

A RESILIENT MONARCHY: THE SULTANATE OF BRUNEI AND REGIME LEGITIMACY IN AN ERA OF DEMOCRATIC NATION-STATES

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As the only ruling monarchy in Southeast Asia, the Sultanate of Brunei is often seen as a political anachronism in a region in which democratic institutions of government prevail. Independence, gained from Britain in 1984, did not result in the institution of representative government, but in effect led to the consolidation of the monarchical system of government (Singh 1988: 67). Its present head of state, Sultan Sir Hassanal Bolkiah, is the 29th ruler of a dynasty which has reigned in Brunei since the fourteenth century. The early Brunei Empire reached its zenith from the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries, when it exercised suzerainty over much of Borneo and the southern tip of the Philippine archipelago. Under the fifth Sultan, Bolkiah (1473-1521), Brunei was especially powerful and even managed to briefly capture Manila.² Its territorial domain and influence was gradually whittled down through the centuries, and it has been suggested that if not for British colonial intervention, the Sultanate would be lost to oblivion (Horton 1984).

In 1839, the English adventurer, James Brooke, arrived in Borneo and gained control over territory in northwest Borneo as a reward for putting down a rebellion in Sarawak. Brooke, who styled himself "Rajah" of Sarawak, soon expanded his territorial control. Soon after, in 1878, on the northeast coast of Borneo, the British North Borneo Company established a foothold and was similarly encroaching on territory tenuously held by the Brunei Sultanate. The arrival of western powers in the region affected the traditional trading patterns and decimated the economic base of the Sultanate. Brunei became a British Protectorate state in 1888, and had the British not established a residency in 1906, it is very likely that Brunei would have been absorbed by Sarawak.

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2 Horton, however, argues that the splendour and power of the Brunei Sultanate may have been exaggerated in the account of Antonio Pigafetta, who visited Brunei in 1521 (1984: 3-4).

From 1906 to 1959, except for the short period under Japanese occupation during the Second World War, Brunei was administered by the British under a Residency system. The Sultanate did not lose complete sovereignty especially on matters relating to religion and local custom, but executive authority was held by a succession of British Residents (Horton 1984). Internal self-government was acquired in 1959, and as a result, executive power was extended to the Sultan. A new constitution was promulgated in 1959 and Brunei assumed full internal sovereignty in 1971 (Saunders 1994: 163). An attempt to introduce a partially elected legislative body as set down under the constitution was abandoned after the opposition political party, Partai Rakyat Brunei, launched an unsuccessful revolt in 1962. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, Brunei strongly resisted British pressure to amalgamate with its neighbours, first in a British Borneo Federation and later, in the new state of Malaysia. In 1979, Brunei and Britain signed a new treaty, transferring powers over defence and foreign affairs to Brunei and this paved the way for full independence in 1984.

The Sultanate comprises two territorial enclaves of some 5,769 square kilometres in total, accessible from one another only by water and surrounded on the landward side by the Malaysian state of Sarawak. Its population is estimated at around 344,500 (July 2001), of whom 67 per cent are Malays, who dominate the political and bureaucratic life of the Sultanate (The World Factbook 2001). Ethnic Chinese, most of whom are stateless, make up around 15 per cent, while indigenous non-Muslims constitute 6 per cent of the population. According to a 1991 estimate, temporary residents make up 41% of the country's labour force (The World Factbook 2001). The country's fortunes are closely tied with abundant gas and oil reserves, which initially funded its overseas investments. In 2000, the Sultanate had one of the highest average per capita income in Asia at US\$17,600, and has instituted a comprehensive system of social welfare programmes unique to the region. Free education and health care, guaranteed pensions as well as other benefits are provided on a generous basis to its citizens (Government of Brunei Darussalam, 2002).

This paper examines how the Brunei monarchy legitimizes its rule in a country which is sometimes regarded as an anomaly. What are the sources of regime legitimacy that are available to an absolute monarchy which clearly is determined to perpetuate its own existence? Before discussing the various alternatives, it would be useful to look more closely at the nature of the modern Brunei polity.

