1969).

Brunei Dusun consider themselves to be a distinct race (both *bangsa*, having biological connotations, and *puak*, which refers to a cultural or social grouping) and maintain that they are able to recognize other Dusun on the basis of physical features. They call themselves *Sang Jati*, meaning "indigenous people." Many Dusun also

consider the Bisaya of Limbang district, Sarawak to be included in this grouping.³

Although in the past, Dusun lived in longhouses, only one Dusun longhouse remains, located at Sukang in the Belait district. Most Dusun live in the middle Tutong valley. Dusun settlements tend to be small and widely scattered. Several hamlets of five to ten households comprise a village. People in the hamlet tend to be closely related, with the result that they are in effect exogamous. Subsistence activities include, besides fruit growing, dry rice cultivation, fishing, and hunting with spears, blow-darts, and traps. Until the 1980s, rubber trees were grown, but these are no longer tapped as market conditions have led to the collapse of the rubber trade in Brunei (Franz 1980:244-45). The traditional Dusun economy was one of subsistence rather than trade, though wild fruit and vegetables are now sold both at markets and along the roadside. Rice is also sold to the Agriculture Department. Dusun rice cultivation nowadays must be considered an extra income activity (Franz 1980:213).

Forest activities have been extremely important for the Dusun, not only because of hunting but because the forest yields a large number of other economic products: vegetables (most notably edible ferns, mushrooms, and various palm shoots), fruits, medicinal plants, resins, honeycombs, rattan, grasses and sedges, and wood. Wood has been used in building houses and most other tools and crafts. Wood may also be used for cooking fuel, though by and large it has been replaced by gas for everyday household cooking. Although most forest products are obtained for household consumption, a few trees are especially sought because of their value in trade with other groups. Dusun who are still engaged in subsistence forest activities have extensive ethnobotanical knowledge, and some are able to identify more than 150 kinds of trees in a single forest patch of 576 square meters (Bernstein, Ellen, and Antaran in press). However, this knowledge is now seldom transmitted to younger generations. Many of the economic uses of trees and other plants have become obsolete, and a majority of young Dusun adults do not recognize either the plants or their names. Although several young adults were interviewed about their knowledge of forest plants, only one informant (a woman) under forty years of age could recognize

more than 50 percent of plant names collected in connection with an ethnobotanical survey.

Most men and children are absent from rural villages for most of the time, occupied in employment or school in other places. Thus, subsistence work within the household has declined (Antaran 1993: 102), and is limited to the unemployed and people visiting on weekends or holidays. Hunting, for the latter, has become primarily a form of recreation, though, it remains an important cash-earning activity, because most meat is sold when possible.

The economic status of Dusun settlements is transitional. Most houses are accessible to roads, and many families own cars. Old people generally do not drive, but their children frequently have cars and are able to transport them. Certain Dusun villages have mains electricity, whereas villagers in more remote settlements rely on generators. Many villages do not have piped water, and in Tasik Merimbun, the area in which I worked in 1992 and 1993, people were only beginning to equip their houses with toilets. There were no telephones in the area. Those who did not have government salaries tended to live in simple, wooden houses. A few people with salaries, or who had retired from government service above the level of unskilled laborer, could afford to build better houses, due to the availability of interest-free loans from the state.

The direction of change in village Brunei is clear: road-building, electrification, piped water, and other public works are continuing apace. However, little land is available for development by villagers, because most is owned by the government and must be leased on a year-to-year basis. (No new land has been granted since 1963.) Temporary occupants are not allowed to build permanent houses (i.e. structures using concrete). Those persons without land may place their names on waiting lists to buy houses through government resettlement schemes. (Applicants may be selected through lotteries.) Many other employees live in government-subsidized rented accommodation. Even these rental units are insufficient, and people awaiting their own housing stay as guests with kinsmen.

