

Education, Religious Authority and Moderation: Muslim Scholars-Cum-Leaders in Brunei Darussalam

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ABSTRACT: *Brunei Darussalam is known to be one of the countries in contemporary Southeast Asia which has not experienced the birth of modern radical Muslims or Islamic organizations on its own soil. Obviously, the political system and state structure have a lot to do with such a condition; however, from the purely socio-religious perspective it is certainly interesting to examine the educational and religious backgrounds of the country's Muslim leaders and scholars or 'ulama'. This paper addresses the structural link between state and education, especially religious education, and its impact on the kind of education, training and career Brunei's 'ulama' have. Brunei's prominent 'ulama' went through particular educational centers and underwent certain training. However, they also had diverse interests and extra-activities which eventually formed their personal stature and religious characteristics. By identifying the many facets of their intellectual passages and training, this paper sheds some light on how the scholar-cum-leaders fit to the state structure and maintain religious stability in the country.*

KEY WORDS: *state of Brunei, religious education, impact on society, the scholar-cum-leaders, and religious stability in the country.*

INTRODUCTION

After returning to the country, they joined government service. Some of them were appointed minister, deputy minister, state mufti, permanent secretary, ambassador, head of department in various ministries [...]. In short, they played an important role in the development and progress of the country. The Brunei government's policies in religious education had been effective in shaping a solid religious foundation among Muslims in the country who strongly upheld and practiced

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Islamic teachings based on the concept of the *ahl al-sunnah wal-jama'ah* (Pehin Dato Hj. Md. Zain in Abdul Hamid, 2004:8-9, our translation).

The centre-periphery model, in which the periphery, i.e. Indonesia, evolves under the influence of a dominant centre, was long an adequate model to explain the process of ongoing Islamisation. By the 1970s, however, there were not only more centres, but the influences had also become more diffuse, and a network model represents the flow of influences more adequately [complex]. One did not have to go to Mecca or Cairo to find stimulating Islamic ideas. Students of medicine or political science at an American university were as likely to emphasise their Muslim identities and to encounter fascinating new Islamic thought. Journals and books, in such international languages as English and Arabic or in Indonesian translations, became the major vehicles of Islamic dissemination (Van Bruinessen, 1999).

How could Islam in Brunei be so monolithic and uniform that even various reformist ideas have been smoothly absorbed into the existing fold without open conflict, let alone rivalry between the *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Muda*? Were there any past model or bitter experiences of religious infighting that led to such a proclivity? How could the Azharites enjoy such a dominant position in the religious bureaucracy and Islamic discourse?

The political responsibilities of men of learning, and the relationship between knowledge and political and economic domination, have been discussed by many scholars involved in examining the link between knowledge and power (Eickelman, 1985; and Abu Rabi', 2004). In pre-20th century, Brunei – like many other Malay states – religious scholars formed a part and extension of the ruler's authority. In the words of Clifford Geertz, a Brahmin can be compared to a diamond ring worn by the Balinese ruler, when describing the domination of a king over his realm, including the religious leaders. Under such a condition it is not surprising that religious officials were appointed by the ruler and awarded diverse titles. More specifically, they were authorized to develop knowledge relevant to the aura of the state, the ruler. Knowledge thus was not a means of to challenge the epicenter of power but rather to buttress it (Geertz, 1980).

Under Islamic polities, different patterns of relations between power holders and religious scholars emerged. From the attempts of centralization as exemplified by Caliph 'Uthman's codification of the Qur'an in 644 and al-Ma'mun's imposition of Mu'tazili doctrine in the 820s to *laissez faire* approach of 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (d.719) and al-Mansur (d.774). However, Muslim rulers used many different means to centralize the polity and put the religious scholars under the central government umbrella, if not control, as can be seen clearly in the concept and system of Islamic governance proposed by such leading scholars as al-Mawardi (d.1056) and al-Ghazali (d.1111).

If the early rulers, including the Umawis and the 'Abbasid, had failed to control the religious scholars, later regimes, including the Ottomans (1289-1924) and the Safawis (1501-1722) successfully formed a centralized religious bureaucracy, the *'ilmiye*. Since the formation of Islamic polities in the Malay archipelago was contemporary to the last two great empires, it is not surprising, especially seen in the background of Indic tradition in the region, that religious scholars found themselves closely associated with the court. The appropriation of Islam by the state and the Islamization of the Malay court went hand-in-hand leading to the bureaucratization of Islamic institution, including religious scholars. Originally, the Malay Muslim courts emerged as patrons of Islamic centers and education.

In Brunei,¹ the continuity of Malay Islamic monarchy means the preservation of the patterned relations between the court and the religious scholars (*'ulama'*). The best expression of religious bureaucratization in the country can be seen in the formation of religious functionaries (*manteri ugama*). They formed a fixed religious hierarchy, based on rigid promotion awarded by the ruler through titles and ceremonies. In this sense, religious functionaries are closely linked to the court and the ruler. Not surprisingly, Islamic education in the country has been patronized by the state and centralized. Clearly almost all present religious figures and officials were sent to pursue higher education under government scheme, including scholarship and promotion.

It will be interesting now to examine the historical development of a corps of *'ulama'* in the light of Pierre Bourdieu's generalization on the relationship between knowledge, education and power (Bourdieu, 1990 and 1996), as follows:

First, the dominant classes use education to reproduce their influence in society as well as to create new modes of domination as the society becomes more complex. *Second*, political and social order is maintained through two broad means: material and symbolic force. Material force is represented in the physical capacity of the state, the police or military, for example. Symbolic force is traditionally perpetuated in the field of religion (based on A. Gramsci's thesis). In modern industrial societies, schooling has taken the place of religion. Both religion and education, indeed, can be analyzed as systems of symbolic violence. Through schooling, the dominant elite in

¹This working paper was presented for Workshop on the Education of Southeast Asian Islamic Leadership, 19-20 May 2005, organized by Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS) of Singapore and the International Institute of Asian Studies (IIAS) of the Netherlands, Venue at ISEAS in Singapore.

society reproduce themselves, obtain access to multiple fields of power, and reassert their authority. *Third*, relationship between the dominant elite in society and cultural reproduction is very intricate. The dominant elite acquire the social habit of distinction and differentiation on the basis of their access to education, defined in a broader sense. With their acquired educational power and the relationships that it implies, they acquire the ability to differentiate (to distance and control at the same time) themselves from other classes. Social distinction or recognition is the final objective of the dominant classes. *Fourth*, polarization of the elite into the bourgeois elite that owe their power to education, and the aristocratic elite that derive their power from its inherited forms of cultural and material power. For Abu Rabi', however, the religious intelligentsia in ME have either to ally themselves with the state or opt to refuse to play the game of the power elite and thus they are marginalized (Abu Rabi', 2004:33-34).

If the rapid change and socio-political uncertainty in the Middle East have made the elite to look beyond the traditional local education, including al-Azhar (see Van Bruinessen 1999 as quoted above), in Brunei and other parts of Islamic Southeast Asia, al-Azhar continues to enjoy influence and is a source of prestige and sophistication. Explanations on such a proclivity have been offered by scholars and the actors themselves, including those graduates from Brunei.

Mona Abaza (1993) has shown how the prestige of the Azhar University gave its graduates key positions and high status in Indonesian Islamic institutions and Muslim community for most of the 20th century. Howard Federspiel (1991:6-7) considers the virtue of looking at the educational background of prominent Muslim leaders and scholars during the Soeharto rule in understanding some elements of their strength. Unlike Mona Abaza's findings, that of Howard Federspiel emphasizes the different educational background, especially at the university level. Unlike Muslim leaders in Indonesia,² those in Brunei almost exclusively come from uniformed educational background.

Culture, power and economics are interconnected. The strength of economic/political players significantly determines the dissemination

²Even Ministers of Religious Affairs in Indonesia come from individuals who have no "proper Islamic higher training" (Federspiel, 1991:22-26). The completion of this paper was made possible by support and help from various quarters. First of all, our colleagues in the Department of History have always been sources of ideas and inspiration through exchanges and discussion. More particularly, a few students in Year Three majoring in History have been instrumental in conducting interviews and collecting questionnaires on Islamic education and religious scholars in contemporary Brunei. We owe all of them a

of knowledge and the kind of education pursued. A choice of the type of education, American degrees/universities that the Middle Eastern elite make perpetuates and even increases the power of this elite (Abu Rabi', 2004:33). "Continual struggle among competing groups within society, each of which seeks domination or influence may result in changes in ideas of knowledge and the means by which such ideas are transmitted" (Eickelman, 1985:6).

A view which relegates or ignores traditional Muslim leaders and scholars in time of change has been under attacks since the success of Iranian revolution. The '*ulama*' do respond to change based on their own rhythm and perception. Although the major focus of this paper is contemporary religious establishment, it is indispensable to trace the legacy of religious education and ideological pattern in the country, mainly to put the present configuration in the perspective of continuity and change *vis-a-vis* the country's religious backdrop.

BACKGROUND OF ISLAMIC EDUCATION IN BRUNEI

The strength of religious foundation in Brunei should not be limited to its conservative choice of the prevailing discourse and school of thought but also to the intellectual backdrop of Islamization in the country. Before its decline in the 19th century, Brunei obviously succeeded in establishing a vast realm and forming a religious and intellectual tradition. It is interesting to see how the character and expression of Islam in Brunei reflect at the same time moulded by the religious education in the country.

For the study of Islamic education, intellectual life and '*ulama*' in Brunei, undoubtedly works written and oral traditions preserved, are a mine of invaluable information. Yet we have so far had only a limited number of classical works, including *Silsilah Raja-raja Berunai* (SRB), *Hukum Kanun Brunei* (HKB),³ and *Syair Awang Semaun* (SAS). We should not forget, however, that a range of Islamic manuscripts is yet to be reopened and

great deal, however, since we have not taken all their views or interpretations they are not in anyway responsible for shortcomings of this article. Moreover, the original version of this article was written for a workshop organized by the Institute of Southeast Asian Studies of Singapore and Leiden University in May 2005. Support of the Workshop committee and the views expressed by the participants were of great value to the improvement of the present article.

