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Who are the Dusun in Brunei? Representation and Deconstruction of an Ethnic Identity

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Abstract:

The etymology of the term ‘Dusun’ is disputed. It has been attributed to British colonialists to refer to a place where people practised horticulture and to the Brunei Malays to describe orchard or countryside. Over time, as a consequence of official ascription, it has been accepted by the indigenous community itself, even though the Dusun themselves initially preferred to call themselves *Sang Jati* (our people). In this paper we address the question of what is Dusun identity and who are the Dusun by examining the work of local and foreign scholars and the views of informants who have been influential in the community. Equally important, we also identify critical issues that have dominated the work of these scholars and assess their relevance to current and future research on the Dusun. These issues include ethnic identity and religion, ecology and language, and kinship and leadership. We come to the conclusion that ecological variations matter. Future research should address how the Dusun are represented and essentialised and recognise the diversity of ‘Dusunness’ today.

Keywords: Dusun; Brunei; Ethnic Identity; Ecology

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Introduction

The Malay-derived term ‘Dusun’ was given by the Brunei Malays which means orchard, garden or farm owners (Evans 1922: 35; King 1994: 191; Bernstein 1997: 164; Harrisson 1958: 299; Pudarno Binchin 2004: 71). However, ‘Dusun’ may have originated earlier than when it was used by the Brunei Malays¹ and the government of Brunei Darussalam (hereafter, Brunei). Pudarno (2004: 71) speculated that it was first used by the British colonialists who came to Borneo, who may have used an English equivalent to refer to the place where people derived their livelihood from horticulture. For formal and administrative purposes, the Dusun are one of the seven officially recognized ‘indigenous peoples’ of Brunei. The Brunei Malay, Tutong, Belait, Murut, Kedayan and Bisaya make up the rest of the modern-day *Puak Jati* (hereafter, *Puak*) which is equivalent to *Pribumi* or *Rakyat Jati*, referring to ‘original people’ of Brunei (Martin 1992: 108; Pudarno Binchin 2004: 100). The Brunei Dusun identify themselves as *Sang Jati* or *Suang Jati*² (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 4; Bernstein 1997: 164; Yabit Alas 2004: 14) which simply means ‘native

¹ ‘Dusun’ is not a Brunei Malay word. The equivalent is *kabun* (from *kabun buah* which means fruit orchard).

² *Sang Jati* is also a term that is found in the name *Pakatan Sang Jati Dusun* or simply known as PSJD (Pudarno Binchin 2004: 160; Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid 2015: 41; Asiyah az-Zahra 2016:11). Pudarno mentioned that the Dusun only began referring to themselves as *Sang Jati* in the 1960s following the establishment of the association (2004: 160). Eva Kershaw (2000: 20-21) referred to them simply as the ‘Dusun association’ and the association is primarily from the village of *Bukit Udal* which was believed to have played a pivotal role in shaping her (2000: VIII-IX) work on the Dusun during her time in Brunei.

people'. Hence, they are endonyms.³ Several other names have also been used in the past such as *Orang Bukit*, *Dusun Tutong*, *Iddeh Kitah*⁴, *Sang Kedayan*⁵, *Idahan*⁶ and even Bisaya⁷ (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 4; King 1994: 192; Leake 1989: 102-4; McArthur 1987 [1904]: 80-81, 110 – 112; Yabit Alas 2004: 12-14; Pudarno Binchin 2014: 3). These names and terms are used to refer to the Brunei Dusun as communities having similar 'cultural stock' (Harrisson 1958: 319-20; Bantong Antaran 1993a: 9) or linguistically very closely related to each other (Martin 1992: 110). However, most of the indigenous populations are in the census simply identified as *Melayu* under the Brunei Nationality Act 1961 (Brunei 1961: 118-20; Pudarno Binchin 2014: 2; Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 2).

Brunei has received less attention in the ethnographic literature for any of these groups of indigenous population than other parts of Borneo (E. Kershaw 2000: 3). This is especially true for the Dusun of Brunei. There are some local and non-local writing over the past few decades from the early works of Chong Ah Fok (1984, 1996), Roger Kershaw (1998), Eva Kershaw (1992, 1998, 2000), Bantong Antaran (1984, 1993a, 1993b, 1994), Yabit Alas (1990, 1994, 2004), Jay H. Bernstein (1997) and the more recent work of Pudarno Binchin (2002, 2004, 2009, 2014) and Asiyah az-Zahra (2011, 2016). These are the main authors that will be reviewed and critiqued to help better understand the past and present of the Dusun of Brunei. The literature pertaining to non-Brunei Dusun such as from G. N. Appell (1968) and Evans (1922) will also be included for comparative purposes.

The first field research carried out concerning the Dusun of Brunei was by Roger Peranio who researched the Limbang Bisaya/Dusun of Sarawak in the late 1950s but was not published (Peranio 1959; King 1994: 192). During this time, the Brunei Dusun was referred to as Limbang Bisaya/Dusun; this may have been the start of when both were generally described as Bisaya (Yabit

³ Sang Jati as an endonym is inclusive of both the Dusun and Bisaya. However, the Bisaya regard themselves as distinct from the Dusun (Yabit Alas, personal communication).

⁴ First used by Asiyah az-Zahra in her work on the Dusun which means 'our people' (2016: 4). It is derived from a Belait dialect spoken in Kg Kiudang and Kg Mungkom. The people who spoke this dialect are registered as Dusun, which is their formal identity.

⁵ Further elaboration on *Sang Kedayan* in the 'Ecology and the Dusun Language' section.

⁶ G. N. Appell (1968: 14) mainly wrote about the Rungus Dusun of Sabah but talked about the history of the name *Idahan* and its variations in Sabah, Palawan and Brunei.

⁷ The Brunei Constitution of 1961 distinguished between the 'Bisaya' and 'Dusun' but Pudarno claimed that there have been similarities between the Bisaya and the Dusun of Brunei in terms of mythology and marriage practices (Kahti 1990: 27 – 29) as well as the origins of the paddy or rice (Pudarno Binchin 2002: 76 – 78; 2014: 96). These could be why Bisaya and Dusun are sometimes used interchangeably. More on the Bisaya later on in this literature review.

Alas 2004:73; Peranio 1972; Harrisson 1958). Since then, many scholars had explored issues such as ethnic categorization, language, culture, religion and the much-debated identity of the Brunei Dusun. In the 1950s and the following decades, a romanticized image of traditional village life of the Brunei Dusun was presented, and this was apparent in the work of non-local academics such as Eva Kershaw (2000) and Bernstein (1997). While the Brunei Dusun are called ‘indigenous’, the traditional village life⁸ has long gone and the Dusun have been integrated into *dunia moden* – ‘the modern world’ (Chua 2007: 266). Kershaw and Bernstein reflected the sentiments of other social scientists. For example, in Sabah, Evans (1922: 79) described the Dusun way of life in negative terms: ‘backwardness’ or ‘uncivilized’ (LeBar and Appell, G. N 1972: 148; Tregonning 1960: 82–83) while McArthur (1987 [1904]: 80 – 81). referred to the Dusun as “very unsophisticated, childlike, peaceful and industrious with sincerity and frankness.”

This review looks beyond the ‘essentialised’ views of the Dusun in Brunei; to critique their work, explore possible interpretations of Dusun identity and ‘Dusun-ness’; and examines the Dusun community that exists today in Brunei. The term ‘Dusun’ is a prime example of types of system of naming that shows that “specific political forces can influence how identities are expressed” (Martin and Nakayama 2007: 99). Pudarno (2014: 67-68; Rousseau 1990:1), who is a Dusun from the village of *Ukong*, acknowledged how problematic it is to give a homogenous⁹ term to this very complex ethnic group and believes that this obscures the real differences that exist. While various exonyms have been used, what are the ethnic markers of the Brunei Dusun? Pudarno (2014: 68) suggested that the Dusun is an ethnic group in Brunei that is multi-lingual, multi-status, and multi-faith. We will discuss these issues in this review, with a view to how these can inform research on the ‘Dusun,’ their representation and their identity in contemporary Brunei.

⁸ To read more on the traditional village life the Dusun, Evans (1922) is a prime example where he covered a more traditional anthropology of indigenous peoples of Borneo. The author unravelled aspects of the lives and times of the Dusun such as dress and adornments, houses as well as domestic affairs and old ways in the village.

⁹ Pudarno (2014: 85 - 89) acknowledged that the Dusun as a homogenous race may have possibly existed long ago. This hypothesis arose from his observation of the traditional religious text *Basa Belian* which has epic narratives, archaic words and considered sacred. The author suggested that it may be the ‘original language’ but admitted that there is no satisfactory data to support the claim.

Ethnic Identity and Religion

Ethnic identities, classification and allegiances in Borneo have long been considered problematic (Babcock 1974; King 1979, 1982; Rousseau 1990), and it is evident that ethnic boundaries are often porous and fluid. Recent work by Asiyah az-Zahra (2016) who is a Dusun from the village of *Kiudang* explored the fluidity of the ethnic identity of the Brunei Dusun. Asiyah az-Zahra referred to the Brunei Nationality Act¹⁰ passed in 1961, which stated that the seven ethnic groups (recognized as *Puak*) mentioned earlier were to be considered *Melayu*. This meant that all seven groups are classified collectively as ‘Malay’ despite social, religious, and cultural differences between the *Puak* (ibid 2016: 2). Though the author was one of two (the other being Pudarno¹¹) writers who built on this in her work – she noted that these state efforts can be identified as a ‘Malaynization’ strategy (Asiyah az-Zahra 2011) to homogenize the seven recognized *Puak* for the purpose of assimilation and constructing a common national identity. Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 3) cited King (1994: 186) and argued that the ethnic boundaries of the dominant Brunei Malay ethnic group became less rigid over time, allowing the assimilation of the other *Puak* into the dominant Malay society. Asiyah az-Zahra understood that this contributed to the process of ‘Malaynization.’