Aspects of Culture Loss

Contemporary Dusun village life gives the distinct impression of containing remnants of an earlier, integrated cultural system; certainly, this is a view promoted by Dusun themselves. Thus, one finds attenuated myths, semantically depleted rituals, and the occasional use of subsistence technology and material culture which were once part of more extensive and interconnected repertoires. For example, older informants can name musical patterns for gongs to be played on certain occasions; but these pieces are never played anymore. Some domains of traditional cultural knowledge are falling into disuse due to their inability to be properly reproduced.⁴ Experts and ritual specialists are not being replaced and are declining in numbers. As a result, structurally important traditional practices are dying out. An example is a cycle of calendrical rituals called *temarok* (Binchin 1993), in which many foods are required to be initiated by priestesses by being offered to the god *Derato* before they may be consumed in a community. The practice of *temarok* rituals is waning and was known to be practiced in only 10 Dusun villages in 1992 (out of a total of 91 Dusun villages in Brunei), due to a decline in the availability of female practitioners. This failure of cultural reproduction extends to knowledge of folk medicine, healing practices, agricultural rituals, life-cycle rituals, mythology, and folktales. Similarly, *adat*, or customary law, has proven ineffective in dealing with many of the problems of contemporary life, particularly criminal offenses (Antaran 1993:152).

Perhaps ultimately the most crucial change, and that most symbolically potent in terms of ethnic identity, is with respect to language decline. Although the Dusun language is still spoken in Dusun villages, Eva Kershaw (1992) writes that it is increasingly being penetrated and changed by the introduction of Malay forms and vocabulary, whereas Dusun usages are becoming obsolete and are indeed not recognized by young people. She finds that many Dusun parents speak to their children in Malay, and that people increasingly have "negative attitudes towards the speech of the older generation" (p. 4), consider their own language "archaic" (p. 6), and insert into their own speech Malay words, because of

their "status-affirming effect" (p. 8). Like other Bruneians, the Dusun use common English speech forms, appellations, and other words in child rearing and in daily conversation.

*The Rhetoric of Malay Ethnicity and the
Ambiguous Status of the Dusun*

The use of the term *Melayu* ("Malay") in Brunei is ambiguous because, although it may refer to the dominant group—the Brunei Malays (*Orang Berunai*)—it sometimes includes other indigenous ethnic groups (such as the Dusun) who are Brunei citizens, or, alternatively, Malaysian nationals, who have none of the privileges of Bruneian nationals. The political use of the term *Malay* to include all seven indigenous ethnic groups (Belait, Bisaya, Dusun, Kedayan, Malay [i.e. Berunai], Murut, and Tutong) originated in the 1961 Nationality Enactment and was itself based on the Constitution of the State of Brunei of 1959, which in contrast used the term *Brunei* to refer to the members of all these "races." "Brunei" as an ethnonym then returned to its earlier use to refer to the Brunei Malays (*Orang Berunai*). By this definition 69 percent of the population of Brunei was Malay in 1986.⁵ The politically dominant Berunai group is thought by Leake (1989) to comprise all but 10 percent of this: 5 percent of Brunei's population is Kedayan (a Muslim ethnic minority); and another 5 percent include all the other indigenous groups, including Dusun. Leake notes that these fractions have been declining continually.

Thus the meaning of the term *Melayu* is somewhat different for Brunei than it is for Malaysia (or for that matter other parts of Borneo). In Malaysia the definition is cultural rather than political. There, a Malay is "one who is Muslim, habitually speaks the Malay language, and follows Malay custom or *adat*" (Nagata 1974:335).