³It is true that the author/s of *Hukum Kanun Brunei* (HKB) is/are not known to us. But the presence, if not the predominance, of strong, explicit Islamic elements in it, cannot fail to impress us about the religious background of its author/s. For further discussion of *Hukum Kanun Brunei* (HKB), see Metassim Haji Jibah (1980:51); and Pg. Muhammad (1983:233-242).

examined (Ismail Hamid, 1984:71-73; and Awang bin Ahmad, 1989:11-16). From such works we can expect to know the focus, level and range of contemporary scholarship in Brunei.⁴ The fact that at least three '*ulama*' (two Pehin Datu Imam, and one Pehin Khatib) were involved in the writing of the monumental works [SRB, and HKB] is a clear indication of the important role of religious figures in the intellectual circles of the time (Sweeney, 1968:A1, A50-51, B1; and Pehin Yahya, 1983:5-7). On the other hand, the attribution of the writing of HKB to Sultan Muhammad Hasan by the 18th and 19th centuries, writers⁵ can also be interpreted as a recognition by them and their contemporaries of the declining level of their own scholarship or institutions. In other words, the achievement of Sultan Muhammad Hasan was then regarded as a model and epitome by later generations. This is not so surprising if we look at what happened in Aceh, for instance, following the busy 16th and 17th centuries with figures such as Fansuri, Shams al Din, Raniri and 'Abd al Ra'uf. If Aceh then produced educational institutions like *meunasah*, *rangkang*, *balee* and *dayah*, it is almost certain that Brunei must have also developed its own.⁶

⁴In our preliminary survey over some of these religious texts, including the translation of and commentaries over Ibn 'Ata' Allah's famous *al Hikam* by anonymous Brunei *ulama* in 1220/1808, we come to believe that since the later part of the eighteenth century many *ulama* in Brunei were involved in the international network of Islamic scholarship, particularly through Sufism. Moreover, the additional parts of the manuscript, written after 1320/1905, deal with the issues of the *fiqh*, supported by sophisticated arguments. This text was lent to us by Pehin Dato Dr. Awang Haji Mohd Jamil al Sufri.

⁵See some passages in Sweeney (1968:A3), "[...] *Maka Sultan Hasan itulah keras di atas kerajaannya mengikut perintah Sultan Mahkota yang di negeri Aceh*"; and Sweeney (1968:B9), "[...] *dan ialah keras mendirikan adat-adat kebesaran, [...] di dalam adil jua hukumnya*".

⁶On educational institutions in Aceh, see C. Snouck Hurgronje (1985, II:25-54); and Ismuha (1983). Post 17th century, Aceh witnessed no scholar comparable in erudition and stature to those of the earlier period. The existing works merely repeated, summarized, or expanded what had been said by those great scholars. On comparable phenomenon of intellectual decline in the region, see Van Bruinessen (1994). The intellectual decline in Brunei during the period, thus, was not unique; cf. Raja Ali Haji's view about fellow Muslims in 19th century Riau can be seen vividly in his *Tuhfat al Nafis* (1982:333-341). See also B. Andaya & V. Matheson (1979:122). Perhaps the decline of economic prosperity in the region caused primarily by the increasing European domination over the economy had also a negative effect on the patronage enjoyed by the religious scholars. Even then, during the second half of the 19th century, Brunei still, attracted scholars from abroad, including Dato Haji Ahmad Banjar bin Haji Abdul Latif, to stay in the country as religious experts. On Dato Haji Ahmad Banjar see Hajjah Jorah Haji Metali (1988:62-63). Since this short article contains "unfiltered" oral traditions, a reader should not take all its information at face value.

First, Religious Institutions and 'Ulama' Families: Classical Education. Mosque, *surau* and *balai* are well known religious places in Brunei. It is stated categorically in SRB (Sweeney, 1968:A31 and A33) that the mosque was not only a place for worship but also for instruction on Islam. We do not know, however, who participated (*murid murid*) in the sessions held there. What distinguished instruction in the *balai* and mosque, for example, is not certain.⁷ Since the character and level of instruction are very much influenced or decided by the type of scholarship of particular '*ulama*' who ran the institutions, we can only classify the kind of instruction in these institutions in general terms. The mosque provided the students, mostly senior, with advanced *pengajian* which might include *fiqh*, astronomy, sufism and *tafsir*. The '*ulama*' of *balai*⁸ could be associated with broadening the knowledge of growing youth about *fiqh* and theology. They also taught adult villagers to improve their religious performances. Moreover, at the *surau* children were introduced to the reading of the Qur'an and basic rituals. Spatial movement or status change among these smaller institutions have recurrently taken place. Perhaps on occasion the death of an '*ulama*' with no strong successor could have caused the decline of his religious institution. It thus might be eclipsed by another new rising, though originally lower, one. And still, it is also possible that the popularity

⁷In the Brunei capital, the *jami* mosque was led by the religious officials appointed by the Sultan. They include the three, later five, *Pehin Manteri* and several *Khatibs* and *Mudims* (*imam al din* or *mu'adhdhin*). When the earliest appointment took a place is still a matter of conjecture. Perhaps Sultan Muhammad Hasan, who ruled until the early part of the 17th century, was the first ruler who reorganized the complex religious hierarchy in Brunei. This scheme seems to have survived, to a large extent, until our own era (see Sweeney, 1968:A3, 5, 9, 31, and B9), "[...] daripada banyak anak chuchunya Paduka Seri Sultan Hasan, iaitu Marhum yang (D)itanjong makamnya, barang yang baik bicharanya memerintahkan rakyat isi negeri" (A34). *Balai* or *surau* were usually built and run voluntarily by local *ulama* and inhabitants. In addition, some wealthy prominent figures did build *balai* to cater non resident and peripatetic *ulama* who visited Brunei. In this manner the *balai* formed important places for basic education and dissemination of knowledge in general.

⁸The difference between the *balai* and the *surau* is not quite clear. They were used interchangeably for a religious center below the level of a mosque. We suggest that the term *balai* is perhaps more original and older in Brunei (Sweeney, 1968:A33). It might have been originally related to the ancient local institution which had served almost an identical role to the Islamic *balai*. On the other hand, the use of the term *surau* might have been affected by the intensification of the scripturalization activities since the 19th century. The intensity of this scripturalization can be seen in the widespread use of such texts as *Sabil al Muhtadin*, *Perukunan Melayu*, *Furu' al Masa'il wa Usul al Masa'il*, and *Matla' al Badrayn* in Brunei; for further information concerning the existing religious texts in Brunei, see Ismail Hamid (1984); and A.B. Ahmad (1989).

and influence of the *balai 'ulama'* might be outshone by the *surau 'ulama'* through the above process.

The continuity of scholarship traditions among *'ulama'* families in Brunei can be seen in the strength and persistence of the *Burung Pingai 'ulama'*. Until recently the *'ulama'* of *Burung Pingai* enjoyed religious and social privileges not only at the local level but also at the sultanate level.⁹ Many of them were promoted faster and higher than their equals from other wards in Kampong Ayer (Pehin Yahya, 1989:10-11). How could they have received such favourable treatment? Since the *'ulama'* were mainly associated with religious knowledge and activities, their social achievement must have been, as I will argue below, related to religion. Of course we cannot ascertain, unless we have convincing evidence, that the *'ulama'* of *Burung Pingai* were favoured because they excelled in scholarship, or they composed some great works. As in many other Muslim areas, *'ulama'* often came to prominence thanks to their societal activities including medication, or/and provision of infra structure and basic needs (Eickelman, 1976; and Mansurnoor, 1990). Yet societal activities alone could not guarantee *'ulama'* religious position qua *'ulama'*. Thus the *'ulama'* of *Burung Pingai*, for example, were honoured, for a significant part, because of their religious role. Then in what capacity did they carry out such a role? How and, if possible, when could they assume this leading position among other *'ulama'* of Brunei?¹⁰

⁹Unfortunately we do not have sufficient evidence to suggest that the highest religious officials always came from among the *Burung Pingai 'ulama'*. We know that since the second half of the 19th century, a number of key positions were occupied by *Burung Pingai 'ulama'*. See Hajjah Jorah (1988); and Pehin Yahya (1989:11 and 23). Interestingly, the *Burung Pingai* word was not geographically the closest to the palace or the *jami'* mosque.

¹⁰SRB provides us with an interesting clue about the important role played by Dato Imam Ya'qub not only in a religious field but also in administrative matters, particularly external trade and diplomatic mission abroad (Sweeney, 1968:A57 58 and B31). For more information on the multifaceted role of religious scholars in Brunei, see Pehin Yahya (2000:61-68). Such close association of religion and trade brought me to suggest that Dato Imam Ya'qub resided or belonged to *Burung Pingai*. For, as argued later in this paper, trade and Islamic leadership/scholarship went hand in hand among the *Burung Pingai*. Thus as early as the eighteenth century – during the reign of Sultan Hussayn Kamaluddin (d.1740) – the *'ulama'* of *Burung Pingai* had enjoyed high religious prestige in Brunei. This is especially so since the Dato Imam at that time was the highest religious official appointed by the Sultan under Pengiran Temenggong (Sweeney, 1968:A9 and 31; and Pg. M. Yusuf, 1975:45). Again, the extensive discussion of *adat* in SRB shows that such *adat* had been generally formulated earlier, that is during Sultan Hasan's reign. As such SRB's information on the religious hierarchy should be taken as representing, and relating, a period during Sultan Hasan's rule.

The '*ulama*' in Kampong Ayer, first of all, were busy with routine religious activities. Their involvement in the religious life of the villagers and fishermen, indeed, made them an inseparable part of the local social structure. Being religious leaders, they had a mission of furthering the understanding of Islam for the people and themselves. This can only be achieved by learning, either through teachers, instruction or reading. The religious erudition of a layer of these '*ulama*' is shown clearly in the extant classical texts.¹¹ We may then ask why, by the 19th century, the most widely used texts on religious matters were no longer locally composed. In other words, why were such treatises as 'Abd al Samad Palembangi's *Hidayat al Salikin* (1778), Arsyad Banjari's *Sabil al Muhtadin* (1781), and *Perukunan Melayu* (edited later by his student, 'Abd al Rashid Banjari), Da'ud Patani's *Furu' al Masa'il wa Usul al Masa'il* (1841), and Muhammad Patanis *Matla' al Badrayn* (1885) then widely circulated among religious elite in Brunei to the "exclusion" of indigenous texts? Is it a sign of decline in the level of scholarship among '*ulama*' in Brunei? Or is it an indication that the Brunei '*ulama*' were merely users of religious texts written elsewhere? But our argument is this, perhaps it is true that, by the 19th century, Brunei had suffered multi dimensional decline, religious scholarship not excepted; therefore the state of religious affairs in that period, particularly the widespread use of "foreign" texts, cannot be taken as the yardstick for the decline of the intellectual history of Brunei.¹² If this is the case then we may safely argue that the emergence of the *Burung Pingai* '*ulama*' into prominence by this time was closely related to their intellectual sophistication in line with the universal trend and their religious erudition in the local context.

¹¹Several preliminary studies (see Ismail Hamid, 1984; and A.B. Ahmad, 1989) on the classical texts contained in various collections in Brunei have indicated that a significant part of these deal with Islamic teachings. We have to bear in mind that not all of them were originally written by local scholars. But seen from the eyes of an intellectual historian, this does not make much difference. As long as works were read and studied in Brunei from a quite early period, we may surmise that the contents of the works were familiar, or at least known, to some Bruneians.

¹²The popularity of Banjari's and Patani's works in Brunei perhaps only reflects the trend during that period, that is the emergence of a new style of scholarship among the '*ulama*' of Southeast Asia. Indeed, their works became influential throughout the region, especially among Southeast Asian Muslims who used Malay as their language of instruction. This trend does not necessarily mean that the level of religious scholarship in Brunei was always low. Rather, it indicates that the Brunei '*ulama*' did take part in the changing profile of Islamization in Southeast Asia since the 19th century. For more details on Brunei's participation in the Islamic network in Southeast Asia, see my Iik A. Mansurnoor (1992:152-157).