However, Asiyah az-Zahra claimed that despite the ‘Malaynization’ strategy by the state and the substantial social and cultural changes that have occurred, Dusun ethnic identity has remained intact. She went even further to state that even the “Muslim Dusuns themselves did not think their conversion to Islam have changed them ethnically” (ibid 2016: 3). This leads to her main argument that the Dusun perception towards ethnic identity fits into Shamsul’s (1996) ‘two social reality’ framework of ‘authority-defined’ and ‘everyday-defined’ reality. The ‘authority-defined’ social reality is “authoritatively defined by those who are part of the dominant power structure,” whereas ‘everyday-defined’ reality is “experienced by the people in the course of their everyday life” (Shamsul 1996: 477). Asiyah az-Zahra illustrated the binary social reality of Brunei society by arguing that the ‘authority-defined’ identity geared the people toward ‘Malayness’

¹⁰ The Brunei National Act is linked to the Brunei Constitution. The latter establishes the seven *Puak* of Brunei while the former stipulated that these seven *Puak* are also *Melayu*.

¹¹ The author acknowledged that the Dusun were qualified as *Melayu* in the Brunei Constitution and discussed the fundamentals identity formation by the state. He also explored how this came to be – *Malayness, masuk Melayu* – by referring to the shared history between Malaysia and Brunei.

through the promotion of mainstream societal ideals, values, attitudes, and behaviours. The author supported this:

“Dusun parents send their children to religious (Islamic) schooling due to the inclusion of the Islamic Religious Knowledge subject in the school curriculum” (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 10) and “many Dusuns decided to silence the linguistic aspect of their ethnicity and consciously taught Bahasa Melayu to their children due to the discomfort the student experienced at school” (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 17).

She then asserted that:

“The adoption of mainstream culture by the Dusun has considerably affected their language, behaviour, dress and appearances, cultural practices, and ethnic knowledge” resulting “in the observed cultural homogeneity” (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 6).

The author claimed that Brunei society has become homogeneously Malay from the ‘authoritative perspective’ (ibid 2016: 4). On the other hand, Asiyah az-Zahra (ibid 2016: 4) believed that the Dusun notion of ethnic identity in terms of the ‘everyday-defined’ reality is based on “their actual lived experiences, personal, and collective”. Along with the dual social reality framework, she explored the formulation and construction of the Dusun ethnic identity. Asiyah az-Zahra drew on Phinney’s (1996) construction of ethnicity as an identity undergoing four stages: ethnic self-identification, a sense of belonging, positive attitudes and involvement in ethnic practices and activities. In terms of self-identification, she revealed that all her informants “identified themselves correctly as a Dusun and their identification corresponds to the ethnicity of their parents” (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 9). Her informants also showed their sense of belonging through a “surge in positive attitude and support towards Dusun identity” (2016: 17). Lastly, Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 15) argued that her Dusun informants demonstrated that their “ethnic language is enhanced by their experience of ethnic involvement, which allowed them to have greater familiarity with the Dusun culture and ethnic knowledge.” She concluded that ethnic identity is conceived at the individual level within the perspective of ‘everyday-defined’ social reality (ibid 2016: 6) with the individual him or herself going through ‘stage model’¹² of awareness, exploration and achieving ethnic identity.

¹² Asiyah Az-Zahra (2016: 19) cited Phinney’s (1990) ‘Stage Model of Ethnic Identity’ and noted that the first stage is ‘unexamined ethnic identity’; the second is ‘ethnic identity search’; and the third is ‘ethnic identity achievement’. Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 6-20) explained that during the first stage, an individual lacks ethnic awareness, and observes any culture, ethnic or mainstream, without question. The exploration of ethnic identity starts at the second stage as ethnic awareness grows through experience and observation. Ethnic identity exploration eventually reaches the final

The author then highlighted the value and influence of the family institution on ethnic identity. According to Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 9), “family-oriented values are passed down from generation to generation, especially the value of respecting family members and elders of the (Dusun) community”. The Dusun perceive the stability of the family structure as not only serving an important cornerstone of their community, but it also gives them “a sense of identity through genealogical links” (Chong 1996: 4). Asiyah az-Zahra cited Chong Ah Fok who is also a notable Chinese-Dusun writer and novelist originally from the village of *Batang Mitus* who wrote an essay on Dusun kinship and family in Brunei. Consequently, ethnic identity is ultimately an ethnic strength that allows an individual to be accepted by one’s family and community according to Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 9-10). Through family and community, the individual can demonstrate their ‘ethnic involvement’ via social gatherings, wedding ceremonies, funerals, and feasts after burials. Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 12-16) hypothesized that this ‘ethnic involvement’ will help the individual achieve the four core components of construction of ethnicity as mentioned earlier and promote Dusun identity.

Asiyah az-Zahra referred to the concept of *masuk Melayu* in explaining the attenuation of Dusun identity in relation to Malayness. The term *masuk Melayu* literally means ‘becoming Malay’ and is generally used to indicate ethnic identity transitions (Brown 1970; Tunku Zainah 1982; Horton 1984; King 1994; Bantong Antaran 1995; Pudarno Binchin 1992; Roff 1994; Abdul Latif 2001; Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 18). Asiyah az-Zahra (2015) asserted that her Dusun informants felt that *masuk Melayu* is ‘inevitable’¹³ because the Dusun have now adopted an Islamic lifestyle and have involved themselves more in Islamic activities and with the Muslim communities¹⁴. She cited Clark and Dubash (1998: 248) and concluded that the Dusun who have converted to Islam have always ensured that “their family relationship remains intact and is a protective mechanism of social belonging that promotes bonds of solidarity from generation to generation”. She continued to argue that the Dusun Muslims are essentially still Dusun despite the change in religious belief and practice (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 18). Ultimately, the author suggested that it is not Islamic

stage which is characterized by a confident sense of one’s identity as the individual becomes appreciative of ethnic membership.

¹³ Just to briefly elucidate on Asiyah az-Zahra’s ‘inevitable assumption’ term further, she stated that her Dusun informants’ senses that *Masuk Melayu* is inescapable, and every Dusun will eventually experience it.

¹⁴ In a recent fieldwork in November 2020, during a Dusun wedding ceremony at *Batang Mitus*, most Dusun whether Muslims or non-Muslims raised their hands for the Islamic prayer before the communal feast. In some shape or form, the Brunei Dusun have shown to be accustomed to the Islamic way of life.

conversion that should be accountable for the ‘deculturation’ of the Brunei Dusun as claimed by Bernstein (1977) but the decline of ‘ethnic involvement’.

Pudarno’s work is both complementary to and at variance with Asiyah az-Zahra’s interpretation. As stated earlier, Pudarno views Dusun identity as an ethnic group that is heterogeneous – multi-lingual, multi-status and multi-faith. Just like Asiyah az-Zahra, Pudarno (2014: 68) theorized that this heterogeneity is subsumed within a binary social reality. He also used Shamsul’s (1996) dual social reality framework of ‘authority-defined’ and ‘everyday-defined’ reality (ibid 2014: 13-14). However, Pudarno does not subscribe to the ‘stage model’ approach like Asiyah az-Zahra – rather he looks at ethnic identity as fluid and negotiable. Pudarno cited Richard Jenkins (2008: 3) that “identity is negotiable where the boundaries of ethnic groups are unclear and imprecise”, as is the case with the multifaceted identity of the Brunei Dusun. Pudarno believed that from the perspective of the ‘everyday-defined’, ‘life history’ is relevant as most of the stories by his informants are retrospective. These retrospective stories through retelling are what shape the ‘everyday-defined’ reality of minorities (Janesick 2007: 113; Swain 2003: 141). This differs from Asiyah az-Zahra’s earlier inquiry on personal experiences used to identify a group’s ethnic identity. One can argue that ‘life history’ is a personal recollection of memories and life experiences which can illuminate the ‘collective scripts’ of a social group (Sangster 1994: 8; Janesick 2007: 117). Pudarno (2014: 53) cited Barnard and Good (1984: 86) to reinforce this, noting that “the origins of what you observe almost certainly lie far in the past, before your arrival”. However, Pudarno suggested that ‘life history’ should be examined as ‘cultural mapping’ the Brunei Dusun with attention to ‘social mapping’ and ‘mental mapping’. The former examines rituals, social practices and the individual order of life while the latter refers to belief systems and their symbolism (Pudarno Binchin 2014: 63).

Like Asiyah az-Zahra, Pudarno (2014: 99) discussed identity formation in terms of ‘authority-defined’. Pudarno examined several issues: 1) the official term of the ethnic group based on state law 2) factors that influence national identity 3) integration of ethnic identity with the national agenda. Pudarno noted that these issues are centred around the Brunei Nationality Act of 1961 which stipulated that all the ethnic groups recognised as *Puak* - Belait, Bisaya, Brunei, Dusun, Kedayan, Murut or Tutong - are considered ‘Malay’. With that in mind, Pudarno also acknowledges the importance of ‘Malayness’ and *masuk Melayu* when it comes to Dusun identity.