There is no inclusive term for the non-Muslim or non-Brunei Malay peoples. The term *Dayak* (see Florus, Djuweng, and Bamba 1994) refers to or classifies only certain peoples of Kalimantan and Sarawak, never Bruneians. Dusun are, for many purposes, Malay. The term "Malay" in Brunei can therefore be used to designate religion, culture, language, ethnicity (race), or citizenship. "Dusun" however,

designates culture, language, and ethnicity, but not citizenship (all Dusun are Bruneian) or religion: Dusun may be Muslim, Christian, animist, or "free thinkers" (atheist).⁶ Dusun animistic belief and ritual are never considered to constitute a religion (*ugama*), and Dusun will not only say that they have no religion, but will nonchalantly identify themselves as *kafir*, a derogatory term meaning "heathen" or "infidel." Part of their stigma of inferiority is that they have no writing, and hence no holy book. Furthermore, the invocation of spirits in traditional religious practices connotes to the religious Malay an unwholesome association with the Devil (*syaitan*).

Young people accept this situation passively and with resignation, which is, according to Eder (1986:205-6), a common characteristic of deculturation. Although there is little they can do to change their standing, it is not certain that Dusun internalize the sense of inferiority in which some sectors of the Malay majority hold them. Kershaw (1992) suggests that it is the *older* Dusun who present younger generations with a sense that their language and culture are substandard.

For scholars familiar with other parts of the Malay world, it is rather surprising that non-Islamic peoples such as the Dusun are included as Malay within Brunei, because adherence to the Muslim faith is an essential part of the definition of Malay (see Ellen 1983). Being a non-Muslim is a mark of social inferiority in the Malay world. Brunei identifies itself as a Muslim society in which non-Muslim groups are accepted. But the authenticity of these non-Muslims as Malays and hence as Bruneians remains in doubt due to the closeness of Islam to the essence of Malay identity. In government politico-religious rhetoric (see below) the status of Bruneian non-Muslims is ambiguous and problematical: their loyalty to the Malay Islamic monarchy is not established and needs to be proved. Their ability to participate fully in society is doubted. G. Braighlinn (1992: 19) perceives a difference ("if not a strong one") between the "inclusive/permissive" definition of the term "Malay" as including all seven indigenous groups, and the

inclusive/unpermissive imputation that non-Malay (i.e. non-Muslim) indigenous groups lack enough authentic or valuable culture to be considered anything better than "sub-groups" of the dominant Malay population. In the terms of this emphasis, the latter alone are the authentic

heirs to the country and entitled to demand that non-Muslim practices which offend them are kept out of sight, or, at the extreme, that the "pagans" all convert to Islam, as a condition of tolerance.

Jacques Waardenburg (1984:49) points out that Muslim societies that are

inwardly directed and concentrated on themselves ... have little contact with communities of other religions. Whenever relations with non-Muslims occur, they seem to be governed by rules transmitted by tradition.

He finds that outsiders—non-Muslims—"are not really perceived, except in so far as their presence affects the interests of the Muslim community" (1984:51).

Of Malay identity in Borneo, Tom Harrisson (1970) has written that there is little that is distinctly Malay in a positive sense. Rather, Malay identity is defined by what it is *not*. Becoming Malay by embracing Islam requires "not a great deal of positive decision, but rather abandoning ... a much more complicated and troublesome—even intimidating—set of beliefs, associated with a way of life belonging to the interior ..." (p.157).⁷ On the other hand, an equation is in effect made in Brunei between Islam and a Malay lifestyle. Thus, many Muslim Dusun adopt Malay norms of comportment (in dress, social interaction, and speech style, for example) with the understanding that they are properly Islamic and indicate that they are good Muslims.

An important factor leading to the loss of Dusun identity is out-marriage. Elaborate Dusun marriage customs are dispensed with in such situations, and the practice of other Dusun traditions ceases except in marriage to Iban. Even in Iban-Dusun intermarriage the Dusun seem to be absorbed into the Iban group due to the fact that the latter are "relatively strong adherents to their traditions" (Leake 1989:108). Every Dusun family in the area I studied contained at least one person who had converted to Islam through marriage to a Muslim (whether Berunai, Kadayan, Tutong, or Islamized Dusun). The children of these marriages are raised as Malay and tend not to learn the Dusun language. Other Dusun have married Chinese, and the offspring of these marriages tend to be given Chinese or Western names; however, Dusun is often spoken in these households.