We should also bear in mind that the original division of wards in Kampong Ayer may have had occupational significance, as argued, but not proven by Brown (1970:27 28 and 46).¹³ If this is so perhaps the eminence and influence of the '*ulama*' of Burung Pingai can be explained in terms of the status division applied in Kampong Ayer. Nevertheless, it may explain the after fact phenomenon not the process of its emergence. In order to have a better view about religious institutions in Kampong Ayer, we think it is necessary to look at educational centres.

Several preliminary studies (see Ismail Hamid, 1984; and A.B. Ahmad, 1989) on the classical texts contained in various collections in Brunei have indicated that a significant part of these deal with Islamic teachings. We have to bear in mind that not all of them were originally written by local scholars. But seen from the eyes of an intellectual historian, this does not make much difference. As long these works were read and studied in Brunei from a quite early period, we may surmise that the contents of the works were familiar, or at least known), to some Bruneians.

The most important centre of religious activities was of course the '*jami*' mosque. Reading the records about mosques in Brunei,¹⁴ we had an impression that in the past mosques were built from simple materials. There is nothing unusual about this in island Southeast Asia. The fact that most informants claimed that their religious buildings (*surau* or mosque) were built no earlier than the second half of the 19th century is an indication of that. Without doubt, the shifting of places (settlements, buildings or cultivation) might have had a negative impact on the memory of our informants and their predecessors. But to say, that prior to the second half of the nineteenth century, no second mosque/*surau*/*balai* was built somewhere in Brunei proper besides the '*jami*' mosque does not fit to the religious tradition of Muslims.¹⁵ Indeed, during the periods of political crisis

¹³The idea about the close connection between the structure of settlement and the patterns of occupation in Kampong Ayer was suggested first by Spencer St. John (1862, II:252-257); and Haji Abd Latif Ibrahim (1971:56-58).

¹⁴Answers to questionnaires conducted by the Department of Religious Affairs, Brunei Darussalam in 1985.

¹⁵See, for example, Haji Awg Asbol bin Haji Mail's study (1989) about mosques in Bandar Brunei since the reign of Sharif 'Ali (circa the mid-15th century). He argued that the first mosque ever built in Brunei was the one erected at the time of Sultan Sharif 'Ali. Then during the reign of Sultan Saif al Rijal, a new five storey mosque was built. This was burned down by the Spanish forces in 1578. No information is available about the foundation of new mosques until the time of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin II (1828 52) when he erected a new mosque in Kampung Bendahara Lama. During the reign of Sultan Hashim, a new mosque was built in the vicinity of the palace in Kampong Ayer, since the old mosque could no longer be renovated. All these mosques apparently were built of simple materials, mainly lumber.

in Brunei, new mosques were built. *First*, when Sultan Abdul Mubin (1661-1673) moved to Pulau Chermin and built a new palace, he also founded a new mosque there (Sweeney, 1968:B17). *Second*, during the reign of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin II, some prominent figures who supported the controversial views about God's essence,¹⁶ propagated by a certain Haji Mahomed (Muhammad?), openly declared the founding and the use of mosques besides the *jami'*.¹⁷ If the establishment of new mosques by the "the renegades" was possible, it is more probable that the orthodox '*ulama'* might have built others. What is interesting in Haji Mahomed's affairs is, *inter alia*, that mosques were used to disseminate new religious ideas for the masses. Since the controversy during that period included highly sophisticated religious arguments,¹⁸ we may surmise that the participants in these sessions were mainly qualified, and highly informed, scholars.

Indeed, relatively sophisticated knowledge of Islamic teachings was attained by many in Brunei. From several, religious texts collected in Bandar Brunei such as '*Umdat al'tiqad* (p.17a), we discover discussion on identical issues such as those propagated by Haji Mahomed. Interestingly, even if these texts were not written in Brunei, many of the texts were seriously studied by the Bruneians as evidenced by the presence of notes and glosses on the margins as well as appendices added by the local students.

Only later Sultan Hashim erected a new mosque in Kampung China, using more permanent material. See Pg. Muhammad (1985:144) in which he quotes information from a "popular work" which states that Sharif 'Ali built several mosques besides the *jami'* Mosque.

¹⁶Perhaps the controversy was centered on such questions as whether several verses in the Qur'an which use human terms for God can be explained in allegorical or literal meanings. Haji Muhammad seems to have suggested contrary to the standard view: "Leave as they are (*bi la kayf*), that the verses should not be interpreted allegorically". Since the Brunei '*ulama'* were followers of Ash'arism, they upheld that "God's hands", for example, can be read as God's power. See St. John (1862, II:258).

¹⁷See St. John (1862, II:256-259). The time of incident – around the mid-19th century – seems to have coincided with the height of animosity between the rival groups that polarized as a result of the infighting between Pg. Muda Hashim and Pg. Anak Hashim. What is interesting in this rivalry is that the inhabitants of *Burung Pingai* were involved in the struggles by supporting a royal faction (Brown, 1970:54 65). Thus, can we suggest that Haji Mohamed's movement also had a religio-political tone? Did his ideas represent an ideological protest against the '*ulama'* of *Burung Pingai*? Perhaps such a religious movement was regarded as an effective means to discredit the prominent figures in *Burung Pingai*, who had so far enjoyed popularity among the population and favour in the court.

¹⁸Haji Mahomed's affairs were not the only religious controversy ever emerged in Brunei. Indeed, a text written in the beginning of the last century identifies a group of people who held controversial religious views, called as *setengah orang jahil* (p.107), see also footnote 4 above. In our opinion during the period the Bruneians were exposed to intensive scripturalization and at the same time challenged by many novel religious issues.

With the growing numbers of '*ulama*' and experts, smaller centres might have grown in fame. Haji Abdul Latif (1971:87-88) suggested that a small *balai* could have absorbed more attendants not only from its own ward, but also from the neighbouring ones. The *balai* of Kampong Burung Pingai is a good example. In accordance with this theory, the prestige of the *balai* was built upon various factors; most significantly was the presence of influential and erudite '*ulama*'. If such could have taken place in Kampong Burung Pingai in the 1920s, or as we argued, long before that period, is it not possible that the identical pattern might have occurred somewhere else before? In order to elaborate on this view, we have to examine the origin, background and education of many leading religious figures before the emergence of the Burung Pingai '*ulama*' into prominence.

Our knowledge about the phenomenon is still fragmentary. But perhaps it is not farfetched to suggest that from quite an early period religious figures came from many segments, including the nobility. They received their religious instruction mainly from the resident '*ulama*', even though some had travelled abroad to pursue advanced study.¹⁹ By the second quarter of the 19th century, Burung Pingai enjoyed a prominent position in Kampong Ayer, or rather Brunei, as a base for wealthy merchants and traders (Brown, 1970:27). Identical to what happened in many other Islamic cities, the burgeoning trade among Burung Pingai residents might have had something to do with their sophistication in Islamic learning and *vice versa*.²⁰ Often religion and trade went hand in hand. The trading activities pursued by the Burung Pingais in distant ports might also be related to, and encouraged by, their interest in religion.

¹⁹The fact that SRB (Sweeney, 1968:B31) mentions the purchase of a house in Mecca for Brunei pilgrims and travelers around 1221/1807 shows that many Bruneians by the beginning of the 19th century had visited or even lived in Mecca. Some of them must have been students or teachers. For a discussion of the life of Southeast Asian Muslims in Mecca in the 19th century, see Iik A. Mansurnoor (1998); for eyewitness notes, see Snouck Hurgronje (1931:213-292). So far, no detailed published study was undertaken on the "Palace School" in Brunei. It will be interesting to know how such a school played an important role not only in educating princes and princesses about statecraft, but also about in furthering religious knowledge during the period.

²⁰Not only is learning in Islam functional, it is also structural in a sense that without thorough knowledge, a Muslim cannot fully grasp the formal doctrine which is written, the Qur'an and others. Under such condition, it is not surprising that learned Muslims throughout history invested considerable time to pursue knowledge not only in their own locality but abroad. Thus travel became a common phenomenon for many active individuals. For further discussions on the learning networks and travels among Muslims scholars and students, see Joan E. Gilbert (1978); and Iik A. Mansurnoor (1990:305-334).

Furthermore, we should not ignore the possibility that part of the wealth accumulated by some *Burung Pingai* traders and merchants²¹ was invested in religious patronage for some students and scholars, including providing religious facilities such as *balai*, books and teachers. Since a settlement was as much built upon kinship as upon spatial propinquity, the inhabitants of *Burung Pingai* were closely related, except for a few outside “workers”. Thus the idea of having religious centers and Islamic experts was less motivated by the need of masking their worldly trading interest than by religious conviction. In some cases, the prestige of a religious center had to be enhanced by inviting great scholars from abroad. To do this, considerable financial arrangement would have had to be undertaken. In the next section, we will examine the intellectual activities of many Bruneians primarily in order to show what kind of role was played by ‘*ulama*’ and their educational institutions in spreading knowledge among the population.

Second, Intellectual Facets of Brunei ‘*Ulama*’. Islam as a scriptural religion is closely associated with learning. Without continuous poring over the scripture or its derivatives Muslims may deviate from the true teaching. No prophet after the Prophet Muhammad is recognized in Islam. To fulfil some task of the Prophet, especially spreading the doctrine, religious experts or ‘*ulama*’ usually emerge in different Muslim societies. In traditional Southeast Asia, and perhaps in most Muslim countries, the ‘*ulama*’ corps becomes an exclusive and closed entity. Only certain individuals may join their rank. More importantly, intellectual genealogy is strictly observed among them. An ‘*alim*’ can be admitted to their rank if he has gone through educational training which is recognized and acceptable to them. This strategy is clearly an effective mechanism to check any possible breach of their understanding of Islam.

In Brunei Muslim, intellectual activities have been reflected in various aspects of life, including treatises, arts, songs and monuments. In this section, we will concentrate on the written material.

Manuscripts which directly discuss Islamic teaching perhaps occupy more than a half of the numbers of manuscripts kept in various collections, public or private, in Brunei.²² It is not surprising that most of these manuscripts deal with Islamic law (*fiqh*), theology (*‘aqida*), *sufism* and ethics. History proper (*tarikh*) seems not to have particularly attracted the Brunei ‘*ulama*’s attention. This is despite the fact that *hikayat*, *syair*

²¹It should be pointed out that some of these wealthy individuals were also officials of the Sultans of Brunei, see Brown (1970:26 27).

²²See for example a number of surveys reported by Ismail Hamid & Harun Mat Piah (1983); Ismail Hamid (1984); and A.B. Ahmad (1989).

and *silsilah* literature prospered for some time (Brown, 1988:10-15; and Ahmad, 1989:33-35). But fortunately we are still provided with SRB, *Syair Rakis* and SAS. Moreover, the extant religious texts may furnish us with some ideas about intellectual life in Brunei.