Pudarno (2014: 100-101) suggested that *masuk Melayu* involves three components of language, Islam and acceptance of social hierarchy¹⁵, in line with D. E. Brown's (1970) work. Therefore, the interwovenness of 'Islam' and 'Malayness' concerning ethnic identification is a highly complex and delicate matter – but entirely unavoidable for the Brunei Dusun according to Pudarno. Dusun identity is influenced by how it negotiates the dominant Brunei Malay ethnic system in the eyes of the authority. Since there is no existing literature on navigating 'Malayness' for a minority ethnic group in the Brunei Malay ethnic system, we turn to Liana Chua's work on neighbouring Sarawak. Liana Chua (2007) explored the significance of the Malaysian ethnic system from the perspective of the Bidayuh, an indigenous group of Sarawak. Chua highlighted the 'fluid' and 'shifting' nature of Malay identity and how an indigenous minority adapt to 'Malayness'. According to Chua (2007: 264), 'Malayness' is marked by an inescapable fixity which stifles a fluidity that an ethnic minority like the Bidayuh value as intrinsic to 'Bidayuh-ness'. Chua acknowledged that identity-formation is a "profoundly contradictory process" and illustrated the complex and problematic combinations of fixity and flux through Bidayuh (dis)engagements with the ethnic categories as defined by the Malaysian state. Fixity of the Malaysian ethnic system lies in its emphasis on 'being' rather than 'becoming'. Organized along the lines of *bangsa*, it assigns its citizen "fixed, stable modern identity[ies] anchored in a particular territory" (Khan 2006: xxiii). Being Malaysian entails conforming to a fixed system of ethnic-based categories and privileges originally defined concerning Malay dominance (Shamsul, 1998: 141-44). When we look at the Brunei Dusun represented in the various literature, there are evident similarities. The Brunei Dusun move and negotiate between 'being' and 'becoming' Malay.

'Dusun' is an exonym, it is 'authority-defined' as argued by Pudarno and Asiyah az-Zahra and this comes with the condition of 'becoming Malay' in the context of Brunei. According to Chua, 'being' or 'becoming Malay' also deals with conversion to Islam¹⁶ and this is never a simple matter for an ethnic group such as the Bidayuh (2007: 267-270). In comparison, Asiyah az-Zahra claims that several studies suggest the compatibility¹⁷ between the Malay Muslim way of life and non-Muslim ethnic groups (King 1994; Bernstein 1997; Abdul Latif 2001; Yabit 2007). However,

¹⁵ 'Acceptance of social hierarchy' is a crucial point for the Brunei Dusun society at-large and will be elaborated further in the 'Family, Kinship and Leadership' section.

¹⁶ The Bidayuh grapples with the difficulty of 'un-becoming Malay' than when entering Islam (Chua 2007: 269).

¹⁷ According to Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 10), "Dusun parents send their children to religious (Islamic) schooling" and this seem to be voluntary.

Bantong maintained that Dusun religion is one of the main factors in sustaining Dusun identity and solidarity. According to Bantong (1993a: 162), it is important in binding their society. Eva Kershaw's (2000) work on the Dusun focused on the priesthood of the Brunei Dusun. The data that the author collected was over an impressive period of almost nine years (1985 – 1993) primarily in the village of *Sungai Damit (Bang Diok)* and *Ukong*. Her access was granted by the *penghulu*¹⁸ of the village of *Ukong* named *Ringgit Luang*. At some point towards the end of her stay in Brunei, she also resided in the villages of *Bukit*¹⁹, *Rambai*, *Bukit Udal* and very briefly *Kebia* and *Layong*. Her stay in *Bukit Udal* had a significant impact on her study as she stated that she “would never have achieved the high level of accuracy which I believe I can now claim for it.” (2000: VIII-IX).

While hindsight has revealed several shortcomings of Eva Kershaw's work such as her misunderstanding of the Dusun language²⁰ and her essentialist views of the Brunei Dusun one should acknowledge the valuable data from her research. She presented some interesting observations. She pointed out how two of her informants cited the change and comparison between Dusun folklore and Islamic figures – from *mpuan inan* to *Nabi Muhamed* and *pagun lingu* to *Mecca*. The author simply portrayed it as a form of Islamization and ignored the fluidity of Dusun religiosity. She claimed that she focused on “describing the traditional Dusun view” and “establish a precise record of a dying religion of Borneo in a way that has never been attempted before” (2000: VIII). Again, Chua's work on the Bidayuh argued that instead of entirely attributing the ‘loss of religion’ to Islamization, it is more accurate to refer to the influence of ‘Malay-ness’²¹. Her informants, in referring to the Bidayuh who converted or married a Malay, stated that they were required to follow *adat Islam*, which not only entailed giving up pork but also dressing, speaking and behaving like Malays – this process was not easily reversed. Bidayuh-ness is presented as a flux to the fixity of ‘Malayness’ where the latter is dominated and defined by the Malays (Chua 2007: 269-270). This narrative on ‘Malayness’ is similar to the Dusun of Brunei (as observed by Pudarno and Asiyah az-Zahra) but overlooked by Eva Kershaw.

¹⁸ A leader for a *mukim* (sub-district) and will report to the district officer (Pang, 2018: 4).

¹⁹ The village of *Bukit* is a village on its own. *Bukit* means ‘hill’ and the word is used in the names of other villages such as *Bukit Udal* and *Bukit Sawat*.

²⁰ More on this in the ‘Ecology and the Dusun Language’ section.

²¹ Asiyah az-Zahra (2011:3) also supported this claim that state efforts that can be identified by the ‘Malaynization’ strategy as discussed earlier in this review.

In Kershaw's work, religion is central to her research. She pointed out that the religious practices of the Dusun is more than simply "a belief in supernatural beings and powers" (2000: 6). She cited Geertz (1993: 90) and noted that it is an "entire system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive, and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence". Eva Kershaw (2014: 15-17) claimed that the practice of *tamarok* was a form of *bantahan* (protesting). Pudarno refuted this claim and said that *tamarok* was never a form of 'protest'. Pudarno (2014: 14) argued that 'protesting' (against Islam or the Malay government) would mean that the Brunei Dusun is a 'marginalised' community, and this is not the case. Kershaw theorizes that the Dusun 'protested' because they were losing their religion. Like Bernstein (1997) who wrote about the 'deculturation' of the Brunei Dusun, Kershaw's claim of 'loss of religion' is essentialist. Pudarno (2014: 8) pointed out that Bernstein portrayed the Brunei Dusun as 'victims of progress'. The 'loss of religion' (E. Kershaw 2000) and 'loss of culture' (Bernstein 1997) due to Islamisation resulted in the 'loss of identity' of the Dusun. However, we can infer from the work of Pudarno (2014) and Asiyah az-Zahra (2016) that this is simplistic. Pudarno, citing Zawawi (1998: 11), suggested that "identity is continuously being constituted, negotiated and reconstructed". As such, we need to address how the Dusun constitute, negotiate and reconstruct their ethnic identity within the Brunei Malay ethnic system both at the public and private levels.

Ecology and Dusun Language

According to Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2015a: 37), there are no specific statistics on the size of the Dusun population in Brunei to date but based on the population data in 1998, from the estimated 323,600 people, a total of 19,400 people (or 6.0 percent) is made up of indigenous groups in Brunei – Dusun is one of these groups (Aini Karim, 2007). Although Asiyah az-Zahra noted that while the official ethnic category of 'Malay' encompasses all seven *Puak*, the exact number of Dusun from the 65.8 percent of Malays in the 2014 National Census is not known (Economic Planning and Development 2016). The Dusun communities who have embraced Islam especially in the coastal areas are generally recorded in the national census as 'Malay' rather than Dusun which makes it even more problematic. This census can be misleading because the ones who identify themselves as Dusun Muslims are recorded as 'Malay' and are combined with the

other ethnically Brunei Malay Muslims. However, Matussin (cited in Bantong (1993a: 19) estimated that there were around 20,000 Dusun in Brunei in the 1980s of which 13,000 were in Tutong district. Bantong thought that the former figure was high and probably included Muslims and speculated that the non-Muslim Dusun population in Brunei is around 5000 (ibid.). Kershaw (1992: 180) suggested that there were around 10,000 – 15,000 Dusun in Tutong District and some 5000 in Belait District. Lastly, Chong (1996: 64) projected a figure of 13,000 Dusun in Brunei while Yabit (1994: 10) estimated that it is in the region of 10,000 people. While it is difficult to offer a precise figure, it is largely believed that the majority of the Dusun reside in the Tutong District (Nothofer 1991; Asiyah az-Zahra 2011). Aini Karim (2007) confirmed that groups of Dusun can be found in the peripheral areas of the Belait and largely in Tutong Districts, in areas such as *Bukit Sawat*, *Sungai Mau*, *Merangking*, *Bukit Sawat*, *Sungai Liang*, *Ukong*, *Kiudang*, *Lamunin*, *Rambai* and *Telisai*. A smaller number are also found in the interior of the Brunei Muara District, namely, around *Batang Mitus* and *Bebuloh* (Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid 2015a: 37). King (1994: 192) also supported the claim that many of the Dusun live in the Tutong region and has been mistakenly referred to as *Orang Tutong*. It is no coincidence that all the major research on the Dusun such as from Eva Kershaw, Pudarno, Bantong, Asiyah az-Zahra and Yabit Alas were all conducted in the Tutong District.