Melayu Islam Berjaya (MIB)

The peculiar bind of non-Muslim minorities in Brunei has been intensified by the recent emergence of a new ideology the official purpose of which is to instill and cultivate a distinct Bruneian identity, even a personality, based in part on Malay ethnicity. We now turn to a consideration of this.

Since full independence in 1984, a national ideology in Brunei has emerged, called *Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB)*, meaning Malay Islamic Monarchy). Although the essence of this doctrine has never been explicitly stated (unlike the Indonesian national ideology of *Pancasila*), a large volume of official discourse has been generated in promoting it (see Braighlinn 1992). Part and parcel of *MIB* has been the idealization of conservative Islamic lifestyles and fealty to the crown. Although Islam was the state religion of Brunei long before the advent of *MIB*, the ideology emphasizes and gives new authority to the "officialization" of Islam (Waardenburg 1984:51) through the use of governmental institutions to give directives to all Muslims in the country.

The sultan is at the center of attention in all public events and undertakings in Brunei. Monarchy and Islam were intricately related in the traditional Malay state (Milner 1983), and it is the essence of this distant connection that *MIB* aims to recapture and revitalize. Donald Brown (1984) finds the connection between monarchy and Islam to be potent for modern Bruneians. The pivotal position of the monarch and the royal family in *MIB* is expressed through an emphasis on ceremony in all matters. Nevertheless, it is paradoxical, in a way, that Islam is used by a modern Southeast Asian state to support an oligarchic structure, because as Clive Kessler (1978:210) has observed, Islamic teachings could more accurately be interpreted as encouraging people to *resist* the dictates of existing society that is unequal and unjust and to strive to create a just and equal society as expounded in the words of the Prophet Mohammed (see also Geertz 1968). It is precisely for this reason that fundamentalist teachings are not tolerated and are rejected as "deviationist." Specifically, Bruneians are warned that they should "be constantly alert to any possibility of such teachings which run contrary to the Ahlus Sunnah

Wal-Jema'ah, the Quran and the As-Sunnah" (*Brunei Darussalam Newsletter* 1993:2).

MIB, while presenting itself as vital, is focused on a timeless eternal past: a mythical time of Brunei's greatness. *MIB*, according to the doctrine, is not a recent phenomenon at all, but actually dates back to the first Islamic sultan in Brunei in the sixteenth century and has only been given new emphasis with the advent of independence. More than a positive set of principles, *MIB* is defined negatively, aimed as it is at preventing subversion and penetration by external "undesirable elements." The object of this vague innuendo, in general, is the West and its values. Secular humanism, as well as Christianity and Zionism, are seen as threats to be kept at bay. These undesirable foreign groups are attributed, according to Braighlenn (1992:54), with "a desire ... to destabilize Brunei through hostile propaganda, because they are jealous of what it has achieved." The conviction that the outside world has a corrupting effect is paradoxical, given the co-existing goal of modernization.

In *MIB*, the interests of Bruneians are identified with those of Muslims. The position of non-Muslim Bruneians is therefore insecure. These latter are expected to study and learn from Islam because of its value in and of itself, and because Brunei is a Muslim state. Non-Muslims are expected not to offend Muslim sensibilities. The sensibilities of non-Muslim Bruneians, on the other hand, need not be heeded by Muslims.

The Dusun are not considered a religious community. Although some have converted to Christianity, this practice is officially discouraged nowadays. Christian evangelism is prohibited, and the Bible banned. Dusun may and are encouraged to convert to Islam, but they may find that their lower status as members of an ethnic minority remains. This is particularly so because Brunei is such a small country that their family and community origins cannot be hidden.