Legitimacy and the Modernising Monarchy

Clearly, the structure of government in Brunei is in striking contrast to that of the other states in the region. The absence of institutionalized popular participation has led to external observers questioning the structure and viability of such a political structure. Legitimacy is not derived in form or

substance from election or popular participation. The Brunei state, although expressed as a mixture of traditional and modern forms, essentially bears testimony to the resilience of a hybrid traditional political style of leadership. Under the 1959 Constitution, the Sultan is both head of state and prime minister, and has full executive authority including emergency powers since 1962. Authority is centralized and the Sultan rules, assisted and advised by the various councils, such as the Council of State, Council of Ministers and the Privy Council. The Cabinet, presently consisting of 10 members, is responsible for government administration. The Sultan presides over the cabinet and apart from being prime minister, also holds the ministerial portfolios for defence and finance. One of the Sultan's brothers, Prince Mohamed, is the Minister of Foreign Affairs. The present ruler, Yang Di-Pertuan Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah, succeeded his father as monarch in 1967. As mentioned earlier, the state of emergency declared after the 1962 revolt has not been lifted and Gunn argues that a "resurfacing of the experiment in representative government" has been limited by an obsession with security (1993: 124).

Huntington, in an early work, *Political Order in Changing Societies* (1968), expressed skepticism that an absolute monarchy can be considered a viable regime type in the modern era. He maintains that the centralization of power, although useful for social and economic change, does not provide sufficient incentives for monarchs to expand their social base and accommodate the demands of new social groups produced by the process of modernization. However, as evidenced by the resilience of a number of monarchies in the Middle East, the monarchical system of government has proven to be a rather congenial regime in the Islamic world. While monarchies are essentially traditional polities, they are by no means incapable of accommodating new demands brought about by socio-economic change. The strong centralizing tendencies of monarchies may be seen as a positive attribute, especially in the early stages of state formation when decisions need to be made swiftly (Anderson 1974: 17-18; Anderson 1991: 4). The absolutist nature of monarchy also enables it to control the pace of change in a manner that is often less disruptive than full democracies. It can be argued though that owing to their traditional political structures, their capacity for managing change is perhaps more limited than that of democracies. The second stage of state formation, however, requires the creation of more tangible and lasting ties between the ruler and the citizens. This appears to be more successfully negotiated by monarchies with strong representative institutions (Anderson 1991: 4).

Upon achieving independence in 1984, the main task that faced the Sultanate was institution-building. Historically, the Sultanate, with its own built-in stability, has been the only institution of government in Brunei. As a measure to avert criticism of its absolutist nature, efforts were made to develop professional institutions of government which would have their own dynamics, along the lines of similar polities in the Middle East, such as Oman and Saudi Arabia. As a result, the ministerial form of government was unveiled in 1984. However, the Sultan continued to exert a strong presence and influence by

simultaneously becoming Prime Minister, Finance and Home Minister (Leake 1990: 68). Although mindful of the fact that the centralization of power sets limits to the expansion of the traditional polity, the independent Sultanate has shown attempts to accommodate new groups produced by modernization. The Sultanate has had to prove that it is willing to absorb able people from humble backgrounds into the highest positions in the bureaucracy. This, according to Huntington, is a necessary condition for reform and is also a useful means to reduce the monarch's dependence on the traditional bureaucratic elites (Huntington 1968: 186). The ability of the Sultan to reduce discontent through absorbing upwardly mobile individuals is also limited to the financial and physical capacity of the small bureaucracy. With modernization, important considerations for entry into the central bureaucracy have been influenced by such factors as professional skills, talent and merit. Hence a fine balance has to be struck between appeasing traditional allies and rewarding merit.