The presence of a text can, of course, be seen in different perspectives. *First*, a text might be owned but never studied. *Second*, a text was imported and studied. *Third*, a text was copied for local needs. *Fourth*, a text was copied and commented on. *Fifth*, a text was summarized or expanded and/or translated into Malay. *Finally*, a text was originally written. We may thus ask: what can we expect from the mere presence of religious texts? Putting aside any “old text” which was only recently brought in, we dare to argue that these texts have a value for understanding general scholarship in the past. One helpful way in examining religious texts in order to determine its use by the locals is to look for notes and glosses written in the margin or for appendices in the end. In case of texts used in Brunei, we should examine whether these notes have some traces of Brunei Malay dialect. The fact that these texts were hand written perhaps encourages their users to add their own ideas, comments or glosses, usually explanation by teachers. Normally, religious texts are read in a particular study group organized by a teacher (*‘alim*). Important points delivered by a teacher were usually written on the text by those disciples who hold their own. If this is so, then what should be done with “clean texts?”. Generally speaking they, except those written in Brunei dialect, are not very helpful for the understanding of intellectual history of Bruneians.

Some preliminary studies undertaken by some scholars on Brunei’s manuscripts have shown the dominance of Islamic writing. Most, if not all, of them were recent editions. This does not mean that none was originally written before the nineteenth century. In the next few lines, we will discuss our reading of a text on the Islamic belief system.

Although this text is explicitly named *‘Umdat al I’tiqad*, its author remains anonymous.²³ It is almost certain that the original text was written in Arabic by a follower of *Ash‘arism* who is also a *Shafi‘ite*. The present text which is primarily a Malay text was perhaps composed somewhere in the central Malay States, since the Malay used here is not mixed with a lot of local dialects. Moreover, its contents are taken from various sources. Some references are made to the works of well-known *Shafi‘i* scholars such

²³It is worth noting that this text has a similar name to the one described by Ismail Hamid (1984:73); and A.B. Ahmad (1989:30). According to Ismail Hamid, *Kitab ‘Umdat al-I’tiqad* was written Pehin Siraja Khatib Haji Abu Hanifah bin Mohd. Salleh (d.1955). To our understanding of the text, it was copied not composed by the Pehin.

as Ahmad ibn Hajar al Haytami (a 16th century Egyptian who wrote the *Tuhfat al Muhtaj* and Muhammad al Ramli (a 16th century Palestinian who composed the *Nihayat al Muhtaj*); both taught and died in Mecca. The text itself consists of an introduction, four sections and a conclusion; this exactly conforms with the plan of the author in the first page. The introduction gives a general review of the meaning of belief and religion. The first section discusses the faith and its components. Then the second deals with the crucial matters which should be performed by a Muslim around the deathbed. In the third section, the author talks about the faith in the light of Sufi ideas. The fourth contains the doctrines and conditions of belief. The conclusion which is called *Ma'rifat al Tawhid* seems to serve as a warning to the believers about the threat of the *Qadariya* (the self determinists) and the *Tabi'iyah* (the naturalists) and also the passive *Jabariyah*. Indeed, the inclusion of these rationalists' ideas, even from the reductionist point of view, is quite novel and interesting in the context of Southeast Asian Muslim circles. More significantly, their being contained in a treatise used in Brunei is a clear sign that vigorous scholarship then prospered within the Muslim community, or, at least, among 'ulama' circles.

Some of the terms and meanings used in the text indicate the high level of religious scholarship. In the introduction, for example, there are several terms such as 'ayn (essence), 'arad (form), jirm (body) and dhurra (atom) which are highly philosophical and technical.²⁴ Moreover, in the first section a number of *sufi* ideas are explored. Interestingly, for our present inquiry, many glosses appear almost on each page of the introduction. The writing is quite similar to the original text. The glosses give further explanation and elaboration for certain terms. Furthermore, in the conclusion new notes were added. They are not related to the text, contextually or literally. The style of writing is slightly cruder than the original. They contain *sufi* ideas, including the meanings of the term *tasawwuf* analyzed in an alphabetical order, formulae for medication, and some examples of amulet making.

The analysis of the above text suggests what kind of Islamic disciplines were pursued in Brunei in the past. They include *sufism*, belief system, *fiqh*, and ways of facing some plagues, illnesses, or threats.

The lack of intellectual vigour in 19th century Brunei should not be seen as a complete and full representative picture of intellectual tradition in Brunei. It is true that the existing intellectual and educational institutions of the time became routinized, producing more copies than originalities.

²⁴More elaborate and sophisticated information of the ideas of Sufism can be found in a Malay text, written in Brunei- based on Ibn 'Ata' Allah's *al-Hikam*.

Yet the wider use of the term *surau* by the time also indicates a new vigour of religiosity among the '*ulama*' of Brunei. Perhaps this period can be categorised as a period of intensive scripturalization among Muslims in Brunei. Put differently, the understanding of Islam in Brunei generally became more fixed and standardized in accordance with the acceptable Islamic texts.²⁵

Third, New Religious Institutions: Education and Administration.

Concomitant with the introduction of formal schooling in Brunei since 1914,²⁶ various attempts were made to improve religious education. The absorption of *kadis* into the modern bureaucracy indirectly stimulated the more organized preparation and training for the new candidates to the post. Seen from this perspective, we can better understand the increasing number of '*ulama*' who graduated from the *Burung Pingai balais* around the period.

Moreover, it is worthwhile mentioning that in 1922, the *surau* which belonged to the Sultan's household, perhaps in Kampong Ayer, was, by his permission, used as an educational center. Here we have a clue as to the relationship between the palace and education. The idea of permitting the Sultan's *surau* for educational purposes seems to suggest that previously a section of the palace (*istana*) was specifically set up as a special educational center, popularly known in Islamic literature as the palace school. Perhaps we have to do more research to reconstruct a better picture of the palace school in Brunei, if it ever existed. Later, in the 1930s, voluntary religious instruction was given twice a week in the afternoon, following the regular classes in some public schools in Bandar Brunei. This was followed by the establishment of a private religious school (*madrrasah*) in 1941. Its foundation was approved and supported by the ruler.

²⁵This development can be seen clearly in a chapter attached to Ibn 'Ata' Allah's *al-Hikam* (including its Malay translation and commentaries), see note above. The author of the chapter categorically urges the readers to refer all religious questions to the standard works of the prominent Shafi'i scholars, such as Nawawi's *Minhaj al Talibin*, Sharbini's *Mughni al Muhtaj*, Ramli's *Nihayat al Muhtaj*, Ibn Hajar's *Tuhfat al Muhtaj* and Ansari's *Fath al Wahhab*. Interestingly, the author at times mentions the terms "*setengah orang jahil*" in order to disqualify the un orthodox views of the time (the beginning of the twentieth century). It is important to examine the process of more vigorous Islamic scripturalization and reform since the later part of the nineteenth century and what relations they had with the development of education in Brunei, but we have to deal with the phenomenon in a separate paper.

²⁶Since 1908, the idea of a Malay school had been circulated in the meetings of the State Council.

The *madrasah* was unique in many ways. Its prominent teacher was an Egyptian, *al-Ustadh* 'Abd al-'Aziz al-Shami. It is possible, as had taken place in many other educational centers of Islamic Southeast Asia²⁷ that this teacher was sent from al-Azhar University to help and support local Muslims to improve their religious knowledge through more organized and standardized education. Again, many important figures, such as the *Pengiran Bendahara*, *Pengiran Pemancha*, and *Pengiran Shahbandar* were involved in the foundation of the *madrasa*. This *madrasa*, however, stopped its activities with the arrival of the Japanese forces to Brunei in December 1941.

During the Japanese occupation, religious education continued to be conducted voluntarily by private citizens, especially the '*ulama*' in their *balais*. Although the Japanese had generally adopted a conciliatory policy toward the Muslims, in Brunei such policy was not specifically applied. In the field of education, the pupils of Muslim parents at the "primary schools" were lined up to go to the mosque on Fridays and chant Japanese *Kimigayu* every morning.²⁸

Shortly after the end of the Japanese occupation, religious instruction was revived in the public schools. Religious content was included in the curriculum. Instruction was given once a week, on Thursdays. The teachers for religious subjects, as during the 1930s, were recruited from among the *imams* and *bilals* of neighboring mosques. The improvement of religious instruction can be seen in the appointments of two religious education officials, *Nazir [Pendidikan] Agama*, and *Ketua Pengajar Agama* in 1948/1949. They were responsible to the Chief *Kadi*.

Moreover, by 1950 the Brunei government was able to send three of its more promising students to pursue their religious study at a higher level at the *Madrasah al-Junied al-Islamiah* of Singapore. If in the past the Brunei students went abroad to study on their own, this time, intending religious students, like their teacher counterparts,²⁹ were funded by the state. As

²⁷Since the beginning of the twentieth century, al-Azhar University of Egypt had been active in sending teachers to many Muslim concentrations in Southeast Asia. For example, in 1908 *Madrasat al-Iqbal al-Islamiya* was founded in Singapore under the directorship of an Azharite, Shaykh Osman Rif'at al-Misri. Again, in the early 1920s, Shaykh Ahmad Ghana'im al-Misri was sent to lead a modern Islamic school (*al-Madrasa al-Asasiya*) in Surabaya, East Java, Indonesia.

²⁸The vivid description of Japanese highhandedness and some religious tolerance is given, for example, by the present minister of Religious Affairs in his book on Islam in Brunei (Pehin Dato Md. Zain, 1992:167-68).

²⁹Since the 1930s, many Brunei teachers were sent to various teacher training colleges in the United Kingdom, Sabah, Sarawak and the Peninsula.

can be seen in figure 1, from 1950 to 1956 they were sent to the *Madrasah al-Junied* in Singapore. Starting in 1956, after some of them had completed their education at *al-Junied*, they were sent to the Islamic College in Klang, Selangor (Malaysia). In 1959, four of them continued higher studies at the al-Azhar University in Cairo (see figure 2). Thereafter, for some time, these three Islamic educational centers became the main destinations for Bruneians pursuing higher religious education. Even today, after the opening of higher religious institutions in the country, al-Azhar continues to be the preferred place for university education in Islamic studies among the Bruneians.

The impact of religious bureaucratization during the Residency on Islamic institutions in Brunei deserves much closer examination. For example, the demand for greater efficiency and better skill in the modern bureaucracy required well-planned training for government officials,

Figure 1:
 Brunei Students Sent to Singapore and Malaysia for Religious Education 1950-1983³⁰

Year	Names	Destination 1	Destination 2	Level of Education
1950	Md Zain Hj Serudin, Abd Salam Abd Razak, Abd Hamid Mohd Daud.	Singapore	Malaya	Primary to a college level
1952	Abd Hamid Bakal, Abd Rahman Khatib Abdullah, Mahalle Hj Abdullah.	Idem	idem	
1953	Yahya Hj Ibrahim, Ibrahim Mudim Hj Ismail, Mahmud Basiuni Awang Othman.	Idem	Idem	Idem
1954	Abu Bakar Tengah, Ismail Abd Latif, Abd Hamid Tamat.	Idem	Idem	Idem
1955	Abd Saman Kahar, Abd Aziz Juned, Mahmud Saedon Awang Othman.	Idem	Idem	Idem
1956	Badaruddin Hj Othman, Suhaili Mohiddin, Mohd Amin Abd Rahim.	Idem	Idem	Idem

Sources: Dato Haji Abdul Hamid Haji Daud (2004).

