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Space, Place, and Identity: How Migration have Transformed Kampong Ayer (Brunei)

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Abstract:

Kampong Ayer was and is historically and culturally a significant place in Brunei. However, years of resettlement programmes and destruction caused by fires have resulted in droves of people moving in and out. This paper examines Kampong Ayer from the perspective of human geography, the social construction of space over time. Migration, as a manifestation of globalization in the last thirty years, is a key element in this process.

Keywords: *Kampong Ayer, migration, Brunei, space*

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Space, Place, and Identity: How Migration have Transformed Kampong Ayer

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INTRODUCTION

Foucault in one of his essays lamented that spaces have been largely neglected in the social sciences. “Space was treated as the dead, fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the other hand, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic” (Foucault, 1980, p. 70). Over the last few decades however, the study of space has been gaining momentum. Litanies of researches have been conducted and it became clear that the influence of space is undeniable. Foucault’s words were repeated as a reminder that time and space should be treated with similar importance. But just as it was gaining momentum, the unrelenting effect of globalisation has almost struck a blow to the discipline of space/place. It was announced to be the “death of geographies”. However, geographers have retaliated against this misconception. Time/space compression does not entail the death of geography. Geographers highlighted that with the unrelenting expansion of globalisation and its impact on inequality, the study of space and place has become more important. Geographers have also incorporated migration into their work as it is an important element in their research of time and space.

For this reason, there is a growing need to inspect further spaces in Brunei. Kampong Ayer became our focus of research due to the importance it has on political and cultural discourses in the country. True to Foucault’s word, much of Kampong Ayer discussion have focused on its history but not how space and place are actively conceived. Furthermore, this paper addresses how space is the subject of negotiation for power and sense of belonging among the residents and with the state.

Kampong Ayer has a very rich historical background in Brunei society. For centuries, the Bruneian people have lived in Kampong Ayer and their cultural roots were sown in the river that flows through the heart of Brunei. The cultural fabric of Bruneian society can be traced to Kampong Ayer. So much so that many of the practices and rituals that were developed in Kampong Ayer have spread as its residents moved out. From 1952 onwards, the Brunei government aggressively pursued resettlement programmes to shift the population inland (Yunos, 2008). Modernization and population increase have put pressure on Kampong Ayer. It could not sustain the ever growing electrical consumption of its population. The results were catastrophic. Fires completely ravaged the collection of houses and in turn, the communities; and in some cases, entire villages were destroyed.

In addition, Kampong Ayer has not escaped the reality of migration. It has transformed Kampong Ayer fundamentally. The symbolic meanings that Kampong Ayer has evoked within the consciousness of Bruneians have changed considerably. In their minds Kampong Ayer has changed from a functional living space to a place that belongs in the past (though this perspective is often tinged with a sense of romanticism and nostalgia). The contradictions between what is real and what is imagined have interesting implications.

This research is also interested in the people that have been influenced by migration. Migration is a disruptive process that uproots one's life from one place to another that has different culture, norms, values and practices. This results in contestation.

What are the consequences on identity formation? How does place change people and how do people change place through migration? The data for this research are derived from unstructured individual and group interviews from a sample of three groups: Indonesian migrants moving into Kampong Ayer, local residents who still live in Kampong Ayer and lastly, local residents who migrated out of Kampong Ayer. The first group consists of five Indonesians who live in Kampong Ayer, age ranging from 22 to 45. Secondly, three local residents who are still residing in Kampong Ayer, and lastly, five local residents who have migrated out of Kampong Ayer, age ranging from 23 to 25 years (Universiti of Brunei Darussalam students). A sample of three groups from different backgrounds was used as they provided contesting narratives of their lives in relation to place through mobility in and out of Kampong Ayer.

Space and identity

Before discussing the findings we examine some relevant work on how space and identity are conceptualized. There are scholars who argue that globalisation has a deterritorialising effect on emotional bonding with place. Place no longer hold significance due to time–space convergence. Yet, geographers disagree with this view. This is because globalisation has unequal consequences. Technological advances in the form of the internet or other telecommunication spread only to the richer countries while the poorer countries are excluded (Murray & Overton, 2014). Technologies have transformed spaces/places, but they created inequalities and widened the gap between the rich and poor. International migration has also been largely dominated by the movement of population from the poor to the richer countries. What is clear is that the impact of globalisation are unequal, and space/place has become highly stratified. A romanticised notion of globalisation should not blind us toward such differences.