The Sultan appeared to recognize this need and, on the eve of independence, appointed three persons who were not immediate members of the royal family as Cabinet Ministers. This process was accelerated further in 1986 when more channels for vertical mobility were opened in a cabinet reshuffle, which elevated a comparatively large number of commoners and also resulted in the promotion of an ethnic Chinese to the post of Permanent Secretary in the Foreign Ministry (Government of Brunei Darussalam 1988: 53). In the 1986 reshuffle, four new ministries were created, including the Ministry of Religious Affairs, and eight new deputy ministers were appointed, selected from the civil service. The priority appears to have been to appoint the educated elite and technocrats in ministries such as Finance and Development. To retain the royal family's hold on power, the Sultan and his brother still control key positions in the Cabinet. It may be tempting then to describe the Sultanate as a modernizing monarchy as seen in its attempt to adapt and adjust its institution without great difficulty (Apter 1961: 21). However, modernizing monarchies do often run the risk of expanding the traditional polity and encouraging demands for broader political participation.

Political Challenges

Brunei shares the basic political challenges faced by the small oil-rich Gulf states, which are conservative in their approach to government. The windfall in revenue as a result of the oil boom in the 1970s created new conditions for these states. While remaining politically conservative, they experienced rapid economic development funded by their oil wealth. It has been argued that rapid economic growth may give rise to demands for more representative government (Huntington 1991: 59-60). Monarchies have been reluctant to institute major political structural change. In order to avert demands for a shift towards more representation in government, they have introduced and maintained comprehensive social welfare programmes. After having

committed themselves to a clearly adaptationist programme, these monarchical regimes have, in effect, compromised their identity as keepers of more traditional values. In a period of rising Islamic consciousness, there is also pressure to pay constant heed to Islamic tradition.

As a modernizing regime, the Sultanate has demonstrated its reluctant agreement to tolerate some form of democratic activity from time to time. Following the upheavals as a result of the 1962 revolt, which essentially challenged the legitimacy of the Sultanate, a state of emergency was proclaimed. The constitution was suspended and the Legislative Council dissolved. Elections to the Legislative Council were held in 1965, but the then Sultan, Sir Omar Ali Saifuddin, refused to bow to British pressure to admit elected members to the Council of Ministers (Hussainmiya 1995: 353). In order to avert a crisis and avoid the constitutional changes, the Sultan abdicated, in 1967, in favour of his son, Hassanal Bolkiah. However, with the installation of the new Sultan, Sir Omar Ali remained the power behind the throne. The outcome of this crisis was that Sir Omar had bought time that he believed was needed in order to consolidate the monarchy and transform Brunei into an independent state (Saunders 1994: 160). His abdication and the installation of his son provided the breathing space required for the consolidation of the monarchy before the call for changes could be renewed (Saunders 1994: 162).

It was only in May 1985, a year after independence, that the Sultanate saw the rippling of democratic activity with the formation of the Brunei National Democratic Party (BNDP). One of the leaders of the party, Haji Abdul Latif Chuchu, described the party as a “moderate political party with principles based in [on] Islam and liberal nationalism” and it aimed to peacefully achieve “a system of parliamentary democracy under a constitutional monarchy” (Menon 1987: 94). This clearly runs against the grain of the traditional political structure. The government was cautious about the effects of party politics and the challenge it could pose to the regime and took measures to limit the influence of the party; for example, members of the civil service, who formed 48 per cent of the labour force in 1987, were not permitted to participate in political activities (Abu Bakar 1989: 93-94). The BNDP also called for the repeal of emergency law and the re-introduction of elections. However, the Bruneian populace were rather apathetic, perhaps owing to the long period of time in which party politics was dormant. Moreover, the Sultanate’s enormous oil wealth had equipped the state with the capacity to provide social welfare programmes for the people and the BNDP was thus left with few issues with which to mobilise the people. The party soon saw a split within its ranks when a splinter group, the Brunei National Solidarity Party (BNSP), was formed in late 1985. The BNDP leaders continued to be critical of the Sultan, making visits abroad and giving negative statements about the government. The BNDP was eventually de-registered in 1988 on the grounds that it had contravened the Societies Act, and its leader Abdul Latif Chuchu was subsequently arrested under emergency laws. Brunei’s only registered party, the BNSP, made a surprise return to the

limelight in February 1995 when it was officially permitted to hold its first national assembly. This suggests that the Sultanate was still willing to entertain limited notions of liberalizing its polity (Talib 1996).