³⁰Data for these two figures cannot be satisfactorily presented for space limit. The foundation of pre-Azahar university education in the 1960s, and especially the advance level of education in the country after independence in 1984 with the opening of University of Brunei Darussalam in 1985 and the Institute of Islamic Studies in 1989, led to the decline, if not an end, of the number of Bruneians sent to Singapore and Malaysian *madrasas*.

Figure 2:
Brunei Students Pursuing Tertiary Education Sent to Egypt, Jordan and UK, 1959-2000

Year	Names	Destination 1	Destination 2	Level of Education
1959	Md Zain, Abd Hamid, Abd Rahman, Mahalee	Cairo (al-Azhar)	--	University
1963	Abd Hamid Bakal	Cairo (al-Azhar)	Cairo (Dar al-Ifta' 1975)*; London (1986)*	University
1963	Badaruddin Hj Othman,	Cairo (al-Azhar)	London (1977)*	University
	Abdul Aziz Juned	Cairo (al-Azhar)	Cairo (Dar al-Ifta' 1979)*	
	Abd Saman Kahar	Cairo (al-Azhar)	Birmingham	University
1964	Mohd Amin Abd Rahim	Cairo (al-Azhar)	Birmingham	University
1965	Yahya Hj Ibrahim	Cairo (al-Azhar)	--	University

including religious functionaries. The sending of religious students and teachers abroad thus was, among other things, intended to meet the challenge of modernization.

The religious reforms in Brunei have been accelerated since the accession of the Sultan Begawan to the throne in 1950. Many Islamic institutions were reformulated and reinvigorated. Islamic education and the management of Islamic affairs were reformed in accordance with the new spirit.³¹

AZHAR, RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE, AND NATION-BUILDING

How could the Azhar graduates and newly educated Brunei *'ulama'* assume religious leadership from the mid-1960s? What were the conditions which allowed them to do so? Was there no rivalry between the old religious order and the new generation of *'ulama'*?

Let us first look closely at the sending of the first batch of student of al-Junied Islamic School in Singapore. Although the sending of Brunei students in 1950 was not a novelty, it was a new venture since the earlier study missions were tuned to general education rather than Islamic education. There had been a few Brunei students abroad before 1950 pursuing Islamic studies as evidenced by Pehin 'Abd Mokti bin Nasar, who stayed in the Hijaz

³¹For more details on institutionalization and bureaucratization of Islamic affairs in Brunei, see Iik A. Mansurnoor (1995 and 1996).

to study around the turn of the last century, and another young Bruneian who went to Istanbul in the last quarter of the 19th century for study. The first batch in 1950 involved three boys who just “completed their primary education” (Pehin Md. Zain, 2004). Since the instruction in al-Junied was fully in Arabic, Brunei students did struggle from the scratch to catch up the education at al-Junied, especially in mastering the language.

The circumstances surrounding the sending of this first batch need some elaboration. Why al-Junied and why at that time? Only in the mid-1950s did major reforms in the administration of Islam and Islamic education intensify as the country’s Islamic Council, Islamic Law Acts and Islamic schools were formed and erected. The usual explanation for the major reform at this time is referred to the determination of the energetic new ruler to accelerate the country’s modernization. The administration of Islam was included in this scheme. Thus, the sending of students to pursue higher learning in Islamic studies was part of the response to the ruler’s development plan. Seen in the influence and erudition of the contemporary Chief *Kadhi*, Pg. Muhammad Salleh, it is claimed that he was the one who recommended to the ruler for the training of local students abroad, starting with al-Junied. Obviously al-Junied was chosen for its excellent training in Arabic and basic Islamic discipline as well as its emphasis on the “acceptable and moderate” Islamic teaching. At the same time, Brunei had expected its sons to go beyond al-Junied. Al-Azhar was chosen, not Saudi universities for example, for straightforward reasons – to guarantee the teaching of the *ahl al-sunna wal-jama’a* in theology and the *Shafi’i* school in law.

The new environment that Brunei had found since the second half of the 20th was conducive to major reform. Strong leadership was provided by Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien from 1950 and new national awakening was stimulated by diverse factors socially, economically and politically after the end of the Pacific War. In the religious field, the pressure to provide more sophisticated services to the community required modern education, the formation of new institutions and skilled functionaries. Indeed, the sending of Bruneian students abroad to pursue higher education had taken place since the 1930s. What is crucial in the sending of students to *madrasas* in Singapore, Malaysia and al-Azhar was the design and vision of a particular religious scholars-cum-leaders and the style and quality of their scholarship. Seen in the context of the larger reform movement in the Malay world of the period, it is not surprising that the Bruneian religious establishment had determined to preserve their religious style and heritage, the *ahl al-sunna wal-jama’a* in theology and the *Shafi’i* school in Islamic jurisprudence and law (*fiqh*). In other words, the future experts in Islamic discipline were

tuned to fill the designed niche in the state structure and society at large. In this sense, the sending of students to al-Junied, Klang Islamic College and al-Azhar University had been precipitously anticipated and thoroughly implemented. In response, the religious *homines novi* seemed to have adjusted to the prevailing conditions while pursuing their own agenda of religious revivalism or simply reform. In this light, foreign observers should not be surprised to see that various facets of Islamic reform did take place in the country without the negative impact of “silly conflict” between the old and new proponents of Islam (*Kaum Tua – Kaum Muda* dualism).

Brunei had developed a religious atmosphere that was instrumental in concocting moderation. First of all, the small size of its population (see table 1) made radical innovation and controversies impractical and self-defeating. The British administrative reform which was tuned to certain political ends also led toward conservatism in religious administration and, to a large extent, the moderate form of Islamic expression.³²

First, Religious Writings and Publications. Concomitant with the spread of modern education, Brunei saw the increase of written materials about religion and the participation of Brunei writers in the exposition of their view of Islam and their own religious experiences. The higher rates of literacy achieved through modern education increased the circulation of written materials. Knowledge has become more and more a public domain thanks to the availability of, and interest in, written materials and various publications. Although in the past many Bruneians were literate in Arabic

Table 1:
Population of Brunei

Year	Brunei
1911	21,718
1921	25,451
1931	30,135
1947	40,657
1960	83,877
1971	136,256
1991	260,381

Reference:

*The total population of Brunei (town and villages) in 1911 : 14,463 (Brunei Town: 9,767 and Brunei rural areas: 4,696); other districts such as Tutong, Muara, Belait and Temburong: 7,255. The population in 1921, Brunei: 14,139; Belait: 1,541; Muara: 2,548; Temburong: 2,912; and Tutong: 4,319.

³²William C. Roff (1974) and Moshe Yegar (1979) have shown the comparable phenomena in Kelantan and Malaya in general respectively.

scripts, they enjoyed only limited access to reading materials. Knowledge, especially religious knowledge, was transmitted generally and most of the time in an orality. The intellectual erudition of many Bruneians through the introduction of religious classes and modern education paved the way for the provision of reading materials on various subjects, including religion. The graduation of many Bruneians from higher institutions of religious learning facilitated the writing of religious texts and studies tuned to local conditions. Indeed, during the 1960s more works on Islam were written by Bruneians in different forms.

The return of Bruneian graduates to the country was usually followed by employment in public office. For example, the Azhar graduates since the mid-1960s have joined the Department of Religious Affairs (DRA).³³ Although these graduates were soon occupied with office duties and responsibilities, many continued to devote part of their time to writing and preaching. As can be seen in the religious column of the *Pelita Brunei* of the period, these graduates contributed highly informative and novel views of Islam and society. More specifically, under the sponsorship of the DRA, the religious publications became more frequent and regular. For example, since 1962 DRA has published a quarterly journal, *Majalah Jabatan Hal Ehwal Ugama*. Its contents include various religious topics, the Mufti's views and features of DRA activities. In 1964, another series, *Sinaran Suci*, was published. It was designed to respond to the popular need for religious teachings.

During the 1970s, more publications were introduced by the DRA, including a religious journal, *al-Huda* and a series on Qur'anic exegesis, *Tafsir Darussalam*. The role of the newly graduated Bruneians in these undertakings was obviously significant. Interestingly, a score of books on Islamic literary works by Bruneians were published during this period. Among them were *Puisi Hidayat*. Several books and monographs were published after 1979 in conjunction with the celebration of the 15th century *Hijra*. Moreover, during the 1980s a number of religious seminars were organized in the country. They brought together experts in specific fields from around the country to discuss various religious topics. On several occasions, the participants were international experts. The proceedings of such seminars were mostly published by DRA. Yet, the fast growing publications of religious materials cannot be separated from the general trend of Islamic revivalism in the country and beyond. The impact of Islamic revivalism could be seen clearly in the speeches and actions of the leaders, political elite and religious scholars of the country.

³³Since 1986, the Department has been transformed into a Ministry.

Several examples can be cited to illustrate the increasing influence of the Brunei graduates of al-Azhar University. The predominance of the Azharis in the DRA was structural and consequential. The official adoption of a “moderate” version of Islamic practice restricted contacts to certain educational centers. The Azhar continues to enjoy the highest position in the list. Since the majority of the religious leaders had been educated at al-Azhar, it only follows that the future cadres be sent to the same institution. Evidently, publications on religious subjects came from the works of the Azhar graduates. This can be seen in the writings of the former Mufti, Pehin Mohd. Zain, Pehin Abd Hamid, Pehin Yahya, Pehin Abd Aziz Juned, Dato Abdul Saman and Pehin Badaruddin. All belonged to the top religious officialdom. It should also be mentioned here that in addition to religious training at al-Azhar, all these leaders-cum-scholars had joined religious schools in Singapore and Malaysia. Some spent time in higher learning institutions in the West. For example, Dato Saman and Pehin Dato Mohd. Amin completed their post-graduate programme at the University of Birmingham following the graduation from al-Azhar. Indeed, several students who had originally been sent to further religious study at the well-known Islamic *madrasas* ended up being sent to universities in England, Malaysia and Singapore (Dato Abdul Hamid, 2004).

After independence, an idea was circulated to locate some Azhar graduates and those who had undergone intensive Islamic education to certain non-religious offices in order to inspire higher discipline and morality. Although the experiment was not pursued further, the image and prestige of Azhar graduates were quite high. As a senior officer with an Azhar degree acknowledges, Azhar did not provide him with an ‘*ulama*’ label, however, it gave him authority in religious matters.