MIB is not "controversial" in the usual sense, and the force of traditional stratification and tributary relations persists (Brown 1970). Open debate and critical analysis of it would be politically impossible and, indeed, tantamount to treason. However, in private, some Bruneians feel inconvenienced by it. Among minority groups such as

the Dusun the policy is often felt to be discriminatory and disparaging of them. This is related to enduring tensions between Malays and non-Malays, and to resentment by the latter of the Malays' attitudes of superiority. This picture is, of course, found more widely in Borneo (see Rousseau 1990:282-83, Bernstein 1991:78).

Some Dusun feel that the pressure on them to convert to Islam is unreasonable. For example, some Dusun informants told me that Dusun cannot obtain government jobs above the level of laborer unless they have already converted to Islam. In one case related to me by an informant, a Dusun man funded his own studies abroad in the hope of advancing his career, but his diploma was not recognized and he was not given employment in his field. He was offered only a clerical job considerably beneath his qualifications.

The opportunities for career development are limited because of the explicit preference for Muslims. Non-Muslims are not allowed to head any government office, and in job interviews they are routinely asked when they plan to embrace Islam. Certain civil service jobs, such as those requiring the handling and preparation of food, are also closed off to non-Muslims. It is unclear whether the present Dusun "success stories" will be allowed to rise to the top of their professions, and younger Dusun now coming into adulthood doubt they will have similar opportunities to succeed.

Islamization of the Dusun

The absorption of the Dusun into the Malay group and the subsequent loss of Dusun culture have been linked to Islamization. The final outcome of Islamization in Brunei can be seen in the Belait and Tutong peoples. Little of the distinctive culture of these peoples remains, and few people have first-hand knowledge of their traditional customs. The Tutong in particular have virtually been assimilated into the Brunei Malay group and have been completely Islamized, while 20 to 30 percent of Belait are non-Muslim (Peter Martin, personal communication). The Islamization of non-Muslim peoples in Brunei exemplifies what Bodley (1982) has called "cultural modification policies," even though explicit force has never been used. Rather, the state offers benefits to Muslim converts while

neglecting the interests and problems of non-Muslim communities. From the government's point of view, Islam is a way of maintaining order and consolidating control over the public and private lives of the members of society. Nonadherents are not a part of "the system"; to an increasing extent they seem a thorn in the side of the authorities in that they are felt to be a weak link, exposing all Bruneians to danger through infiltration by foreign elements.

Conversions are carried out by the Islamic Dakwah (Propagation) Centre, an office of the Religious Affairs Department. The activities of this Centre are not open to direct inspection; however they are known to focus on incentives to propagate Islam among non-Muslims. Incentives of cash (monthly benefits), land, and houses are routinely offered. In the Tutong district, there have been several instances in which roads and other public improvements have been delayed but were then immediately executed upon the conversion of a household. Conversions are attended by state representatives, and are reported on radio and television. Statistics are maintained on conversions from the various districts. (About 200 persons per year, mostly Dusuns, are converted in the Tutong district.) Representatives of the Dakwah Centre will visit houses, often beginning with the headman, asking him to convert and to invite others in the village to do the same.

Incentives to convert to Islam include offers of cash benefits, raises, or promotions. The figure of B\$200 (US\$120) per month was often mentioned as the amount given for each convert. Other gifts include the offer of new houses or electric generators. Land deeds have been promised for some families.

As already indicated, one source of conversion is related to out-marriage. There are no statistics on how many conversions are made in this way. By law, any marriage between a Muslim and a non-Muslim, regardless of sex, requires conversion authorized by the Religious Affairs Ministry. In line with the Islamic doctrine on apostasy, conversions cannot be recanted.

Marriage is not the only means of conversion. A significant number of conversions are spontaneous, often involving pupils living in boarding school, where they are influenced by their peers and tutors. Although Dusun converts may express a genuine desire to embrace

the new religion, other Dusuns may regard them with distrust, and suspect that it is a strategy to advance their educational or career opportunities. It is these spontaneous converts who often influence their parents, brothers, and sisters to embrace Islam as well. In one case, a Belait man told me he had converted to Islam because everyone in his family was already a Muslim.