The ability of the Sultan to stifle the development of party politics has allowed him to maintain his role as the prime source of authority in the country. Despite his attempts to project an image of being benevolent, and the extension of generous social and welfare benefits to the people, there appears to exist a latent fear on the part of the regime that there would be a demand for a shift in the system of government towards more representative institutions.

In 1989, the Sultan declared that he intended to broaden the basis of his government and establish liberal political institutions and re-introduce elections. A committee was established to review the 1959 constitution and, in 1994, it submitted its findings to the Sultan. The report has not been made public. In 1999, Prince Mohamed, the Sultan's brother, declared that "Brunei could not be left out but must move with its neighbours" (Mohamad Yusop 2000: 93). The constitutional review committee, according to the Prince, had submitted its final report and recommended the introduction of elections for the legislature (*ibid.*). It remains to be seen whether the Sultan will re-introduce more representative institutions in the near future, and the comment made by Prince Mohamed must be considered within the context of the economic downturn that Brunei experienced in the late 1990s, discussed next.

Economic Problems

The impact of the 1997-98 economic recession on Brunei becomes important particularly when the legitimacy of monarchies is often measured in terms of their ability to provide social services. This capacity to meet social demands is often reduced and sometimes seriously affected when a country experiences severe economic problems, resulting in a crisis of legitimacy. The economic crisis during the late 1990s, which affected the whole Southeast Asian region with varying degrees of severity, did not leave Brunei unscathed. The Brunei economy fell into recession in late 1997 and the GDP growth for 1998 barely reached 1 per cent (The World Factbook 2001). Many of Brunei's trading partners, especially the neighbouring Southeast Asian countries and Japan, reduced their demand for Brunei oil. The impact of the crisis was worsened by the slump in oil prices at the beginning of 1999. Since oil and gas constituted 90 per cent of Brunei's exports, the fall in oil prices resulted in a reduction of the Brunei government's revenue. During the economic crisis, the Brunei government also suffered embarrassment due to the collapse of Amedeo Development Corporation in 1998, owned by the Sultan's brother, Prince Jefri, who was Minister of Finance from 1986 to 1997. The company allegedly owed debts up to US\$2.8 billion. Prince Jefri was also accused of misusing funds belonging to the Brunei Investment Agency (BIA). The government began legal proceedings against Prince Jefri and an out-of-court

agreement was reached in which the state would take over all personal assets acquired by Prince Jefri using BIA funds (Horton 2001: 95).

As a result of the fall in revenue, Brunei suffered a budget deficit in 1998/99. The government adopted austerity measures and all government departments had to review their spending. The construction and retail sectors of the economy were adversely affected by the economic downturn in the short term (Mohamad Yusop 2000: 90-91). The recession served as a wake-up call to Brunei to press on with its efforts to diversify its economy.

The economic difficulties Brunei experienced in the 1990s were not severe. The government's capacity to accommodate the needs of the people and deliver social services were not seriously compromised. Most of the local workforce are employed in the public sector and were not affected by the retrenchment of workers in the private sector, especially in the construction industry. Mohamad Yusop maintains that the "welfare system insulated the population from the impact of economic problems" (2000: 92). It is noteworthy that the events of the late 1990s demonstrate a growing tendency on the part of the government to be more transparent. There appears to be a greater openness and candour as seen in media reports. For example, the collapse of Amedeo and the legal proceedings against Prince Jefri received wide coverage in the local press. There was also some relaxation in the control of the media as seen in the launching in 1999 of a privately-owned second English daily, *News Express*, which provided competition to the *Borneo Bulletin*.

Islam as a Source of Legitimacy

As a British protectorate state in the first half of the twentieth century, Islam continued to be a defining feature of the monarchy (Gunn 1997: 8-10). Thus, upon attaining self governing status in 1959 and independence in 1984, it was natural for Brunei to mobilize the religion to protect the state.