The division of scholarly labour in the field of Islamic studies in Brunei is worth noting. Despite the strong expression of Islam in public life, the writing on Islamic subjects in Brunei has become the sole domain of fully trained religious scholars. It is true that some Brunei students who had completed secondary religious school opted to pursue non-religious career. Nevertheless, it is exceptionally rare that Bruneians who have not had religious training write on religious issues.³⁴ The emergence of numerous writers on Islam who have no higher religious education in other countries seems to have not encouraged their counterpart in the country. We do not see that the predilection has anything to do with the

³⁴As far as we can recall and find, only Pehin Jamil contributed articles on Islamic topics. This took place in the 1960s, when not many Azhari graduates could be found, see *Lambaian Islam*.

type of religious practice and understanding held in Brunei. It has more to do with the formal regulation about the spreading of Islamic teaching. A teacher of Islam is required to have a teaching license. It is argued that the present arrangement has positively contributed to the religious harmony and stability in the country. Religious innovations are discussed internally and if necessary introduced slowly and quietly. Open religious polemics and debates have never taken place.

Second, Extra-Curricular Activities and Future Career. When the first batch of Bruneian students were sent to al-Junied (Singapore), the Islamic College (Malaysia), and then al-Azhar University (Egypt), all the three countries were in the process of rapid change and major nation-building. Singaporeans and Malaysians were determined to build independent and progressive nation-states. Competing ideologies and parties emerged to win public support. Under all these Muslims also asserted their presence and influence in finding proper place in society and state. Language was one area which the Malays found the best way to express their thought and vision as can be seen in the holding of diverse language and literary activities at schools attended by Bruneian students at al-Junied and the Islamic College. They wrote poems, participated in art and drama performance and compete in debates held for schools. Several Bruneian students did excel in composing poems and writing drama scripts that a number of them became regular visiting writers for cultural magazines (Mohd. Salleh, 2004:159-165).

The hunger at home to spiritual foods and healthy entertainment also played an important role in encouraging these early missionary students to uplift their artistic and cultural works, in addition to excel in their religious study. On occasions of their return to Brunei during school holidays, they took an active part in making relevant Islamic holiday celebrations great occasions for Islamic art and cultural performance. They directed plays, initiated stage decoration, participated in various competitions in Qur'an recitation, debates and public speech. One of these early students who always took a role of a popular singer later occupied one of the key religious positions in the country, Chief *Qadi*. When one of his senior from Selangor later visited him, he recalled that he was ridiculed how he who had used to sing on the stage then could occupy the chief *qadi*-ship.

In Cairo, these Bruneian students also saw important stages in nation building. Under Gamal Abdul Nasser, Egypt during the 1950s and 1960s experienced social revolution as education became free and available to all citizens. His socialism made ordinary Egyptians rediscover their dignity and new opportunities. More specifically, the legacy of its close

link with Europe made Egypt proud of its intellectual tradition with strong impact of modern thought. Indeed, since 1961 al-Azhar University under its progressive leader, Mahmud Shaltut, launched major reforms to this old institution when, *inter alia*, general faculties such as engineering, economics, agriculture and medicine were introduced. As the price of books was kept low, students enjoyed easy access to various contemporary ideas and developments. Thus Bruneian students in Cairo during this period had luxuries to the richness of Egypt's intellectual tradition, beyond strictly religious teachings, and the youthful spirit of nation building. From what have been gathered from these students and what they have written it is evident that the social and intellectual environments in Egypt of the time was conducive to study, to learn the skill of progressive and confident citizens, to expand their intellectual horizon and even to feel the discipline of the military. For example, upon his return from completing his education at al-Azhar in 1963, Md. Zaim was soon appointed to assume a deputy chief *qadi* and in 1966 was elected President of the Brunei Youth Council (Mohd. Salleh, 2004:262-263). He propagated a slogan of "Awaken Youth for the Future".

Interestingly, the multifaceted skills that achieved by the early batch of students seem to have not been followed by those who began their university study after the 1970s. However, a new trend emerged when those had finished their secondary religious education at al-Junied or the Islamic College were sent to England for their first degree. Most of them were later assigned to non-religious posts. They were expected to disseminate their religious knowledge and discipline, while being professional in their respective fields of expertise.

If the early batch produced some of Brunei's great play writers, poets and orators, later students seem to have shifted their attention in strictly professional career. None of them indeed achieved any important note in arts or poetry.

VIGILANCE AGAINST CONTROVERSIAL IDEAS AND UNORTHODOX TEACHERS

Brunei's Islamic identity has evolved to face external challenges and distinguish it from other suspected interpretations such as *Wahhabism* and other radical scripturalism. Consonant with most other Malay states in the Peninsula which opted to discard the *Wahhabi* and the *Kaum Muda* movements, Brunei has been consistent in closing its doors to such movements. Although some may argue, as William C. Roff and Moshe Yegar have suggested, that such a religious policy can work better toward

maintaining the religious and political status quo, it is clear that the prevailing religiosity and Islamic discourse in the country have no other way but to favor the maintenance and implementation of the moderate, which means *jama'i* approach to Islamic teachings (Roff, 1974; and Yegar, 1979). How can such a policy be successfully implemented?

Brunei has been particular in maintaining its well-established religious approach and practice. It did not allow the development of religious conflict between the *Kaum Tua* and *Kaum Muda* experienced in other Muslim communities in the Malay world. The well-known argument on this issue can be found in the Mufti's address concerning *Wahhabism* or its derivatives and origins. "It is useless to repeat [the call] propagated by Ibn Taymiya [to oppose] the religious innovations [*bid'a*]" (Ismail, 1979:126-127). The emphasis of religious understanding and practice focuses on the pursuance of Islamic teachings taken from authoritative (meaning acceptable) teachers. Wayward scholars have no place in such religious structure. For instance, in rejecting the opinions of the reformist Rashid Rida (d.1937) and his predecessor Ibn Taymiya, the former Mufti argues (Ismail 1979:123) that the two well-known scholars were never known to study under authoritative teachers (*tiada mempunyai guru*), thus heavily depended on their own ideas without referring to standard Islamic books (*hanya ia membaca kitab-kitab dengan sendiri dan menggunakan akal berlebih-lebih*). The *Kaum Muda* are strongly criticized for their dismissal of other opinions and are more concerned with putting themselves as true Muslims at the expense of coexistence and pluralism.

The uniformity of the religious elite and their control over major religious institutions, including the centralization of religious school and mosque organization and the crucial one national version of Friday sermons, ensure stability and continuity of religious tradition. Indeed, several factors have worked to buttress the centralized management of Islamic affairs, as follows:

- Brunei has enjoyed stability and prosperity, especially after the oil boom period in the mid-1970s. Although, or rather due to the fact that, the country continues to maintain its emergency status in place following the 1962 rebellion, it has succeeded in keeping peace and order without any major political upsets, let alone unrest.
- An effective welfare system has been universally applied in the country since the 1950s. Despite the relatively low oil output, Brunei's oil wealth suffices to implement a quite generous welfare system for its population, which reached 329,000 in 2000, including some 30% expatriates.

- Centralization in various aspects of society, religion and state has been effectively pursued.
- Moderate religious practice: In implementing Islamic law, Brunei has been consistent in developing a strict application of the *Shafi'i* school. For example, as stated in the *Undang-Undang Ugama Islam* of 1955, only in specific cases when public welfare (*muslihat*) necessitates emergency actions then the endorsement of non-*Shafi'i* opinions can be considered. According to the former *Mufti*, based on al-Kurdi (d.1194 H), any *fatwa* and legal decision should be based on the unanimity of the Shaykhan, al-Nawawi (d.676/1276) and al-Rafi'i (d.623 H) and for less informed scholars (*laysu min ahl al-tarjih*) decisions should be referred to either the works of Ibn al-Hajar al-Haytami (d.1565) or those of al-Ramli (d.1004/1596).

Earlier this century, a warning was made by an anonymous writer on the necessity of relying on the authority for religious opinions. This brief text is very important, for our present scholarly understanding of the period, in helping us to determine the level of scripturalization in Brunei by the turn of this century. The author warns the Muslims not to follow “the teaching of the ignorant people who did not study under the knowledgeable figures” (*pengajar[an] orang yang jahil yang tiada mengambil daripada orang yang `alim*). It is clear that the text was written in response to the confusion in society resulting from the spread of the teachings of a particular religious group.

Interestingly, this religious group ridiculed those people who had followed the *'ulama's* (*fuqaha'*) way of performing intention (*niya*) for being “novices”. The arguments contained in the group’s criticisms and the alternatives they offered indicated that the group based its views on the Sufi approach to divinity. What mattered most for these people was the attainment of unity with God. For example, the *niya* was not just pronouncement and intention but, more importantly for them, connoted approaching God directly (*apabila hadir lah dhat Muhammad di dalam hati maka serasa hadir kan zat Allah ta`ala*).

Yet it is possible that the reason for writing the text was to resolve the controversies around the *niya* raised by the literalists and 'Abduh's followers. For them the attachment of the wording *usalli* etc. was regarded as useless or even religiously wrong (*bid'a*). But for the Shafi'is a *niya* connoted three basic elements, that is *qasad* (purpose), *ta'arrud* (concentration), and *ta'ayyun* (specification), which usually materialized in the wording of the “intention” for the prayers. As far as the study of

intellectual history is concerned, the reaction of the '*ulama*' to the reform movement can be clearly categorized as reform, especially in the context of Islam in nineteenth and twentieth century Southeast Asia. Anyway this reaction also contained many elements of readjustment and restatement of well-accepted religious practices and ideas.

If the above discussion shows the internal dynamism of Islamic society, then the administrative reform and socio-political changes since 1906 can be regarded as external factors to the religious reform.

First, the Impact of Islamic Revivalism on Brunei after the 1970s. As early as 1967, the idea of implementing Islam as the way of life has won some public support. In Brunei, the return of a few students from the al-Azhar University from 1963, as shown above, injected new religious vigor and agenda, including religious sophistication, new institution and Islamic policy. Consequently, Islamic revivalism was carried in more confident and consistent patterns; for example, the organization of conferences, the establishment of Islamic financial institutions, and the handling of religio-political issue.

Second, Islamic Conferences and Committees. Although Brunei has enjoyed full control over its foreign affairs only since 1984, it unofficially participated in many international Islamic forums. For example, during the 1960s and 1970s several religious leaders of Brunei participated in international Islamic conferences such as those held in Baghdad, Mogadisho, Cairo and Kuala Lumpur. During this period, Brunei participation was rather low profile. The situation has greatly changed since Brunei fully regained independence in 1984.

Brunei quickly joined various international Islamic bodies. Concomitant with its official admission into diverse regional and international organizations such ASEAN (Association of South East Asian Nations), UN (United Nations) and Commonwealth, Brunei became a full member in the Organization of the Islamic Conferences (OIC). Indeed, shortly after its admission, the Sultan attended the summit conference of the OIC held in Casablanca on January 16, 1984. Again, during the summit conference of the OIC in Dakar on December 1991, the Sultan actively participated in the Conference. By formally joining OIC, Brunei also has access to OIC affiliates such as Islamic Development Bank (IDB) and Islamic Economic and Social Council (ISESCO). For example, in 1989 Brunei held an international seminar on Islamic civilization in the Malay world in cooperation with ISESCO. The seminar was attended by prominent Muslim and non-Muslim scholars from all five continents. And, as we shall see shortly, Brunei has taken advantage of the experience of the IDB in running Islamic banks to

set up its own Islamic financial and banking system.