Thus, Islam in Brunei serves as an important form of social control at the disposal of the government, complementary to that exerted by other government bodies or other authorized sources of power. By converting non-Muslim Bruneians, it is possible for the government to subject them to a variety of sanctions and means of surveillance from which they would otherwise be exempt.⁸ Other pressures include conformity of dress. Women are encouraged to wear head coverings (*tudong*) and ankle-length gowns. Girls in school are required to wear the head covering. Children are required to take religious lessons, and Islamic religion is a required subject in secondary schools as well.

Dusun, like non-Muslim agricultural peoples throughout Southeast Asia, have traditionally reared pigs; however, this is now forbidden. The keeping of pigs is now concealed, and people who own them deny that they do. Malays are known to be offended at the sight of pigs, and they may report their presence to the police, who then come and shoot the pigs. Also, campaigns are held to poison the wild pigs that damage people's gardens. (For some, these campaigns are a public service; however, Dusun who hunt wild pigs tend to resent them.) Permission for shopkeepers to sell fresh pork was revoked in 1993, and the meat may be confiscated at the border by customs officers. However, it remains on the menu of a number of restaurants in Brunei, and it may be sold in supermarkets under restricted conditions:

The consumption of alcohol and pork, expressly forbidden in Islam, are symbols of resistance for non-Muslim minorities. For example, I was told that all the households in an Iban village had been converted to Islam and been given electricity generators as rewards, but that they ate pork anyway. On another occasion, an informant told me about a Dusun man he knew who had converted to Islam but then "cheated" the system by continuing to use his Dusun name,

eating pork, and drinking liquor. There is no opportunity in Brunei for outward protest or rebellion as is found in ethnic identity movements elsewhere in the world. People's words and actions are scrutinized for even the slightest indications of heterodoxy. Therefore, it is only in such small gestures and remarks that identity may be articulated and protest registered. These expressions of resistance are reminiscent of James Scott's (1985) "weapons of the weak," in that they concern private behavior that cannot be monitored. The difference is that the political weakness and frustration of the Brunei Dusun are based on institutionalized ethnic disadvantage rather than on class and economic poverty, as was the case for the Malay peasants studied by Scott.

Conclusion

The ethnic history of Borneo may be chronicled as so many processes of marginalization in relation to dominant groups (cf. Eder 1987). Dusun traditional culture has been marginalized in recent decades because of the rapid modernization of Brunei's economy: the decreasing value of agriculture and forest production has not been matched by an up-take of white-collar jobs in the government sector. Here, Dusun have been historically disadvantaged by not being equipped with a sufficient level of skills to enter the labor force as office workers. Their main opportunities have been in menial, unskilled jobs.⁹ The preferential treatment of Muslims and especially of well-connected Malays, has hurt the chances of more ambitious and qualified Dusun.

The difference between the situation of Brunei's minorities and those in other parts of Borneo (especially Sarawak) is particularly instructive. Major environmental changes in Sarawak due to deforestation and the building of dams, as well as buoyant economic opportunities, have made traditional economic pursuits nonviable for some people (Hong 1987). Nevertheless, the cultural integrity of village communities has been held largely intact, and ethnic identity has been fostered by community organizations. In Brunei, by contrast, although roads now reach many previously inaccessible villages, at least 70 percent of the land remains forested, and 58 percent

of the total land mass is primary forest. Much of this land has been declared forest reserve. The Brunei government has presented a firm conservationist posture. Ironically, the peoples who have traditionally earned a livelihood as "forest specialists" have not only altered their patterns of forest use but are in the process of losing both indigenous knowledge of forest resources and the cosmological ideas which in the past have made this meaningful (Ellen and Bernstein 1994).