Moreover, one should not conflate the idea of spatial reach with social depth (Morgan, 2004). Massey (1994) argued that in a globalising and modernising world characterised by inequality and a sense of anomie, place provides security and assurance; a point of orientation filled with disorientation in a rapidly changing world. Indeed, the power of places can be so overwhelming that it becomes the sole factor in identity creation (Massey, 1995; Rose, 1995).

Even more so, space and place are not apolitical; the productions of space itself are infused with political agenda propagated by the state and dominant culture (Lefebvre, 1991). Lefebvre (1991) further argued that this is because the exercise of domination over place is important because it helps normalises socio–spatial relations in the sense that it further reinforces the unequal power relations between individuals or groups. The conceptualisation of space and place is constitutive of power (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003). For this reason, space is not “the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile” (Foucault, 1980) but it is constantly in a state of flux; subject to contestation, competition and negotiation because it is the arena in which politics are being played out. As such, rootedness in a particular place can be seen as individuals asserting control over the spaces by constructing images that reflect their particular realities (Rodman, 2003). Through imagined communities and imagined geographies, a certain mysticism and reverence are attached to the space in a way that evokes strong emotions and bonding. The

formulation and ascription of these images on places are often guarded fiercely by the primate community, because it relates heavily to power and identity (Low & Lawrence-Zúñiga, 2003).

This is primarily because place have unique realities: it has an existential dimension to it. It is full of meanings, experiences and memories of individuals which are shared in a macroscopic scale, producing “an assemblage of cultural symbols, discourses and representations”. It creates a distinctive element to places, which distinguishes it from other places. From this, Mayhew (2004) argues that the distinctiveness of a place can create emotional attachment for its residents: a “sense of place”. Yet, with increasing migratory patterns of a global population, the idea of “sense of place” should be scrutinised even more. With migration, this process of uprooting has changed the concept of the “sense of places”. For Massey (1994), it is no longer useful to view sense of place in a singular, parochial perspective. Indeed, an unprecedented increase in mobility has resulted in the construction of culturally multiple and dynamic places that are no longer isolated from other places.

Yet, reality has a way of unravelling these imaginations nurtured and constructed carefully by the locals. This often come (but not confined to) to migration in and onto space. Migration introduces new disruptive elements into particular spaces, and intensifies negotiations over what space means.

What we understand regarding identity can be gleaned from the influential work of Goffman. Goffman sees identity as dramaturgical: interactions are seen as a theatrical performance (Goffman, 1959). In this way individuals formed their conception of self through social interactions with their surroundings. Indeed, identity is an ongoing process, negotiated through our interactions with other. In this instance, individuals are active agents in the process; though it is still bounded by the society at large. This is because the individual must rely on others to complete the idea of ‘self’ through reaffirmation of their identity: either positively or negatively. This process would ferment and reinforce further their identity through actions performed by the individuals. If a person received positive label, he/she would act out based on that positively received label, and if otherwise, it is negatively received, individuals might act out differently. Similarly, if the individuals received labels by generalised other in a way that directly contradict their conception of themselves, he/she might act out differently as a way to break free from the

label. Identity is a collaborative processes that are incomplete without social interactions with others.

This idea of identity formulated by Goffman is useful, but insufficiently developed because it does not take into account cross cultural interactions, which added further complexity to formation of identity for migrants and for the original settlers. Rabikowska (2010) points out that normality is subjective across culture. What is normal in one part of the world may not be so in another part of the world. Yet, normality is not fixed, it is also subject to changes. What is clear though is that migrations have resulted in displacement of groups of population onto places that differ in norms, values, and culture. Indeed, the concept of place and identity should be positioned in a context whereby migration becomes the important determinant in the construction of the meaning of the place (Lawson, 1999).

In the context of cultural space, it becomes clear that there is a certain connotation attached to it: that it belongs to a certain culture. But belonging implies inclusion of certain people only. And inclusivity cannot exist without excluding other bodies that are deemed as the “others”. Indeed, in a cultural space, racialised bodies that are not accepted as part of the imagined community residing within that space often evoke a sense of unease among the locals (Puwar, 2006). The burden of doubt is placed upon the outsiders, transgressions are exaggerated; and thus seen as evidence that they do not belong in that particular space. The presences of outsiders turn this space into a Panopticon: outsiders are scrutinised (Foucault, 1980).