Ecological influence has been overlooked when examining the Brunei Dusun and this is particularly significant as regional variations are related to distinct Dusun dialects and traditional practices (Pudarno Binchin 2002: 46). According to Pudarno, the Dusun of Brunei are divided into three main categories: coastal, lowland and upland (refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2). The coastal Dusun possess a distinctive *liang-telisai* dialect. Most of the upland Dusun (primarily from the villages of *Bukit*, *Merimbun*, *Long Mayan*, *Sungai Mau*, *Merangking*, *Bukit Sawat* and *Sukang*) have an upland *bukit* dialect which is close to the Bisaya of Limbang. The village of *Bukit Udal* is an exception where the Dusun there speak a lowland Dusun dialect. Lowland Dusun dialect is spoken by the majority of Dusun speakers, and considered to be the ‘standard Dusun language’, which most Dusun of the three ecological zones have adapted to; particularly the Dusun who have migrated to urban areas (ibid 2002: 47). To breakdown the settlements further, Pudarno argued

that the coastal Dusun²² settlements are situated in the villages of *Danau*, *Telisai*, *Sungai Liang* and *Lumut*:

“Most of the Dusun populations have embraced Islam and adopted the Brunei Malay way of life except for a small cluster of families in *Sungai Liang*. Those ‘original’ Dusun located near *Telisai*, along the *Penyatang* River, were locally known people in *Ukong* as *Sang Panyotong* - ‘People of the Panyotong River’” (ibid 2002: 47).

He also claimed that the lowland Dusun²³ settlements covered the villages of *Sungai Damit*, *Ukong*, *Rambai*, *Pancong*, *Benutan*, *Layong*, *Lamunin*, *Kebia*, *Batang Mitus*, *Pad Nunok*, *Kiudang*, *Birau*, and in small numbers in *Keriam*, *Sinaut*, *Luangan Duduk*, *Luangan Timbaran* and *Maraburong* while remarking that:

“These lowland settlements are mostly located in the flatlands of the Tutong river valley, extensively spread outstretching from *Benutan* down to *Kebia* towards the northeast. Only a small cluster of lowland Dusun settlements is found in *Sungai Mau*, probably due to migration of Dusun people from *Bukit Sawat* long ago. The Dusun communities are predominantly non-Muslims though, during the last two decades in the 1980s and 1990s, a large number of them have embraced Islam, particularly those Dusun living in *Rambai*” (ibid 2002: 48).

Since Pudarno is originally from *Ukong*, he has more to say about the lowland Dusun:

“The lowland Dusun are generally found in small clusters of villages along the riverbanks. Being riverine, lowland Dusun settlements are normally identified by the name of well-known boat landings called *Pangkalan* or *Ngkalan* that were found along the riverbanks or by the small river tributaries that flow into the main Tutong river. These settlements still carry original names today. The river was the major route of communication before the development of roads into the interior highlands in the early 1960s connecting the Dusun settlements with the district’s main towns such as Tutong Town, Seria and Kuala Belait.” (ibid 2002: 48)

Pudarno noted that the upland Dusun²⁴ settlements are found in the Tutong and Belait Districts and are located in the areas that border the Tutong and Belait river valleys. In Tutong district, they are settled in the villages of *Bukit Udal*, *Bukit*, *Long Mayan* and *Merimbun*. In Belait District, they live in the villages of *Merangking*, *Bukit Sawat* and *Sukang*. Pudarno claimed that “the majority of the Dusun population in *Bukit*, *Long Mayan*, *Merangking* and *Bukit Sawat* have

²² Pudarno (2014: 3) also called them *Dusun Pantai* in Malay in his later work which described their type of settlements which are along the coast of Tutong-Belait.

²³ Pudarno (2014: 3) also called them *Dusun Lembah Sungai* in Malay as they live in hilly river areas.

²⁴ Pudarno (2014: 3) called them *Dusun Bukit* in Malay which described where they – in hilly areas.

embraced Islam” (ibid 2002: 49). He also made an interesting observation that the coastal regions are more developed than the highlands due to accessibility. This meant that the upland villages were shielded from outside influences until recently; settlements were traditionally nucleated and compact which promoted a close kin community and intermarriages²⁵. *Bukit Udal* was counted as an exception which developed much more than the other upland settlements.



Figure 1. Map of Tutong

Source: Survey Department, Ministry of Development, Brunei Darussalam 2009.

²⁵ Pudarno (2002: 49) claimed that Dusun from *Sukang* have intermarried with Iban and Penan. The reason behind this tendency to nucleation from the upland Dusun was that there were frequent inter-ethnic fights in the past before the British colonial government was established in 1906, especially the infamous attacks by marauding Kayan from Sarawak.

Districts	Villages	Ecology
Tutong	<i>Bukit</i>	Upland
	<i>Merimbun</i>	
	<i>Long Mayan</i>	
	<i>Sungai Mau</i>	
	<i>Merangking</i>	
Belait	<i>Bukit Sawat</i>	Upland
	<i>Sukang</i>	
Tutong	<i>Sungai Damit</i>	Lowland
	<i>Ukong</i>	
	<i>Rambai</i>	
	<i>Pancong</i>	
	<i>Benutan</i>	
	<i>Layong</i>	
	<i>Lamunin</i>	
	<i>Kebia</i>	
	<i>Batang Mitus</i>	
	<i>Pad Nunok</i>	
	<i>Kiudang</i>	
	<i>Birau</i>	
	<i>Keriam</i>	
	<i>Sinaut</i>	
	<i>Luangan Duduk</i>	
<i>Luangan Timbaran</i>		
<i>Maraburong</i>		
Tutong	<i>Danau</i>	Coastal
	<i>Telisai</i>	
Belait	<i>Sungai Liang</i>	Coastal
	<i>Lumut</i>	

Figure 2. Ecological Divisions of the Brunei Dusun

Kershaw commented that some differences in Dusun dialects may be attributed to the Bisaya language spoken in the Limbang to the east (E. Kershaw 2002: 13). Eva Kershaw suggested that *Sungai Damit* (*Bang Diok* which is from the lowland settlements) shared a homogenous sub-variant with the village of *Bukit Udal* (upland), *Ukong* (lowland), *Rambai* (lowland) and *Lamunin* (lowland). On the other hand, the village of *Bukit* (upland) showed a linguistic affinity with *Bukit Sawat* (upland) in the Belait District. *Bukit* is just a few kilometres further inland and she suggested that this may mean that the population had moved eastwards (ibid 2000: 2). These observations

reflect the significance of Pudarno's examination of Dusun 'ecological zones'. While Kershaw had mentioned the term lowland Dusun once in her work (2000: 14), it is unfortunate that she overlooked the diversity of the Dusun community. This may be due to her misunderstanding of some Dusun words notably the word 'Kedayan'. While we have noted earlier that Kedayan is one of the seven *Puak* of Brunei, it is also used as a term to describe the Dusun language – *basa Kedayan* (Pudarno Binchin 2004: 160). Bantong and Pudarno argued that *Sang Kedayan* is another term that the Dusun of *Ukong*, *Sungai Damit*, and *Bukit Udal* use to self-identify (Bantong Antaran 1993: 15; Pudarno Binchin 2004: 160). Bantong also indicated that *Sang Kedayan* is only employed by elderly Dusun and is probably an earlier term which was used to distinguish the *Jalama Laud* (sea people) and *Sang Kedayan* (inland people). *Sang* means 'people' while Kedayan means 'inland' or 'interior' in Dusun (Roth 1986). *Sang Kedayan*, therefore, means 'the people in the inland or interior'. This may be a general term used by the British long ago when identifying the people living inland or interior. Kershaw was confused by the different uses of the word Kedayan. She did not understand the distinction between Kedayan as a *Puak* and *Sang Kedayan* as an endonym for some Dusun. She wrongly suggested that there may be a link between the Dusun and Kedayan and said that "it may be another proof of the Dusun diminishing contact with its past"²⁶ (Eva Kershaw: 2000: 13). Another misunderstanding in variations is from McArthur (1987 [1904]: 92) who called the Brunei Dusun as the *Bukit*. *Orang Bukit* or *Sang Bukit* generally refers to the upland Dusun who originated from the village of *Bukit* and speak the *bukit* dialect²⁷ (Bantong Antaran 1993: 16).

At this point, we can turn to the Dusun language. There have been much interest and literature on the issue of language loss in Borneo. Discussion on language shift and the loss of indigenous languages in Brunei can be found in Martin (1995, 1996), Noor Azam (2005), Coluzzi (2010), McLellan (2014), Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2015b), and McLellan and Jones (2015). Three papers are of interest, the first written by Najib Noorashid (who is a Dusun academic from the village of *Bukit*) and Fatimah Chuchu was conducted at mukim²⁸ *Ukong* and the villages of *Bukit*, *Ukong* and *Long Mayan* on the code choice within intercultural communication among the ethnic minority in Brunei (Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid 2015a). There were 58

²⁶ It is not clear what she meant by this as Eva Kershaw did not elaborate further on this matter.

²⁷ This is supported by the data collected from recent fieldwork conducted from January to October 2020.