At the regional level, Brunei has actively taken part in various Islamic committees and bodies. For example, it soon joined the forum of senior religious officials of Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore. By the admission of Brunei, the forum which was set up in 1974, had four member states. The forum was originally designed to develop better cooperation in the field of Islamic calendar, especially regarding the beginning of the months of *Ramadan*, *Shawwal* and *Dhu al-Hijjah*. Lately the forum has included in its agenda various religious and social issues concerning the general affairs of Muslims in the region. Moreover, the closer cooperation between the members led to the holding of more activities in Brunei with the support of other members. A good example for such activities can be seen in the organization of two regional seminars on the concept of the *ahl al-sunna wal-jama'a* and Islamic values held in September 1985 and October 1988 respectively. During the seminars, papers were presented by Muslim scholars from Brunei and other Southeast Asian countries.

The active participation of Brunei in various Islamic organizations at the international and regional levels has many positive impacts upon Muslims in the country. Better knowledge and information about Brunei's link with Muslim countries and about their affairs through its participation in various Islamic organizations and committees made Bruneians more aware about their link to Muslim world. Accordingly, Bruneians became more eager to learn about them and to develop closer contact with them. Again, the structural links developed at a state level eased Bruneians to extend their links from the "old friends" to new Muslim countries. As a small country, Brunei has advantages of being accepted in the memberships of various Islamic organizations. On the other hand, Brunei's wealth adds weight to certain plans of these organizations.

Despite its openness and diplomatic warmth, Brunei is fully aware about its own limitation. It is true that Brunei has established diplomatic ties with many Muslim countries, including Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Malaysia, Indonesia, Oman and Iran. It has also joined other Muslim countries in giving support to Muslims in Palestine, Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina. Again, it set up various symbols of Islamic revivalism, including the opening of Islamic financial centers. Yet, Brunei continued to declare its commitment to a long established version of Islamic practice and belief system in the country. At the same time, interestingly, diverse changes took place in the organization and administration of Islam in the country. They have taken place smoothly without using new labels. Thus despite changes in the expression of Islam in the country, Brunei maintains its commitment to the beaten path.

Third, New Economic and Financial Institutions: Islamic System. The increasing pressure on many Muslim countries to have an Islamic system of finance led to the establishment of many new financial institutions. Since the mid 1970s, attempts were made among various Islamic circles to run Islamic banking system. In Brunei, concrete steps toward the foundation of Islamic financial institutions took place in 1990. Heavy Islamic symbols could be seen easily in public places and formal occasions in the country, since Islam has been the official religion (*ugama rasmi*) of the state. Moreover, Islamic revivalism in the 1970s led to the adoption of many Islamic activities, expressions and practices by individuals, society and state. The celebrations of the new century of the *Hijra* in Brunei during the late 1970s and early 1980s marked an important milestone in Brunei's commitment to Muslim world.

In the 1980s, several activities were geared to involve Bruneians in various issues concerning Muslims worldwide. For example, in response to increasing numbers of Islamic banks founded in many Islamic countries, in 1987 a committee for the foundation of Islamic Bank in Brunei was formed. More specifically, a definite plan for establishing an Islamic system in banking took place after the Ruler announced his support for the enterprise in late 1990.³⁵ Indeed, a year later in September 1991 an Islamic savings bank, known as *Tabung Amanah Islam Brunei* (TAIB), was established. It was modeled mainly on the existing example founded earlier in Malaysia. The primary aim of the institution was to provide financial services and business transactions in an Islamic way (Abdul Aziz, 1992:188). The success of the TAIB in attracting customers led to the undertaking of another major step in the Islamization of the financial system when on January 13, 1993 the International Bank of Brunei was restructured to become the Islamic Bank of Brunei. A few years later the Islamic Development Bank was founded.

Although Brunei Darussalam was not among the early protagonists of Islamic financial system, it did not want to be left behind by its brethren. Its participation in the increasingly popular and successful system shows that Brunei is well aware about its ties with the wider Muslim world.

Fourth, Religio-Political Issues. Political solidarity among Muslim countries has been seen by many scholars as shallow and non-substantial.

³⁵"As a nation with strong Islamic tradition, we have the obligation to take steps forward presenting ourselves among other countries which have set up [Islamic financial] enterprises" (*Sebagai sebuah negara yang mempunyai teras keislaman yang kuat, maka kita adalah wajib melangkah ke hadapan turut menampilkan diri bersama-sama mereka yang telah memulakan usaha*).

Expressions of solidarity were often regarded as lip-service, thus rarely materialized. Reasons for this tendency are traced back to the internal structure of modern Muslim governments and to their relations with the established states, particularly those of the West, as well as their relations with their Muslim neighbors. Yet in the past few years, when the economy of many Muslim countries got better, at the same time enjoying political stability, concrete common actions were, indeed, undertaken. For example, the Muslims did take almost a common stand toward the Afghan issue in the early 1980s when the Soviet Union had interfered in its affairs. Again, concrete actions were taken by diverse Muslim countries to help their brethren in Bosnia-Herzegovina. Their solidarity towards their co-religionists in these two countries, as we all know too well, did not stop at the moral solidarity alone.

In the case of small countries like Brunei, options to build “independent” foreign relations may be rather limited. Indeed, as the authors put it, foreign policies of such countries are heavily influenced by external factors. However, it is interesting that Brunei has succeeded in steering a more realistic approach to solidarity among Muslim countries. It never failed to join common stands adopted by other Muslim countries toward contemporary issues among Muslims.

Brunei has strongly supported the rights of the Palestinian people. The support was shown clearly in the speech by the Brunei ruler, when Brunei was admitted to the United Nations as the 159th member state in 1984. For Brunei, the overall solution of the Palestinian question was the only answer to the political crisis in the Middle East. As a member state in the OIC, not surprisingly Brunei has been applying the general policy of the organization toward Muslim countries. Similar straightforward approaches were adopted in dealing with the Soviet’s interference in Afghanistan and the independence of Bosnia-Herzegovina.³⁶ Nevertheless, Brunei faces a dilemma comparable to other Muslim countries when dealing with political crises among Muslim countries. For example, while Brunei had adopted cautious approaches to the Gulf crises, it joined other Muslim countries in calling for the end of wars between Iran and Iraq. Again, Brunei called for the immediate peaceful solution to the Kuwait crisis in order to establish peace in the region as a whole. Although Brunei officially condemned the Iraqi annexation of Kuwait, it strongly urged for negotiation and a political

³⁶Before the campaign for substantive support to the Bosnian struggles in 1993, Bruneians had mobilized fund for the cyclone victims in Bangladesh during the disaster in May 1991.

solution to the crisis. Indeed, the idea of Muslim unity was reiterated time and again by Brunei in various OIC meetings.

With the increasing awareness of the Bruneians about their brethren in other Muslim countries, they began to realize their importance. Thus, diplomatic ties were formally established with many of these countries. At least six Muslim countries have permanent representatives in Brunei. It will be interesting to look how the official positions toward Islamic issues have been accommodated by and molded in public opinion.

Fifth, Economic Growth and Islamic Movement in Brunei. It has been a common talk among scholars concerning the trickling downs of oil money from the Middle East to Southeast Asian Muslims aiming to resuscitate Islamization which often meant the spread of a particular approach to Islam, puritanical or *Wahhabi* movement or *Salafi* (Jones, 2004). In many parts of Southeast Asia, such financial and ideological support did bring new vigor into the local communities, pursuing the on-going process of puritanical movement, establishing new roots of the movement and, more significantly, founding many symbols of material modernity and sophistication. These trends can be observed among Muslim minorities throughout the region and certain urban Muslim communities in Malaysia. In Indonesia, the impact of such oil money-related development is so obvious that enumeration seems to be too redundant. Interestingly, Brunei has been resilient toward the *salafi* challenge, despite the quiet and eclectic internal change (Mansurnoor, 1996).

How could this process revolve? Being financially and religiously strong, Brunei could simply close its doors to the *salafi* entry and offer. For example, no Brunei student was ever sent on Brunei government scholarships, let alone on foreign ones, to any higher educational institution in Saudi Arabia. In the mid-1970s, when Bruneian students were withdrawn from Malaysian campuses, an envoy led by the incumbent *Mufti* was sent to Egypt and Saudi Arabia to observe and look for study opportunities (Abdul Hamid, 2004). Curiously toward the end of the 1980s, higher religious officials were sent to study in the “westernized” IAIN (*Institut Agama Islam Negeri*) of Jakarta. Normally, Brunei graduates in Islamic studies complete their master or doctoral programs in Malaysian universities and especially al-Azhar in Cairo. Put differently, by design and strength, in the second half of the 20th century, Brunei determined to overtly reject the puritanical onslaught in its diverse manifestation.

The control over education and its potential religious leaders has worked nicely toward administrative centralization. Many Bruneians have been sent

abroad to complete various degrees in Islamic studies. The intellectual training undergone by the Bruneians in various Islamic educational centers formed the strongest link between the Muslim world and Brunei. If in the past Bruneians, like their Southeast Asian coreligionists, had gone to Mecca for higher study, after the Pacific War (1939-1945), they joined al-Azhar University for their university education. Indeed, it is interesting to note that the leadership of the Department of Religious Affairs, and later the Ministry, has been dominated by Azhar-trained scholars.

Following the revival of the *Wahhabi* movement during the 1920s, Bruneians opted for positive withdrawal. For them the extent of intellectual contacts were curtailed in the Holy Cities, outside the formal pilgrimage seasons. Under such circumstances, al-Azhar with its open approach to *madhhab*-ism provided a more appropriate environment for study for Bruneians.³⁷ Indeed, the Brunei graduates of al-Azhar continued to influence the prevailing religious system and uphold the status quo, while introducing changes from within.

Having achieved greater scholarship, these Azhar-trained scholars had no difficulty in building ties with other Muslim scholars internationally. Before joining al-Azhar University, they had studied at the al-Junied Religious School in Singapore,³⁸ and the Islamic College of Malaya in Klang, Malaysia.³⁹ Under the arrangement, Brunei scholars completing their first degree at al-Azhar enjoyed access to a diverse academic circle. The years of interaction with different colleagues enabled them to be more open minded and provided them with a wider vision. As noted by Abaza (1994) in her study of Indonesian students in Cairo, such students brought home with them outlooks nurtured by diverse social, intellectual, political and cultural exchanges during their long stay in Egypt. Indeed, a Brunei student in Cairo reported in 1961 that his stay in Cairo not only introduced him to purely religious subjects but also to diverse disciplines, even nationalism and military drills (*Pelita Brunei*, 1961).

Again, various collections of writings and poems written by Brunei students abroad, including Cairo, indicate that they read widely and

³⁷It is necessary to note here that Mecca during this period continued to attract many students from Southeast Asia. Some of them, in fact, emerged as prominent scholars at home.