Indeed, the mere presence of “foreigners” raises suspicion and breaks away the predictability of the routine for the residents. On the other hand, to be accepted as “normal” is seen as an achievement for migrants because it implicitly means that they are included within the invisible crowds and their mere presence no longer poses threats to the public (Goffman, 1971; Rabikowska, 2010). Rabikowska (2010) further argued that migrants often see normalcy in a symbolic sense which signify a stabilisation of their lives. To have that sense of normalcy implies that they have managed to, and indeed, succeeded in forming a new version of normalcy, different than in their homeland; but still imitating it to a certain degree. Rabikowska (2010) also added that achieving normalcy is seen as bringing back a sense of order after uprooting their lives from their homeland into an environment with different norms, values, culture, language and lifestyle. What is normal in the migrants’ homeland differs from the new settlement. Thus, migrants would need

to adapt to their surroundings, which has implication on the way interactions are conducted. And if we accept that interactions are an important component in playing out identity in social setting, we can argue that migration results in the formation of a new identity as a way of adaptation to the new culture.

Historical and political significance of Kampong Ayer

Part of the reason why the history of Kampong Ayer is important in this analysis is because it helps us trace the evolution of Kampong Ayer and the implication it has on how power is exercised in this society; its significance for interaction between migrants and settlers' population; and what it means to belong to Bruneian society.

Kampong Ayer is regarded as the cradle of Brunei civilisation. The long-lasting presence of Kampong Ayer represents memories of Brunei histories. But Kampong Ayer as a space has undergone significant changes over the course of its history. For much of its glorious years especially during the 15th century under the reign of Sultan Bolkiah (Haji Abdul Latif Haji Ibrahim, 2012, pp. 21–68); it was suggested by historians (Chi, Cleary, Ka, pp. 117–123; Nicholl, 1975, pp. 85) that Kampong Ayer was situated closer to the mouth of the Brunei Bay than its current position, of “three miles from the coast along a river”. The settlement as it was back then was a reflection of the dominant character of the kingdom.

Yet, as Brunei's regional influence waned, Kampong Ayer's position gradually receded. By the time James Brooke became Rajah of Sarawak, Kampong Ayer was firmly situated on the bank of Bandar Seri Begawan. When the British residency developed a stranglehold on Brunei politics, Kampong Ayer became a shell of its former self.

As the British authorities decided to resettle Kampong Ayer's population, it began a downward trajectory that chipped away at the very soul of the place. This mass migration was suggested by M.S.H Arthur, the then British resident in Brunei, who claimed that the current condition and environment were unfit for habitation. He further argued that the development of Brunei cannot be undertaken under such conditions and that subsequent mass migration inland is important. However, the British appointed health officer in 1921 refuted McArthur claims. The health officer posited that Brunei was naturally a “riverine dweller” and any effort to relocate the Bruneian inland would be highly misguided (Leake, 1990: pp. 42).

There is a need for further research regarding the true reason why McArthur recommended that the population in Kampong Ayer be relocated inland. The British has a long history of forcefully moving out inhabitants in a settlement that they deemed as a hotbed for any “suspicious” activities. Regardless of the (true) reason why policies of migration were enacted under the British, Kampong Ayer began to lose its political and cultural influence over Brunei. That Brunei is Kampong Ayer and Kampong Ayer is Brunei seems like a distant past; a pre-European legacy. The policies of relocation were continued under SOAS III (the 28th Sultan of Brunei, lauded as the “architect of modern Brunei”).

During WWII, the Japanese drove the British out of Brunei. But what came after was far more important in tracing the evolution of Kampong Ayer. The struggle for Borneo had taken its toll on the development of the built environment in inland Brunei; but Kampong Ayer was able to come out of the war unscathed. Post 1946 saw Kampong Ayer grow even bigger. By 1971, it represented 60% of the whole of the Brunei population despite unceasing resettlement programmes initiated by the government during the 1950s (Mansurnoor, 1997).