²⁸ *Mukim* is a sub-district or territorial entity which is equivalent to a parish.

percent of Dusun involved in the study while the rest were Kedayan and Brunei Malay. It was found that some Dusun speakers still retain their ‘native’ language of Dusun when they converse with the other ethnic groups. According to the authors, the Dusun participants tend to employ code-mixing of Dusun and Malay, or even conversing with Brunei Malay code completely. The study also claimed that communicating in Brunei Malay is easier and much more ‘universal’ than any other languages while acknowledging the critical significance of the mother tongue in Dusun identity (Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid 2015a: 89). For the Dusun, the pride of being multilingual with the emphasis on preserving their mother tongue is not uncommon according to Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 17). Pudarno has also found that the Dusun are multilingual, and their use of other ethnic languages depends on who their neighbours are. For instance, the Dusun community from the village of *Sukang* in Belait District can speak Iban and Penan languages while the Dusun from the village of *Ukong* can speak Tutong language (Pudarno Binchin 2014: 89). Additionally, Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2015a: 90) suggested that the Dusun adoption of the Malay language is due to the pressures of assimilation. However, as we have already discussed in this review, assimilation may be a simplistic view and while there appears to be cultural homogeneity (Asiyah 2016: 6), the Dusun are more likely negotiating ‘Malayness’ in the socio-political context of the Brunei Sultanate.

In the same year, Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2015b) published another paper on language loss and the revitalization of the Dusun language. The authors suggested that every language has a role in communication, culture and identity and its function will diminish when it is no longer practised (Bahasa Jiwa Bangsa 2000; Derhemi 2002; Fatimah Chuchu 2011). Their study claims that 97% of their respondents regarded the language as an important marker of Dusun identity (ibid 2015: 40). Noor Azam (2005) suggested that the majority of the indigenous ethnic groups believed that their languages and dialects are essential to their identification even though they may not speak these languages. However, as pointed out earlier, Asiyah az-Zahra disputed the view that the ‘loss of language’ is equivalent to the loss of identity. She suggested that ‘ethnic involvement’ within the community and kinship ties are more critical to maintaining identity, a point we shall return later.

The final paper by Najib Noorashid (2018) was with James McLellan on teaching and learning the Dusun language in the university. They raised the inconsistency of grammar

standardization in the Dusun language. Noor Azam (2014: 17-18) highlighted this issue with the Tutong language and the variations within Tutong. Najib Noorashid and McLellan found similar issues with an unwritten language, which caused confusion and misconceptions about standardisation among learners. University instructors²⁹ also expressed their concern about privileging a particular dialect of the Dusun language taught in the university. Najib Noorashid and McLellan (2018: 228) observed that the Dusun facilitators were eager to establish a standardised grammar of Dusun and to produce more Dusun books, but this could run the risk of “losing the language’s essential spirit if it is codified in curriculum documents and textbooks”. However, Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2015b), and to some extent, Eva Kershaw (1994) and Martin (1996), conceded that formal education may help to reduce the danger of language loss and extinction. Those involved in teaching Dusun at the tertiary level are keen to standardise the language. While Najib Noorashid and McLellan’s research did not reveal which dialect was used, we go back to Pudarno’s suggestion on the ‘standard Dusun language’ from the lowland Dusun dialect (Pudarno Binchin 2002: 47) which is usually used outside of the Tutong district and in the urban areas. Najib Noorashid and James McLellan (2018: 217) admitted that Dusun is an unwritten language with several varieties, mainly found in the Tutong district while Fatimah Chuchu (2009) claimed that each of these ethnic groups has its language code and practice. Appell (1968: 14) once proposed to use the word Dusun to refer to a ‘language family’. We suggest that any attempt to make sense of ‘Dusun-ness’ should acknowledge its diversity and the ecological contexts of Dusun dialects.

It would be a disservice if we do not review the work of one of the most notable Dusun scholars in historical linguistics, Yabit Alas. Yabit was originally from the lowland settlements of *Batang Mitus* and his doctoral thesis focused on the ‘diachronic’ and ‘synchronic’ aspects of the Dusunic variants. His research extended to specific regions and villages in Sabah, Sarawak, and Brunei - where he chose to examine the Dusun language spoken in the village of *Bukit*. According to Yabit (1994: 3), the Dusun language belongs to the Austronesian language family. The author mentioned that the Brunei Dusun have been historically identified as Dusun-Bisaya by Hudson (1978) and when we study Dusunic languages, it is natural to include the languages of Kadazan/Dusun from Sabah, Bisaya from Limbang Sarawak, and Dusun/Bisaya from Brunei. The

²⁹ After a brief interview with Najib Noorashid during data collecting in November 2020, it was found that one of the university instructors is a Dusun from the village of *Telisai*, and he speaks a coastal Dusun dialect.

Dusunic linkages between these communities are not an uncommon finding as we can observe past academics who have written about them already (Appell 1969; Peranio 1972; Prentice 1970; Dyen 1965). While Yabit demonstrated that even when two or more communities have the same words in their language, it does not mean that they are of the same social or historical group. One needs to look closer at the timeline and history of ‘retention’ and ‘innovation’ of language (Yabit 2004: 140). However, his work does not show the diversity and variations of the Dusunic language in Brunei.

In comparison to the other non-Brunei Dusun, we can look at the earlier works of G. N. Appell (1968: i) who discussed the Rungus Dusun of Sabah, where he found that they speak one of the many Dusun dialects or languages. Appell looked to Rutter (1922: 51-83; 1929: 30-45) who developed a classification of various Dusun populations in Borneo - his criteria are mainly geographic and economic. Appell (1968: 19) noted that Rutter himself realised that his classification was an imposed one and does not follow the sub-divisions recognized by the Dusun themselves. Appell admitted that this was where ‘dialect boundaries’ would have been preferred instead of a rigid geographic or economic classification. The author also briefly discussed ‘speech communities’ where the Dusun groups³⁰ recognise their ‘shared genetic and ethnic similarities’³¹ with other members but distinguish themselves from non-members by ‘common speech patterns’ (ibid 1968: 22). However, Appell also mentioned that even with ‘common speech patterns’, they are not a social unit, are not hierarchically linked, and do not engage in co-activity.

Aini Karim (2007: 10) claimed that the Dusun language is also a ‘communicative tool for the people of Kadazan’ in Sabah. However, it is important to note that the association of ‘Kadazan’ with ‘Dusun’ is a political construction since the formation of Malaysia³². The language officially recognized by the Malaysian government is ‘Kadazandusun’ (Reid 2010: 187). Maun and Iqbal (2016) discussed the history of the Dusun Kimaragang in Malaysia. The Dusun Kimaragang is one of the Dusun tribes while also a group of the Kadazan³³. Yabit (2004: 13; Lasimbang and Miller

³⁰ These Dusun groups are Rungus, Nulu and Tobilung as examples named by Appell (1968: 22).

³¹ For further elaboration on ‘shared genetic and ethnic similarities’, read Appell (1968).

³² For further elaboration, read Reid (2010).

³³ ‘Dusun’ and ‘Kadazan’ are used interchangeably but they authors hinted that there may still be much to discuss regarding the Dusun-Kadazan issue on identity on whether it is due to a political strategy by the Malaysian government.

1990: 122) noted that the origins of the term ‘Kadazan’ are unknown and Topin (1984: 44) mentioned:

“the early Kadazan/Dusun never actually had a name for themselves as a tribal people. Wherever they settle they identified and referred to the natural significance of the place, be it the trees, rivers, landscape or even peculiar significant occurrences.”

This supports King (1979, 2001) and Sillander’s (2016: 103) work which stressed the importance of locality for collective identity. The Dusun Kimaragang tribe also use a dialect of Dusun language in conversations between them and that is considered an identity marker (Maun and Iqbal 2016: 1). However, it is unclear whether the Kimaragang thinks of themselves as Dusun. Despite this, Yabit (1994) claimed that the language spoken by the Dusun in Brunei is different from those spoken by the Kadazan and Bisaya, either in terms of pronunciation or lexis³⁴. Bantong (1993a: 12) supported this claim and said that they are “linguistically and culturally different from those Dusun in Brunei”. David, Cavallaro and Coluzzi (2009) pointed out that Dusun and Bisaya could be considered as “two dialects of the same language” in Brunei. Although the authors did not elaborate further on this, Kroeger (1994: 27) argued that there is a reason as to why these two ethnic groups have been associated with each other – “there are certainly close parallels in their languages”.

Mackerras (2003: 11) and Cokley (2007: 225) believed that part of an ethnic group is defined by the same language or dialect that they speak.³⁵ However, we believe that ethnicity is multi-faceted, and it is difficult to construct a general notion that can be applied across ethnic groups differing in ideological orientation, political experiences, historical context, language use and cultural values. Additionally, Pudarno (2014: 84) also suggested that language does not necessarily equate to *bangsa* (as understood in Malay political culture, which may refer to race, ethnicity or nationality) and stated that one’s identity “changes according to the place that person resides and with whom that person interacts with”. Tutong is the second largest district in Brunei

³⁴ According to Yabit Alas (2004: 13), historically speaking, the Dusun and Kadazan only started to be differentiated somewhere between 1950-1960 when the name Dusun was given a negative connotation by ‘educated people’ as ‘uncivilized and backwards’ and ‘village people’.

³⁵ Mackerras and Cokley did not write about the Dusun. The former’s research is a book of a collection of Asian ethnicities from China, Japan, Indonesia and Malaysia. Unfortunately, no Brunei ethnic groups were covered. The latter’s work attempted to measure ethnicity. However, his informants were Americans. Both Mackerras and Cokley attempted to define ethnicity in their respective work in a general point of view.

with one of the most multicultural, multilingual and multi-faith population in Borneo. Such diversity needs to be understood in terms of the unique ecological settlements, the population who reside there, and how they navigate ‘fluid’ dialect boundaries.