Postscript

In her postmodernist meditation on the Meratus people of South Kalimantan, Indonesia, Tsing (1993) has focused on various aspects of marginality in relation to the concerns and discourses emanating from external centers of cultural influence. In certain respects, the Dusun, like the Meratus, are being marginalized by their powerlessness to represent themselves in the face of a totalizing system. But it is equally important to observe that they are being absorbed and incorporated into other social and cultural groupings, and that their own cultural heritage, their own "voice" as Tsing would have it, is becoming fainter. Brunei, unlike Indonesia, has no motto of "unity in diversity."¹⁰

Ethnic divisions in Brunei may be changing irreversibly. Allen Maxwell (1981) has predicted that sometime before 2050 all Bruneians will be Malays. To some extent, this is a matter of labelling (as in Malaysia, cf. Nagata 1974), but it does involve the shedding of present ethnic identifications (assimilation), and with it a loss of culture, including the loss of specific knowledge. In the circumstances, perhaps the best the Dusun can hope for is that they will be socially and economically equal to the Brunei Malays. It is, of course, possible that a new Brunei Malay identity will be fashioned that incorporates distinctive elements of Dusun and other minority cultures, or that future generations of Dusuns will find it possible to "reinvent" their traditions to bolster a waning identity. There is, however, little evidence that this is happening, and, as a trend, it would be entirely antithetical to the current ideological preoccupations associated with *MIB*. Throughout the history of the Malay people in Borneo,

"becoming Malay" has always meant, for indigenes, the rejection of previous ways of life. Given this precedent, it seems unlikely that the incorporation of the Dusun people into the Malay group will lead to an enrichment of Brunei Malay culture.

Notes

- 1 Kershaw (1992) thinks there could be as many as 15,000 Dusun in Brunei, though this figure would appear to include Islamized Dusun.
- 2 There are also people called Dusun in South Kalimantan who have no relation to Brunei (Tsing 1993).
- 3 Compare Leake's (1993:102-4) discussion of the Dusun under the heading "Bisaya."
- 4 On cultural reproduction and the differential rates of change in different cultural domains see Ellen (1994).
- 5 Another 5.0 percent of the population were "other indigenous races," including Iban and Penan. Eighteen percent were Chinese and 7.5 percent were other foreigners (Government of Brunei Darussalam 1988:111).
- 6 The English term is used; cf Braighlin (1992:86n.29).
- 7 Compare Ellen 1983 on the variation within Southeast Asia in the ways adoption of Islam is authenticated.
- 8 The functioning of these control mechanisms has been reported for other parts of the Malay world, in relation to control over women. Aihwa Ong (1987), for example, found that single Malay women working in Selangor were subject to scrutiny by religious officers and accusations about their morality. Only Muslims are liable to be arrested for *khalwat* (close proximity between men and women neither related nor married to each other). Ong (1990) interprets Islam mainly as a patriarchal system of male domination over women. While male-female relations are unquestionably a prominent focus of Islamic discipline, it is worth pointing out that Islamic law (*Shariah*) restricts men as well as women, and potentially pervades all areas of personal and public life. The all-encompassing nature of Islamic worldview and mindset in Southeast Asia, with its thorough-going insistence on a "unity of being," and all aspects of human relations governed by *shariah*, is described by John Bousfield (1983).
- 9 Although there have been a number of successful professional Dusuns, it is generally thought that the mobility of Dusun at all strata have been increasingly restricted in recent years.
- 10 Indeed, Dayak scholars in Indonesia are now turning their attention to the vitality and intellectual contributions of Dayak culture in the modern world (Florus, Djuweng, and Bamba 1994; cf. Dove 1993b). The sub-

stance and direction of this work indicates that traditional culture, far from being an obstacle to development, is, in Michael Dove's (1993b: 172) words, a prerequisite to development. Dove, like Tsing, views as essential the contribution of the indigenous "voice."