There is also a need to contextualise the revitalization of Kampong Ayer in Brunei’s geopolitical situation at the time. Prior to Brunei’s independence, Brunei was caught in the Cold War between the USA and China/USSR. By way of proxy, the Chinese state had funnelled money into Southeast Asia region as a way to encourage communism in countries where the British and the US had a firm stronghold. Communism was a way to undermine the hegemony that the British and the US had established in Southeast Asia. Communism spread to most of Southeast Asia with left wing rebellions popping up all over the region.

Moreover, Malaysia and Indonesia had a rocky relationship when confrontation between the two threatened to spill over to Brunei in the mid-1960s. Brunei and Singapore insisted that it would not fall under the same fate as East Timor did under Indonesia (Emmers, 2004, pp. 73). This is compounded by the fact that Malaysia, in response to Indonesian expansionist foreign policies, wanted to grow its sphere of influence as well as to curb the ambitions of Indonesia. To do so, Malaysia set its ambitions on Brunei. Domestically, it also had another reason to secure the Borneo region. Malaysia wanted to avoid separatism fuelled by left wing ideologies in both Sarawak and Sabah (Emmers, 2004, pp. 69–72).

When the British decided to leave Brunei, it was met with opposition from Malaysia and ambivalence from the Brunei government itself. For Malaysia, if Brunei became an independent nation-state it would make its *de jure* claim on Brunei invalid; while on the Bruneian side, to be free from the stranglehold of Britain would be liberating but at the same time, Brunei was not ready to face such a hostile geopolitical environment without any support from the British. However, by 1975, both Indonesia and Malaysia recognised that Brunei's independence was a fait accompli. Both countries agreed to enlarge membership of ASEAN as a conciliatory approach. Brunei distanced itself from the Association, and instead relied on its external association with the British. But in 1979, when the conservative government pulled out of the region for good, an agreement was reached between Brunei and the British. A treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in which the Sultan would be granted full sovereignty of Brunei by the British. As a compromise, the British would also provide a private battalion (the Gurkha Rifles) to deal with the security anxieties of the Sultanate. In 1984 when Brunei became independent, it joined ASEAN.

Despite that, Brunei began developing an ideology of its own in the 1960s to distinguish itself from other states in the Malay world. Prof Madya Dr. Haji Awang Asbol bin Haji Mail (2012) posited that the monarchical ideology based on religious and traditional line has always been an inherent aspect of Brunei political system. However, the development of formal ideologies in the form of MIB (Malay, Islamic, Monarchical ideologies) would only come after the events that preceded the political unrests of the 60s. It bolstered its monarchical system with racial and religious ideas that helped with the political legitimisation of Brunei as a nation-state (Pehin Jawatan Dalam Seri Maharaja Dato Seri Utama Dr. Haji Awang Muhammad Jamil Al Sufri, 1997; Emmers, 2004, pp. 72; Talib, 2002). Under the British, Kampong Ayer represented a subaltern space (a space that is segregated from the dominant power structure that prioritised land-based development); but after independence, Brunei promoted Kampong Ayer as a cultural space central to its national identity.

From this point on, the construction of cultural spaces was guided by narratives and myths that helped the formation of an imagined community in which Bruneian identity was promoted. The role of Kampong Ayer as cultural hearth was highlighted in the political discourses of Brunei at the time. As a result, Kampong Ayer enjoyed a renaissance bolstered by modern infrastructural

developments initiated by the government. In 1971, Kampong Ayer made up 60% of the whole of the Brunei population (Mansurnoor, 1997).

But, Kampong Ayer itself was not immune to the effects of globalisation and modernisation. Its inhabitants started moving out of the place in droves reducing the settlement significantly. At the same time, external migration into Brunei accelerated; Indonesians in particular were attracted to the low rental accommodation in houses left behind by the Bruneians who moved out of Kampong Ayer which started at a small scale during the 50s but grew over the years reaching its peak in the 80s (Yunos, 2008). The prices of houses in Kampong Ayer also started to decline when it was clear that a modern lifestyle was incompatible with the kampong. It was largely isolated from mainland and the availability of affordable cars was an incentive for the kampong residents to move out. Moreover, the wooden stilts of which houses in Kampong Ayer were built could not sustain the increasing electrical usage of the modernising population. The development of affordable housing estates inland was the straw that broke the camel's back. Frequent incidents of fire ravaged the houses and in turn, the communities in the kampong; and in some cases, entire villages were destroyed. The local economy in Kampong Ayer also deteriorated as more and more residents left for the mainland.