Kinship and Leadership

As we have referred to earlier, Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 12-16) privileges the significance of kinship ties and ‘ethnic involvement’ in her work. She believes that it is only through family and community that the individual can express their ‘ethnic involvement’ by way of social gatherings, wedding ceremonies, funeral feasts after burials, and this is critical to maintaining their Dusun identity. The significance of kinship for the Dusun cannot be overstated as Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 4) indicated that they are “close-knit, with family and kinship as core values of the community”. According to Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 9), “family-oriented values in the Dusun community are passed down from generation to generation, especially the value of respecting family members and elders of the (Dusun) community”. Chong Ah Fok (1996: 4) added that the stability of the family structure is not only an important foundation of the Dusun community, but it also provides them with “a sense of identity through genealogical links”. Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 9-10) hypothesized that “ethnic identity is an ethnic strength that allows an individual to be accepted by one’s family and community”. As for the Dusun who have converted to Islam, Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 20) claimed that they identify themselves as Dusun because of family ties. She argued that “the density of ethnic self-identification is primarily defined by the density of family values upheld by one’s family” (ibid 2016: 20). Chong Ah Fok (1996: 68) highlights the important roles played by parents in Dusun society: the authority of the father is in economic livelihood, security, and life lessons while the mother’s influence is exercised in religious practices associated with *temarok*.

Pudarno (2004: 167) made some observations about traditional Dusun society. According to him, it was “organized on the basis of highly autonomous bilateral descent group called *waris*, none of which could claim superiority over any of the others”. In the Brunei Malay, the word *waris* mean ‘inheritance rights’ but in the Dusun language, it is referred to as a bilateral kin group.³⁶ These cognatic descent groups generally include members representing three generations and, as

³⁶ There needs to be a caveat in using the word *waris* as the Dusun are multilingual as discussed earlier in this review. It may mean either one or the other depending on circumstance.

such, extended bilaterally to include the families of the first cousins (descendants of a common grandparent). The second cousins would belong to different *waris*. Pudarno (2004: 167) pointed out that the genealogical reference for the members of a bilateral kin group was not just any grandparent but a well-remembered and honoured male elder called the *tatuwo*. Each generation is called *tiris* while the collection of three or more generations that form the bilateral kin group is known as a *waris*. Pudarno stated that it is important to the members of a *waris* to be able to trace descent from a common *tatuwo*. This is to determine each of their rights in the *waris* and their status within the kinship group. The author went on to describe the traditional Dusun big house or *alai gayo*³⁷ and explained the social and administrative functions of the family residence as well as the *tatuwo*. Pudarno noted that the *tatuwo* has always been influential in the consultation of customary laws in and outside of the *alai gayo*.

As previously stated, Pudarno's work was located in the areas of *Sungai Damit* and *Ukong*. While Bantong (1993a: 16) claimed that his research is relevant to the Dusun community as a whole, the data that he collected was also focused on the same two villages as well as *Bukit Udal*. Even though Bantong admitted that the Dusun makes internal distinctions based on geographical location of their settlements such as *Sang Bang Gayo* meaning 'people from the big river'; *Sang Bang Diok* meaning 'people from the small river'; *Sang Bukid* meaning the 'hill people'; *Sang Bukid Sawat* meaning 'people from the high hill' and *Sang Sambila* meaning 'people from the other side of the land'. We can infer that *Sang Bang Diok* is a reference to the Dusun from the village of *Sungai Damit* (E. Kershaw 2000) while *Sang Bukid* or *Sang Bukit* is referring to the Dusun from the village of *Bukit*. As mentioned earlier, this reflects Pudarno's view of the significance of coastal, lowland and upland ecological zones for Dusun identity. Bantong also wrote about the Brunei Dusun social structure in brief. According to Bantong (1993a: 55), the structure of the Dusun village economy³⁸ is based on kinship ties, but *adat*³⁹ is central to the Dusun social system. Bantong (1993: 95) also noted that since the discovery of oil in the 1930s and its dominance in the economy in the 1970s, the solidarity and coherence of the village social system

³⁷ An *alai gayo* or 'big house' is a traditional Dusun settlement comprised of a single large dwelling. See Pudarno Binchin (2004: 167-171) for further elaboration on the interior and function of the *alai gayo*.

³⁸ To understand more about the economy of the Dusun village, read Bantong Antaran (1993: 52-94). As a caveat, these accounts are based on the villages of *Bukit Udal*, *Sungai Damit* and *Ukong* but the author claimed that it is of general relevance for the Dusun community as a whole.

³⁹ *Adat* means customary law. It is a generic Malay word that can be used by any ethnic group to describe their customary law in Brunei. For example, *adat Melayu* for the Brunei Malay and *adat Murut* for the Murut.

had been undermined. There have been rapid changes in Dusun life, economy and community over the decades. The development of a market economy in village life, together with the availability of paid jobs from various industries especially from the government sector have turned many Dusun into wage-labourers (Bantong Antaran 1993a: 52). Often, working as wage labourers in the urban centres required the Dusun to stay temporarily there and Bantong argued that this has disrupted relations within the village and family household. The villagers only go back to their homes at the weekends and other public holidays. Pudarno (2014: 29) reminisce about the olden days when some Dusun cultural rites and performances were common social events in the 1960s and early 1970s. An industrial economy and modern lifestyle have weakened a social system that is based on *adat* in the performance of kinship obligations and social ceremonies like marriages, deaths and *temarok* rites. As expected with the introduction of *dunia moden* – ‘the modern world’ (Chua 2007: 266), most of the traditional economic and communal activities had significantly decreased. According to Bantong (1993a: 206), “collective representation (leadership) and activities have gradually broken down” and the function of the village as a “traditional cultural base has become less and less effective”. Bantong (1993a: 152) noted that “the Dusun is in transitional period.”

We briefly touched on the role of the *tatuwo* in Dusun society. Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 22) also mentioned the elders as carriers of ethnic traditions and leaders in keeping family and community values together. Pudarno (2004) is the only person who has ever done in-depth research on the roles of these elders and local leadership among Brunei’s Dusun. In the traditional village, an *alai gayo* was not administered by a headman or village leaders – but by several influential *tatuwo*. The *tatuwo* were not just ‘social leaders’⁴⁰ but religious ones too. While most of the *tatuwo* were males, others were female in the absence of senior male members. They were also either a *belian* (priestess) or *belian pengiaw* (chief priestess). Pudarno wrote that these individuals were highly influential members of the ‘*tatuwo class*’ whose advice on religious and moral matters were actively pursued. While the Dusun (especially the *waris*) were essentially an egalitarian kinship group in the past, they were also patrifocal⁴¹, if not patriarchal (Chong 1996: 68). It was usually the males who were in charge of social welfare, economic matters, and all political decisions. Some

⁴⁰ Pudarno’s coverage of the *tatuwo* was vast. To read more about their responsibilities as a ‘social leader’, read Pudarno Binchin (2004: 177-180).

⁴¹ This was the case for day-to-day affairs as female *tatuwo* were subordinate to their male counterparts. Pudarno (2004: 172) suspected that it may be because of the long association with the patrifocal Muslims neighbours.

tatuwo were even able to attain social prominence due to their wisdom and knowledge as well as the ability to function as healers (females) or their bravery in battle (males). Pudarno highlighted that status and achievements are important because these were usually how the Dusun determine who became genealogical points of reference for the establishment of subsequent *waris* or cognatic descent groups. In the traditional Dusun social system, the male elders were in charge of *adat* while the female elders were in charge of *temarok* belief – this system was rigid and mutually exclusive. Crucially, many of the *tatuwo* have expanded their network and influence outside of their *alai gayo*. They have interacted with both the Brunei Malay sultanate as well with the British residency throughout history.

In the traditional Brunei Malay, some male Dusun *tatuwo* were appointed as *menteri darat*⁴² (land chiefs) for tax collecting purposes, *ketua kampung* (village headman), *dato* (powerful elder) and *orang kaya* (rich man). Pudarno explained that these privileged *tatuwo* enjoyed more influence than the traditional *tatuwo*. The impact of the Malay Sultanate over the Dusun gradually transformed an egalitarian society into a stratified one (Pudarno Binchin 2004: 175). As for the British residency, the Dusun have had a long association with the British which dates back as early as 1906. This was when the centralised administrative system was set up for Brunei under the British resident⁴³. Under the British residency system, the *penghulu* was recommended by the district officer but allowed the appointment of the *ketua kampung* from within the community (Brown 1970: 118; Ranjit Singh, 1990: 235). Therefore, some of the traditional *tatuwo* became officially recognized *ketua kampung* under the British residency system and their appointment depended on their position in the traditional kinship network (Pudarno Binchin 2004: 176). Commonly, a *penghulu* or *ketua kampung* (if the appointee was not a *tatuwo*) would preside over an *adat* hearing but it would always be the *tatuwo* who was the ‘juror’. In contemporary Brunei, the *ketua kampung* and *penghulu* are administrative officers of the state and play the role of mediators in the villages. Appointment to these government positions today no longer take into consideration the *tatuwo* as potential future recruits – though, some *tatuwo* still hold the positions

⁴² The position of *menteri darat* was changed to *penghulu* under the British Residency rule (Brown 1970: 119).

⁴³ This was truly a different time in Brunei’s history because the British resident was the apex of the administrative hierarchy rather than the Brunei Malay Sultan (Brown 1970: 85).

of *penolong ketua kampung* (assistant to village headman) today⁴⁴. Nonetheless, the *tatuwo* persist until this day and still hold responsibilities in Dusun customary law, public matters and religious administration⁴⁵ both on an official and unofficial capacity; there is much more to understand regarding their role in the modern-day Dusun community and how it shapes ethnic identity.