³⁸The first batch of Brunei students joined this institution in 1950, consisting of three students, including the present Minister of Religious Affairs. The sending of Bruneians to al-Junied continued until 1983, when the leavers of Brunei Arabic Secondary School could have joined al-Azhar University directly without preparatory years.

³⁹The three students, who finished their Islamic secondary education, joined the Islamic College in 1956. They were followed by others until the early 1970s.

participated in current scholarly debates and development. Nevertheless, the strongest link maintained by these graduates was with their *almamater*. Talented students continued to be sent to Cairo and, lately, Amman for higher religious studies. Again, the experts in the different religious disciplines have come mostly from al-Azhar University; whereas middle rank officials generally completed their higher studies at religious institutions in Singapore and Malaysia.

Despite their erudition in religious scholarship, Bruneians who graduated from al-Azhar opted for the evolutionary approach towards reform in the religious field. It is interesting to note here that in 1953, a religious organization, *Ikhwan al-Muslimin*, was founded in Brunei, in the new booming oil town to be more precise. However, it had obviously nothing to do with the *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* of Egypt. Is it possible that the adoption of the name was inspired by the popularity of the Egyptian *Ikhwan al-Muslimun* during the period? Indeed, the *Ikhwan* of Brunei initiated various activities which had a novel orientation. For example, it actively organized public celebrations on salient occasions in the Islamic calendar, including the birthday of the Prophet Muhammad, the *Hijra* and the sending down of the Qur'an. Yet, as can be seen in the charter of the movement, it is evident that it inspires to propagate some mild forms of reformist agenda. Curiously, during this period no Bruneian had graduated from al-Azhar.

Sixth, Some Room for Non-Formal Actors. In the second half of the 1990s, the local economists note that the role of the state in Brunei's development, however, progressively decreases when the transformation stage proceeds, giving more and more space to the private sector (Ismail & Abdul Amin, 1998:53). The pervasive and ubiquitous presence of the state in every aspect of life gives little for other societal elements to actively pursue and realize their own contribution to society. The formation of the Religious Council is designed to assist the ruler in religious matters. Yet its membership is limited strictly to male over 21 years old and civil servant. Moreover, in order to assist the *Mufti* in performing his duty to issue the *fatwa*, a legal committee is formed. Again, its membership must come from among civil servants (Laws of Brunei, 1984:25-29).

The organization of mosques shows how the government has meticulously tackled religious activities in the country. By putting all mosques under the aegis of the Religious Council, the government enjoys direct control over the mosques. All private mosques thus must be registered with and its management transferred to the Council (Laws of Brunei, 1984:63). Any approved private-property-cum-mosque automatically becomes public

endowment (*waqf*). All mosque functionaries, including the *imam* and *khatib*, are appointed by the government and given the license (*tauliah*). As such the functionaries may be dismissed at any time by the authorities (Laws of Brunei, 1984:65). The duties of the mosque functionaries include the maintenance of order, good conduct and standard Islamic practices among the surrounding Muslim population as well as the provision of any necessary information to the Religious Council for attention and action.

The strict control over the provision of Islamic education through the possession of the license has limited the possibility of novel teaching, let alone religious controversies (Laws of Brunei, 1984:88). Religious orthodoxy and *status quo* thus have prevailed. Interestingly, attempts to disseminate such controversial movements did materialize as can be seen in the emergence and even popularity of such movements as *Jama'ah al-Arqam*, *Silat Lintau* and other transient teachers.

Since Islamic orthodoxy (*ahl al-Sunnah*) has become the official version of religion, it needs to be defended, elaborated and propagated. The propagation of Islam is carefully and centrally undertaken through formal education and public institutions. Almost all Muslim children are given religious instruction regardless of their formal education. In addition, specifically designed religious schools and courses are offered. Islamic *Da'wa* Center, formed in 1985, aims at the propagation of Islam internally and externally, including research and publication on Islamic issues and current affairs (Mohd. Zain, 1998:293-298).

Interestingly, the ruler openly declared that the duty of providing religious education and pursuing Islamic propagation should not be dominated and limited to religious officials. All segments of the Muslim community are encouraged to take part in such endeavors (*Borneo Bulletin*, 9 May 1997). However, the ubiquity of state powers and patronage offers little to non-state actors in Islamic education.

Indeed, in recent years, the mosques have been supported with the Internet link and was to be used as a place to disseminate useful information and protect the Muslims from corrupted ideas by having an access to and understanding wide ranges of development (*Muslimin*, September 1999). Concomitant with the call for more public and private participation in development, the mosque functionaries were urged to upgrade their religious knowledge and their dedication to educate society. Mosques should be supported with a library for the public (*Pelita Brunei*, 3 February 1999).

The Union of Malay Intelligentsia, ASTERAWANI, has emerged as an active NGO (Non Governmental Organization) in promoting Malay culture, literature and language. Government and people (NGO) should work

together on the implement of Islam. “*Dalam konteks negara ini dapat dianggap bahawa gerakan dakwah dan tarbiah adalah dimonopoli oleh kerajaan, kerana ruang yang ada tidak diisi oleh gerakan rakyat*” (Hashim, 1999:101). Only IQRA has been in operation. The absence of informal channel and occasion for religion leaders and scholars to meet the people may have played a role in the lackadaisical development of Islamization. Islamization must be pursued through education system. The *status quo* wanted to maintain Western education since it has proven its success and it doubted the viability and suitability of Islamic education. Graduates from Islamic education system are believed to have been too narrowly oriented (Hashim, 1999:198-199).

The Head of the Department of Religious Affairs, in his editorial column of *Majalah* (no.31, 1973), states that development must be based on a balance between spiritual and material components. The government has an objective of creating religious awareness among Bruneians by pursuing many different means such as education, publication and mass media. By providing a strong moral basis in society, the image of the country is enhanced. But this is not enough. The Bruneians have to prove that they excel in economic activities too. The government has provided many facilities and supports, the Muslims should take advantage and compete with other segments successfully. Muslims should throw away from their mind any idea of superiority or monopoly of economic field by certain groups. They should enter and show that they are capable and open to competition. Only by achieving this, then, not only the image of Muslims is raised but they also prove that Islam is force for prosperity and progress.

Friday sermon serves as an indirect and informal institution to guide the Muslims. Seen in the use of the Friday sermon not only in calling for purely religious piety but in many aspect of societal and state matters, it is clear that consciously and carefully, the sermon has been a medium to modernize in accordance with Islamic precept. For example, the sermon focused on the importance of maintaining proper decorum in neighborhood solidarity, respect of others, visits among family members, colleagues and friends (*Pelita Brunei*, 21 January 2000).

The Center of Islamic Mission (*Pusat Da'wah Islamiah*) emerges as an organized body to disseminate Islamic knowledge and public morality. The Center has been very active in disseminating religious knowledge through publication, television presentation and radio/public talk. First of all, it was founded in 1985 primarily to pursue internal Islamization and the spread of Islamic teachings to other segments of society. Its publication

covers various aspects of religious issues, social questions and public life in general. In pursuing its mission, the Center has fulfilled the key role of socio-religious engineering. As a part of the government's agency, the Center exemplify how many facets of religious expression and institutions have been fully exploited by the state and taken advantage by religious leaders to advance their respective, corresponding though most of the times, objectives.

Seventh, Asian Crisis and Islamic Response. When ASEAN member countries were plunged into mainly financial crisis in 1997, Brunei was no exception. However, the nature of its economy which did not depend on DFI, despite heavily depended on single export commodity, suffered less shock and shorter period of recovery. The heavy financial losses that the country saw at this juncture as can be seen in the collapse of Amedio continue to invite more questions. What is relevant to this paper is the fact that despite the crisis Brunei continues to be immune from the radical trend in religio-political expression? Some scholars suggest that since Brunei had not nurtured any root of puritanical movement, it could easily eradicate the earliest growth of Islamic radicalism in the country. Let's examine some relevant undertakings in this direction.

As the number of foreign workers dwindled in the late 1990s, due mainly to the slow down in the economy, the government also tightened its control over the illegal workers. Routine checks over the pockets of possible illegals have been intensified as the police and immigration officers rounded them and detained those who fail to produce necessary documents, especially passports. Until today, as far as public statements are concerned, no suspected terrorist was detained. In one of the many police operations during 2002, several foreign workers in the construction industry in the capital of Bandar Seri Begawan were caught to possess "old bombs", however, they were soon released after getting expert confirmation that the bombs belong to the Pacific War period and apparently are of little military value.

At the religious front, the MRA and the Islamic *Da'wah* Centre reiterated its war against the deviationists. Public lectures on pulpit, mass media and audio – and video – channels were intensified reminding Muslims from the danger of controversial teachings and unauthorized teachers. On the spot, in cooperation with the police and the immigration officers, religious officials hunted Muslims entering the country without showing proper Islamic behavior. Although the operation was loudly declared to stop Muslims residing in the country from consuming or purchasing alcohol, it was also effective in detecting the entry of suspected Muslims.

CONCLUSION

Islamic education in Brunei Darussalam resulted in the formation on neatly-structured religious elite and at the same time reflected social reproduction engineered by the ruling class. Although the early model of education experienced major decline after the 18th century, Brunei continued to maintain close ties with other Islamic centers, which did not hesitate to send teachers and also received Bruneian students. Interestingly, during the serious decline of Islamic education in the country in the second half of the 19th and early 20th centuries, Brunei did not welcome the reformist movement or it did not attract the latter's missionaries. Obviously, the fixed and elaborate structure of the religious authority under the Sultan had worked to favoring the status quo.

Although the systematization of religious education was *sine qua non* fulfillment of religious and bureaucratic needs, in the final analysis, the broader scheme of centralization in the context of power maintenance device and strategy cannot be ruled out. First of all, the choice of curriculum and teachers at home was tuned to the existing religious practice and at the same time concocted to sustain continuity. When reform in Islamic education was launched in the mid-1950s, the Johor model of religious classes (*madrasa*) in the afternoon was chosen supported by teachers and their whole tradition to start the Brunei *madrasa*. Next, the sending of Bruneians to a set of higher religious education in Singapore, the Malay Peninsula and Egypt cannot be treated in isolation from the overall religious policy in the country which aimed at sophistication and at the same time continuity and stability.

The predominance of the Azhari graduates in the formation of religious discourse and religious bureaucracy has become self-reproducing mechanism in Brunei's religious life. By adhering to well-defined religious practices and belief system, Brunei has maintained a relatively stable religious life. The exclusivist approach to Islam has not been given any place to operate. The strength of its religious bureaucracy, dominated by the Azhar graduates, has been effective in limiting the influence of controversial ideas and figures, even though some might argue that despite its success in achieving religious uniformity and stability, Bruneians may still be prone to new religious movements. The religious establishment seems to be aware of such challenges as suggested by their positive response to various developments in the Muslim world. Attempts in the country have been made to show that Bruneians are joining their Muslim brethren to live Islamically within the modern world. In advertently radicalism never found roots among the population in the country.

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The Mosque of Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin as one of the important place for praying and teaching and learning of Islam in Brunei Darussalam.