But the post-colonial construction of a Brunei Malay identity revitalized Kampong Ayer and preserved its particular image and imagination. For instances, migrants other than Brunei were denied land ownership in Kampong Ayer. But Bruneian policies exist almost in contradiction of itself. Resettlement programmes were initiated further that would shift the inhabitants of Kampong Ayer inland. Even then, the idea that only Bruneians should live in Kampong Ayer persisted in the 1980s.

Despite these developments, the government continued to promote Kampong Ayer as the cradle of Bruneian culture and identity. Only Bruneians could own properties in the kampong. At the same time resettlement programmes were initiated to shift the population of Kampong Ayer inland.

Construction of space and place: Three narratives

According to one of our respondents who has now migrated out of Kampong Ayer, he sees his experience of Kampong Ayer as intensely positive. He pinpointed the communal strength of the place, which he believed was unmatched by any other place. In his words:

The sense of community in Kampong Ayer is very strong. For example, any daily necessities such as salt, sugar, even gas tank are shared among the neighbours. It is normal for the neighbours to come in and hang out with us. This is not just limited to any celebratory activities such as weddings and hari raya, but also in the everyday life of a resident in Kampong Ayer. However, that sense of community is even more pronounced during weddings or any celebrations in Kampong Ayer. Verandas are shared to accommodate visitors for the weddings. Essentially, ownership of any properties is very communal. Any deeds are reciprocated by the neighbours. For example, if you help me with this; I'll help you with that. In spite of anything that might occur, or whatever might occur: happiness and sadness are shared among the community. The burdens of loss are shared by the whole neighbourhood. This is because I consider my neighbours as my own blood, and they consider me as their blood. Any loss that might have been inflicted to them, we feel that sense of loss also.

Objectively, living on land is more suitable for modern life; but I find that living in Kampong Ayer is in my body and my soul. Sometimes, late at night; I would wake up and just, start thinking about my childhood in Kampong Ayer; just the crowd coming into your houses and exchange pleasantries. The sound of their voices overwhelmed by the sound of the engines of the boat running and the chatter of the people outside, the river crashing onto the wooden planks of the stilts: it almost sound very musical to my ears. If there is an opportunity of living back in Kampong Ayer, I think I would

Another respondent also further added that:

I was born here, and I've lived here for 60 something years. I lived inland for a brief period of time but it was completely different. My heart is in this place. I did apply for housing scheme on land, but I was rejected. Instead, I got placement in one of the new housing in Kampong Ayer. I think it is a sign from God, that I am meant stay in this place all my life. Alhamdulillah.

The general sentiment among the samples of Kampong Ayer is such that it is a tremendous experience to live in Kampong Ayer. However, when asked in light of the recent development of Kampong Ayer, respondents have collectively stated that it was like "living in a refugee camp that you see in the news everyday". Other respondents added that:

I feel like the condition of Kampong Ayer then, and now is a little bit like a ghetto. You would see a lot of kids involved in shady practices. Drug trades in Kampong Ayer are quite the problem. Kids were used as runners for their drug dealing friends or family. Syabu (meth) was a real problem just as much as glue sniffing is. When I was in my school days, fights would break out almost every day. And the stench is just unbearable at times, especially during low tide.

In light of the migration of Indonesians into Kampong Ayer, the sentiments among Bruneians were somewhat mixed. Certain respondents were generally positive about the Indonesians, while some were more cautious, and others looked at these migrants in negative light. All of the respondents that still live in Kampong Ayer were generally more cordial with the Indonesians. One of the respondents stated that:

What if your relative from Limbang came to Brunei and wanted to move into Kampong Ayer, would you stop them? Then there's your answer. Nationality does not matter in living. We as a Bruneian should show them the way of life of people in Brunei: live as a family, live in harmony. It should not apply differently when migrants want to live here, because here is better for them.

In contrast, the Bruneians that have left Kampong Ayer were generally more cautious or see Indonesian migrants as detrimental to the image of Kampong Ayer.