Pudarno (2004: 160) also wrote of an existing Dusun Association, a non-governmental organisation, which has been referred to on numerous occasions by Eva Kershaw (2000: 20-21), Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2015b: 41). According to Pudarno (2004: 160), in the early 1960s, following the setting up of a Dusun association in the village of *Bukit Udal*, which was named *Pakatan Sang Jati Dusun* (or PSJD in short) which means ‘our people Dusun association’, the Dusun began to refer to themselves as *Sang Jati*⁴⁶ (our people). However, this view has to be qualified because of the lack of empirical evidence. Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid (2015: 41) noted that part of the mission of the association was to “preserve the Dusun language and culture from extinction”.⁴⁷ Various activities and planning were conducted annually such as *adau gayo* (Great Day) to “unite the ethnic community, reminding them of the importance of their origins as indigenous ethnic Dusun people, while preserving its culture and language in every generation” (Yaw Siew May, May 23, 2007). Pudarno (2004: 182) believed that the establishment of *Pakatan Sang Jati Dusun* represented “the first and only indigenous attempts to unify the entire Dusun population in political terms”. However, he was not very optimistic about its current viability. He believed that it had failed in its objectives and membership has dwindled from thousands in the early 1960s to a few hundred or even less in the 2000s. However, the association continues to be referred to by many who write about the Dusun community.

Similarly, Asiyah az-Zahra (2016: 11) noted that the *Pakatan Sang Jati Dusun* (PSJD) is a cultural body that “provide an avenue for young members to learn ethnic traditions”. She cited

⁴⁴Early fieldwork in the Tutong District in *Batang Mitus*, *Kebia* and *Ukong* in Tutong District from January to October 2020 have revealed that many of the non-Muslim Dusun who hold the *Penolong Ketua Kampung* are not allowed to move up to become *Ketua Kampung* because the criteria to be one now is to also be a Muslim.

⁴⁵ More on these responsibilities of the *tatuwo* can be found on Pudarno Binchin (2004: 177-180).

⁴⁶ As previously mentioned, there are two variations of this: *Suang Jati* or *Sang Jati*. Both terms carry the same meaning. However, we will refer to it as *Sang Jati* hereafter. Beside *Sang Jati*, ‘Dusun’ was used in formal situations or in relation to other ethnic groups. It is more usual to use *Sang Jati* as an in-group reference.

⁴⁷ According to Yabit Alas (personal communication), the real mission of PSJD was to improve the economic well-being of the community through its involvement in business projects such as running a school bus service and cooperative stores. It was the initiative of the Dusun in Kg Bukit Udal. The organization of cultural activities such as *adau gayo* was to promote the profile of the association. Villages were divided in the support for PSJD.

Coluzzi (2011: 19) and mentions that “such initiatives are considered effective strategies to promote and raise cultural heritage awareness”. Her Dusun informants have claimed to be actively involved with the association and have demonstrated ‘ethnic involvement’ such as being “part of folk dancing troupes to represent their schools in national dance competitions or their villages in annual festival celebrations for His Majesty Sultan Haji Hassanah Bolkuah and the monarch’s traditional meet-the-people ceremony in Tutong District” (Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 11). Kinship groups and relations are important to the lives of the Brunei Dusun. Even among the Dusun of Rungus in Sabah, Appell (1968: 213) commented that these kinship groups frequently engage in social and religious activities. However, as we have emphasized throughout this section, family and kinship ties are closely linked with which elder or *tatuwo* the group recognizes, and what we understand so far is that leadership can come at various levels. Throughout history, local leaders have also been influenced by the Brunei Malay sultanate and by the British residency system. In the present day, the Brunei Dusun continues to face major social and cultural changes. To this day, the *tatuwo* continue to play a part in presiding over an *adat* hearing, representing inside and outside of the Dusun community, and identifying what is ‘Dusun’. As Pudarno (2004: 176) describes, they are the ‘juror’. We can infer that there is still much more to be explored and learn as to how and why certain *tatuwo* gained their influence, and how their leadership impacts not only on their own descent group but also on the Dusun community.

Who are the Dusun in Brunei society?

Whether it is in the context of Brunei or outside of it, ethnic naming and categorisation of the Dusun and its representation have always been problematic. As discussed in this review, the term ‘Dusun’ was given by the Brunei Malays of Kampung Ayer (Evans 1922: 35; King 1994: 191; Bernstein 1997: 164; Harrison 1958: 299; Pudarno Binchin 2004: 71) but it may have originated from the British colonialists who came to Borneo (Pudarno Binchin 2004: 71). Tregonning (1960: 82-82) stated that it originally had a derogatory connotation – it was used by the Malays to mean an orchard or countryside, and to be a Dusun is therefore to be a ‘countryman’. This is not to say that the Dusun did not have their own terms for other indigenes – they used *Sang Abai* for the Malays, *Sang Pungit* for the Kedayans, *Sang Keluyo* for the Tutong, *Sang Bataring* for the Murut

and *Sang Daya* for the Ibans⁴⁸ (Bantong Antaran 1993a: 15). Based on the literature reviewed, it is more than probable that ‘Dusun’ is an exonym. Over time, ‘Dusun’ became a term that was used officially by the Brunei Malay Sultanate and the colonial administration.

‘Dusun’ as an exonym has evolved in various ways. The foremost is to understand it as ‘authority defined’ and acknowledging that its identity was given formal recognition in the Brunei National Act of 1961, when it was designated as *Puak* alongside other indigenous groups and collectively subsumed under ‘Malay’ in the census (Brunei 1961: 118-20; Pudarno Binchin 2014: 2; Asiyah az-Zahra 2016: 2). Pudarno and Asiyah az-Zahra identify as Dusun and understandably adopt a normative view of Dusun identity. Both authors also share how Dusun have navigated their identity vis-à-vis the dominant Malay Muslim narrative. Quite simply, there needs to be a greater understanding of the flux of Dusun identity to the fixity of the Brunei Malay ethnic system without ignoring the polysemous nature of ‘Malayness’. Maxwell (2001: 187-188) argued that being a Muslim, speaking the ‘native’ Malay language and identifying as ethnically Malay constitute *masuk Melayu* (becoming a Malay) in Brunei. Bantong (1993a: 16) citing Noakes (1950) believed that the application of the term ‘Dusun’ has always been ‘objective’ rather than ‘subjective’. To explain this, Bantong cited Appell (1972) who used the exonym ‘Dusun’ as an ‘objective’ referent and a “folk term which is imposed by outsiders”. Bantong (1993a: 16) argued that *Sang Jati* is an appropriate endonym or ‘subjective’ referent. We have to also acknowledge that the use of *Sang Jati* emerged after the establishment of *Pakatan Sang Jati Dusun* from *Bukit Udal*⁴⁹ – which was set up to unify the Dusun politically, socially and culturally in the 1960s. However, it has not gained popular acceptance. Bantong and Pudarno also argued that *Sang Kedayan* is an endonym (Bantong Antaran 1993a: 15; Pudarno Binchin 2004: 160). Bantong believed that it was used by Dusun elders and is a term that is far older than *Sang Jati*.⁵⁰

We referred earlier to Bantong’s discussion on the internal distinctions that the Dusun make, which are based on the geographical location of their settlements. Hence the Dusun refer to ‘people’ from the big river, from the small river, the hill or high hill, the other side of the land, upstream or

⁴⁸ These terms have no English translation. In fact, they are proper nouns which are ‘native’ and specific names given by the Brunei Dusun for these ethnic groups.

⁴⁹ On a recent interview with Yabit Alas, he disputed this claim and argued that *Sang Jati* is a term much older and used much earlier before the establishment of *Pakatan Sang Jati Dusun*.

⁵⁰ This is questioned by Yabit Alas (personal communication), who takes the view that it is a reference more widely used in Kg Ukong.

downstream, and inland. These are names associated with toponyms or places, reflecting what Sillander (2016: 106) highlights as a typical Borneo pattern. He argues that it was the locality inhabited in the present or the not too remote past – not cultural tradition or language – that were critical to their identity. Hence in Dusun society in the past, it was the eponymous house or *alai gayo* that was critical to their sense of belonging and reference point. New ethnonyms, Sillander (ibid.) continues, were adopted when they moved even if the old ones were sometimes retained.

As ethnic communities shifted toward the adoption of major languages for instrumental purposes in the second half of the last century, the study of language decline has been an important interest of scholars throughout the world. The death of languages assumed cultural devastation and the loss of identity and heritage (Crystal cited in Najib and McLellan 2018: 217). It was some twenty years after the establishment of the Universiti Brunei Darussalam in 1985 that scholars of linguistics turned their attention to the state of language use amongst indigenous communities in Brunei, including Dusun, Tutong, Belait, Iban and Bisaya. Some of these works were reviewed earlier. Dusun was the first indigenous language to be introduced by the Language Centre in the university as an option for all students in 2010. The language was further promoted in the mass media through state radio and television and publications in the Dusun language by the official Centre for Language and Literature or *Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka* (Fatimah Chuchu and Najib Noorashid 2015: 41). The Sang Jati Dusun Association (PSJD) made up of representatives of various Dusun communities which was formed in the 1960s used the opportunity to promote awareness of the origins of the ethnic community and preservation of its culture and language (ibid.). Under these circumstances the reference to Dusun has evolved in the last twenty years as an ethnonym, as more of the younger generation self-identify. Many of them are no longer familiar with *Sang Jati* and do not relate to it.