One of the respondents stated that:

There's nothing wrong with migrants living in Kampong Ayer. Of course, at first we were quite suspicious of them. We really do not know what to expect from them. So we were a bit cautious with how we interact with them. Only after they settled down, and came to ceremonies, religious events and social gathering and make themselves known to us that they weren't a threat where we started to warm up to them. It also helps that they started coming to the mosque on a regular basis. In our eyes, they weren't a threat as soon as they adopt the Bruneian lifestyle. Though in Kampong Setia, they are very hostile to migrants selling stuff on their Kampong. They want people to buy their products, rather than outsiders.

One respondent was negative toward the migrants:

For me, I find the idea of non-Bruneians living in Kampong Ayer to be absolutely inappropriate. I am in a state of unease in the presence of these migrants. Not because I hate Indonesians or anything, but to allow them to come in and live here is like, fundamentally changing the identity of Kampong Ayer itself. They should live on land and make a living for themselves. It is just absurd for them to live there [referring to Kampong Ayer].

When we conducted the group interview, the issues of how they adapted on land were very heated. Our respondents were very emotional due to the way the inland population see them. The position that we were in, as researchers without any roots in Kampong Ayer were highlighted over and over again. In the end, it was out of necessity that we had to leave the topic, shifting into other areas before asking them again to summarise how they feel about from Kampong Ayer and settling elsewhere:

Some of the Kampong Ayer people are very ashamed of their roots. We don't. We are very proud by the fact that we come from Kampong Ayer. Kampong Ayer has made us the way we are. There were a lot of instances where people straight up insult us, and that has led to some fights. When we play football, you can hear a lot of whispers saying "Oh, they are from Kampong Ayer", of course they are this and that. It is as if that our behaviour are being looked at and then generalised to every Kampong Ayer residents currently living on land. But, whatever.

I mean, there weren't anything we did differently. Of course we had to tone down everything that we did. From our reaction, the way we speak, the way we dress. But that's about it. People on land view us in a negative manner because they have this perception that people from Kampong Ayer are unruly, uncivilised, low class and poklen¹. That is really unfair on a lot of us. The poklen doesn't really represent us in anyway. You see poklen originating from land also, but because we are from Kampong Ayer, suddenly it is expected of us to behave that way.

From the Indonesian migrants' point of view, they adapted to Kampong Ayer:

I don't have any problems with living in Kampong Ayer. In fact, I love it for the unique environment that I am not used to back in Indonesia. The people have been very welcoming of me. They would come to my house and hang out on my front porch and have a conversation. In one sense, Kampong Ayer is better than what I am used to in Indonesia. It is cheaper, my house is very near to where I work [logging company] and it is convenient because it is near to retail store. I don't really have to pay much because it is sponsored by my employers. The pay is also quite nice compared to the one back in Indonesia. It is dangerous and exhausting but it pays the bill and pays for my family back home. I have a lot of mouths to feed especially after one of my sister's husband passed away few years ago. She has two children and no means of providing livelihood for her family. So, as a man, I have to provide for all my kin. I keep in contact with them through WhatsApp. I am very anxious at times, just because I don't really know how to swim. When I ride a boat, I sometimes can imagine

¹ Poklen is a derogatory term that implies "dirty, uneducated, aggressive and unsophisticated country bumpkins". Poklens are often conflated with people of Kampong Ayer origin.

that I would fall into the river and drown”.

The logging company that employs me also employs some of my friends back in Sulawesi. We have the exact arrangement: as in housing and bills provided. I worked with them [the Indonesians] and I feel very close to them because they are the only Indonesians living here. They helped me settle down in this country.

However, what is interesting was when we went to one of the Indonesian respondents' house, we asked him: “Are you Indonesian?” And he replied: “Yes, I am Indon.” The term “Indon” itself is considered as derogatory back in Indonesia. It is used as an insult by the Malaysian towards Indonesian migrants moving into Malaysia. Knowing full well the nature of the word, the Indonesian still refers himself as such. When asked why he referred to himself as an “Indon”, he replied that it is normal in this society for Indonesians to be referred as such. There is no negative connotation attached to that word in the same way it does in Indonesia or in Malaysia.

Local narratives of Kampong Ayer

Kampong Ayer holds a certain reverence in Bruneian society. The construction of a national identity in the years preceding and after independence in 1984 have created imageries, narratives and myths that privilege Kampong Ayer as a space/place of origin of Brunei's history, culture, and identity. The people of Kampong Ayer – situated at the mouth of the Brunei river - feel a certain rootedness to the place; and this includes those who have remained, others who have left, and many more who can claim indirectly their association with the place.