As we have observed, several ethnic groups have been referred to as Dusun throughout this review. While Bisaya is recognised as one of the seven official *Puak* of Brunei (1961: 118-20), Pudarno claimed that there are similarities between the Bisaya and the Dusun of Brunei in terms of mythology and marriage practices (Kahti 1990: 27–29) as well as the folk tales on the origins of the paddy or rice⁵¹ (Pudarno Binchin 2002: 76 – 78; 2014: 96). Pudarno also cross-referenced

⁵¹ Pudarno did not elaborate on this further. He seems to infer that the mythology behind the origin of rice is the same between the Dusun and Bisaya but to which part of it is unclear.

his data collected on the Brunei Dusun with the Bisaya community in Limbang. According to McArthur (1987 [1904]: 92), the *Bukit*, ‘Dusun’ or ‘Bisaya’ people farmed and kept cattle livestock and worked hard. They were honest and peaceful and therefore easy to govern, possessed valuable items such as *bedil* (firework), *gongs*⁵² and their houses were made from wooden boards. McArthur also called the Bisaya of Limbang *kaffirs* (non-Muslims) and serfs⁵³. Pudarno (2014: 71; Harrison 1958: 299) suspected that the term ‘Dusun’ may have been drawn from Malaysia (and originated from the British colonialists who first came to Borneo), but the parallels end there. He suggested that the Dusun of Sabah is different from the Dusun of Brunei. King (1994: 191) also mentioned that the term ‘Bisaya’ usually crops up from time to time regarding communities near the borders with Sarawak. There is a small number of ‘Bisaya’ near the border in the Limbang area of Sarawak (Martin, 1992: 110). Peranio interestingly pointed out that:

“The Malay *pengiran* (nobles) and officials of the Sultan’s court assumed that the Bisaya *adat* was a simplified version of Malay customs, very much like the Kedayan, who were thought to be dissimilar from the Bisaya only having adopted Islam” (Peranio 1959: 40).

Bantong (1993a: 11) even referred to Dusun and Bisaya as the same group and noted that they had been used interchangeably in past literature, such as by Sandin (1972) who employed the term ‘Bisaya’ to describe the people who settled along the banks of the Belait and Tutong rivers. In 1904, McArthur⁵⁴ (F. O. 12/126) reported that he heard “those people variously called Bukit, ‘Bisayahs’ or Dusun”. Bantong (1993a: 12) finally admitted that Bisaya are Dusun in Brunei but they are specifically the “Dusun who have settled at the border areas near Limbang, and who have very close family ties with the Limbang Bisaya”.⁵⁵

Leadership and authority in Dusun society is another issue. As Pudarno (2004: 175) claimed in his research, the Dusun was originally an egalitarian society, but they gradually evolved

⁵² These *gongs* are no ordinary gongs as they are used in several Dusun religious rituals, wedding ceremonies and cultural events.

⁵³ A serf is a person who is forced to work on a plot of land especially during medieval European feudalism. They are typically lower ranked than peasants. Not only did McArthur understand the Dusun in an essentialist view, he also compared them to a group with historically low status in the west.

⁵⁴ McArthur was the British Acting Consul in 1904.

⁵⁵ Bantong (1993: 6) mentioned how the annexation of Limbang from Brunei in 1890 by Charles Brooke not only separated land but also culturally relate peoples such as the Dusun and Bisaya who found themselves in separate territories and came to be known by different terms.

into a stratified one under Brunei Malay rule. According to Pudarno, this is in-line with Brown's thinking:

“It can be argued that rank was the most fundamental principle in the Brunei social system especially within the ethnic Bruneians). Ethnic differentiation was partially subsumed by the system of rank” (Brown 1970: 168).

Brown did not write about the Dusun but focused more on the history of the Brunei Malay Sultanate and Brunei as a stratified society. As the Dusun became incorporated into the Brunei Sultanate, they were influenced by the practice of social hierarchy (Brown 1970; Pudarno Binchin 2014: 100-101). King called this ‘rank consciousness’ (1994: 181) and it was well-documented by Pudarno that some *tatuwo* were given titles such as *orang kaya* (title of recognition bestowed by the Sultan). In turn, this meant that the *tatuwo* exercised greater authority than the traditional one. An example of an admired Dusun leader was an individual named *Lukan Uking*.⁵⁶ He was one of the earliest prominent Dusun figures from the village of *Sungai Damit* (Harry 2015: 152) and was given the title *Orang Kaya Pekerma Dewa*. *Lukan Uking* is referred to by in Matussin Tahir's (1986) work. One of Pudarno's informants, a *belian pengiaw* (chief priestess) was also a highly regarded figure named *Dayang Gudang Binti Orang Kaya Amou* from *Ukong* (2014: 54). Bantong (1993a: 33) also mentioned that the use of status and official titles were introduced to the Dusun by the Brunei Malays. However, he did not elaborate on this. King (1994: 193; Martin 1992: 111) mentioned evidence of former Dusun villages becoming ‘totally Malay’ along with their conversion to Islam. It is also interesting to note that major Brunei Dusun literature have originated from *Bukit Udal* (upland), *Ukong* (lowland) and *Sungai Damit* (lowland) (see Pudarno Binchin 2014, 2004; Eva Kershaw 2000; Bantong Antaran 1994) – these are also areas where the Dusun practice a ‘standard Dusun language’ derived from the lowland Dusun dialect (Pudarno Binchin 2002: 47).⁵⁷ It is relevant to consider the relative influence of the *tatuwo* and the *waris* when we examine Dusun identity and its representation. It is also important to factor in ecological contexts in understanding Dusun leadership and representation and differences in interpretations of ‘Dusunness’. This is evident when we see breakaway Dusun associations other than *Pakatan Sang Jati*

⁵⁶ Harry briefly mentioned *Lukan Uking* as Dusun community leader that would have represent the people of the *ulu* (interior), primarily the Dusun of the Belait and Tutong for an unnamed political party in 1962.

⁵⁷ Bantong Antaran and Pudarno Binchin, two prominent Dusun scholars who both worked in the Brunei Museum, are from Bukit Udal and Ukong respectively.

Dusun such as *Pakatan Ikatan Belia Dusun Brunei* from *Ukong* and *Persatuan Batang Mitus* from *Batang Mitus*.⁵⁸

There is no unitarian conception of the Brunei Dusun today. They are a diverse ethnic group, and we can explore them in many different ways - from their unique kinship descent with their *tatuwo*; their multilingualism and how they navigate their dialect boundaries; their ecological settlements; and how they negotiate ‘Malayness’. Each ecological settlement has its particular history and folklore. The Brunei Dusun have undergone social, organisational and economic change throughout the decades. Housing is different now than it used to be and the *alai gayo* has been replaced by modern housing. The Dusun does not fish, hunt or practice labour intensive semi-sedentary wet rice cultivation like they used to (Pudarno Binchin 2002: 48). There are no ‘villages’ in the strict sense for the Dusun in the past (Pudarno Binchin 2004: 175) but since 1992, the villages in each *mukim* now have their own *Majlis Perundingan Mukim/Kampung* (subdistrict/village consultative councils) and this has impacted on the leadership structure of the Dusun.⁵⁹ Members of the council are not necessarily a *tatuwo*, and educated villagers whether they are originally from the village or as a *pendatang* (immigrant) can be appointed by public election.⁶⁰ The *tatuwo* are no longer involved in the formal village administrative structure.

In the early part of this paper, we referred to Asiyah’s view that ‘Dusun identity’ today is sustained by the strength of kinship connections and the importance of ‘ethnic involvement’ to mark life cycle milestones such as weddings and funerals and regular feasts on auspicious days related to the Muslim or Chinese lunar year and *adau gayo*. Such gatherings are taken for granted and do not seem out of the ordinary, but its social significance should not be lost. ‘Identity’, as Carstens (1995:329) notes, “is not fixed at birth; people become who they are gradually through life as they acquire different attributes derived from the activities in which they engage and the people whom they live”. Furthermore, according to Rosaldo (1988:169), where and when people gather at a place to share or celebrate life events such as births, deaths, coming-of-age, and

⁵⁸ Preliminary fieldwork in the Tutong District in *Batang Mitus*, *Kebia* and *Ukong* in Tutong District from January to October 2020 have revealed that there were two other Dusun associations that was established in both *Ukong* and *Batang Mitus*.

⁵⁹ Villages or kampongs evolved as administrative units under the colonial administration and after independence. However, this may not coincide with the ‘Dusun’ understanding of villages.

⁶⁰ The objectives of the formal positions and administrative mechanisms are explained by Pudarno Binchin (2004: 178).

marriages, they are doing so not only as an act of recounting the past but as a process of selecting, discarding, and improvising in response to situational demands. For Rosaldo (1988: 165-166) this makes manifestations of ‘ethnicity’ at once arbitrary, external, and material.

Identity-formation is a process of ‘becoming’, of moving from one fixed state to another (Chua, 2007: 264). The Dusun is in the process of ‘becoming’ and King (1994: 192) puts it well by saying that “they (the Dusun) assert a separate identity, yet they have been influenced by (the) Malays”. When Peranio (1977: 47) studied the Dusun in the 1950s and subsequently in the 1970s, he noted that the Dusun “recognize an affinity with the Malays and yet they feel themselves to be alien.” Being ‘Dusun’ today is multifaceted: it is multi-cultural, multi-organisational, multi-lingual, multi-status, and multi-faith. It is a process of becoming and unbecoming in Brunei.

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