However Rodman (2003) cautions that there are no positive or negative intrinsic values regarding primordiality between man and place. Rodman indicates that we should be wary of “natives” who assert their dominance by suggesting that they have a primordial connection or oneness with the land. This is often accompanied by actions that are taken to guard the carefully constructed image that Brunei Malayness is rooted in Kampong Ayer. It normalises the power imbalances that exists when migrants from Indonesia settle in the kampong, to the point that Indonesians accept their subservient roles in the social hierarchy of Kampong Ayer.

What Goffman and Rabikowska alluded in their work are relevant. In Goffman's theory, interactions between migrants and settlers are guided by Bruneian culture and tradition. Thus, what is normal in migrant's homeland may not be applicable to Kampong Ayer. In that sense, the

migrants felt a sense of responsibility to fit in to the communities and thus, the development of their identities revolved around this. This is a large part of the reason why they have accepted and internalised their subordinate status in Kampong Ayer. This is a way for these migrants to achieve normalcy in their lives: a sense of order after uprooting their lives from their homeland (a disorder). For our respondents, having stability in their lives helped them survive in this new environment in spite of the power imbalance. This is because their motivation: which is to provide for their family means that they believe that it is necessary to accept the status quo. Their interactions with the locals are much more reserved. We see how categorising Kampong Ayer as “homeland” of the Bruneian people have resulted in migrants feeling like they have to accept an inferior position within the social relations in Kampong Ayer.

Indeed, the presence of “foreigners” raises suspicion and disrupts the predictability of the lives of the local residents. Migrants are considered as racialised bodies that do not belong in Kampong Ayer. This evokes a sense of unease because there is a disconnect between what is real and what is imagined. The constructed image of Kampong Ayer inhabited by Brunei Malay has been betrayed by the mere presence of these foreigners. The burden of doubt is placed upon the outsiders, any suspicions or mistakes are exaggerated; and thus seen as evidence that they do not belong in that particular space. Migrants are regarded with suspicion and any transgressions they commit are further proof that they do not belong in Kampong Ayer. The kampong is a panopticon and the actions of outsiders are scrutinised in detail.

However, there are differences in the way Kampong Ayer emigrants make sense of the place they have left. While the Indonesian migrants might accept their subordinate status, this differs greatly from the way emigrants negotiate their status. Many Bruneians who live on the mainland hold negative views of the people of Kampong Ayer origin. They are deemed as “poklen”. Our respondents are perfectly cognisant of these labels and they vehemently reject the imposition of that label on their self and their identity. The emigrants emphasised their roots and it is a source of their pride.

And now we cast our eyes on Kampong Ayer itself. The evolution is an interesting one in the sense that it has evolved into a place of cultural importance and a place of cultural unimportance. It is part of the national imaginary which has helped to legitimize a young nation state; but it also represents a ghetto, a subaltern place that have been cast aside by the broader

society, when resettlement schemes and unfortunate fires have left Kampong Ayer damaged. Yet, in the minds of Bruneians, Kampong Ayer represents a national treasure that persists even if it is a shell of its former self. Globalisation and a modern lifestyle associated with mobility have devalued Kampong Ayer as a viable place to set up home. Yet, migration has also breathed new life into the place. A new social space stratified by race has arisen.

Conclusion

In Kampong Ayer, the Brunei Malays have enjoyed a hegemony of the place and for this reason, Indonesian migrants have to adapt to this power dynamics in place. However, the status of Kampong Ayer has been undermined by modernization, migration, and social mobility. For this reason the popular narrative of Bruneians today devalue its significance as a place of heritage and cultural and historical importance.

The fluidity of places can be seen in such a way that it still remains a constant on both migrants and emigrants. The power of place has drastically influenced identity, self and subjectivities. It is important that we are cognisant of this fact: migration facilitates such dynamics. Space is never fixed, it is never dead, but it is constantly changing and has an existential being. Indeed, we argue that migration has further galvanised such changes. That migration has become a significant manifestation of globalisation means that the way we conceptualise space and place has also changed. The “spatial turn” in the 90s should incorporate migration because it is a critical influence in in how we use and understand space.

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