Vatikiotis has suggested that in a consideration of the relationship between the state and religion, an important factor would be "the extent to which the state is legitimized by a religious referent" (Vatikiotis 1991: 28) and whether religion has an ideological role in the creation of the political order. This close nexus readily implies that religion can be a determining factor in the nature of the political identity of a country. Another issue which needs to be addressed is the importance the state accords to religion and how it realigns the administrative political unit with the religious; in particular, in Brunei's case, the weight or role given to Islam, that is, whether it should merely be seen as "a guide and inspirational ideal of authority" or as the basis of legitimacy and the organizing principle of authority (ibid.).

The preoccupation with religion must also be seen in the context of the nation-building projects of new states and their need to legitimize their rule and unify their population. In contrast to attempts at modernization giving prominence to rational action and de-emphasizing ritual practices, this type of

nation-building receives its inspiration from quite opposite sources. Acknowledging Anderson's (1983) recognition of an imagined community and the view that the evolution of a nation need not necessarily be a linear one slowed down by people's primordial loyalties, identity with a nation would rest with certain indigenous givens in a country (Geertz 1963). Acceptance of a particular national identity would necessarily involve participation in the community, sharing its religion, common heritage and history. Nation-building entails commitment to a faith and "the promotion of selected practices and even the invention of new rites" (Keyes, Kendall and Hardacre 1994: 5; see also Talib 1998: 149). It is not unusual for religion in Southeast Asia to form a basis of political legitimacy; as an illustration, Buddhism in Thailand has long been utilised by rulers to legitimize their rule and facilitate social control (Somboon 1982: 6). Owing to the strong influence Buddhism has over Thai society, it is often used as a strong referent in the identity of the nation.

Apart from religion, monarchical regimes often consolidate fundamental internal structures and institutions through the ritualization of cultural values and primordial sentiments in order to neutralise aspirations for political change and even avoid religious radicalism. These concerns are central to the concept and practice of a state ideology. Brunei has, since independence, given prominence to the concept of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB, Malay Islamic Monarchy) in an attempt to promote loyalty to the new nation.

***Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) as a Legitimizing Instrument**

In July 1990, on the occasion of the Sultan's forty-fourth birthday, the concept of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB, Malay Islamic Monarchy) was enunciated. It has been argued that MIB is not a new innovation and that it has apparently formed the basis of the Brunei Sultanate from time immemorial. The concept was formulated by officials close to the regime, who attempted to define Bruneian identity in terms of the people's attachment to Malay culture, the Islamic religion and loyalty to the monarchy (Braighlinn 1992: 42). It is seen as an instrument of legitimacy for the Sultan's rule by marrying the conservatism of Islamic values with that of Malay culture and the traditional unifying role of the monarchy. Since the death of former Sultan, Sir Omar Ali, the present Sultan sees MIB as a means to create a "unifying ideology which would bolster his power, blunt the appeal of those calling for a stricter observance of Islam, and develop a sense of purpose in the young" (Saunders 1994: 187-88). He further stressed that MIB was "God's Will", thus imbuing the concept with an aura of divine sanction (ibid.). Over the next few years, MIB was refined as a national ideology appropriated to justify the role of the Sultan as "guardian and protector of Islamic principles and Malay culture" (Saunders 1994: 188). Braighlinn (1992: 19) equates the ideology of MIB with the attempt on the part of the Sultan at "self-legitimization".

Although it has been alleged by its staunch advocates that MIB originates from the establishment of the Sultanate in the fourteenth century,

legal references to the concept first surfaced in the 1959 Constitution, which had references to the Malay language as the official language, Islam as the official religion, and the Sultan as the head of state (Government of Brunei Darussalam 1988: 21). There was no further mention of MIB until the Declaration of Independence of 1984, when, in his proclamation address, the Sultan announced that Brunei would be known as *Negara Melayu Islam Beraja* (a Malay Islamic Monarchical State).

The Sultan, in his 1984 Declaration of Independence, proclaimed Brunei as a sovereign, independent and democratic Malay Islamic Monarchy, observing the teachings of Islam according to the Shafeite sect. The emphasis here was on the three distinct components of MIB; Malay cultural values, Islam as a way of life, and the traditional political system of Malay monarchy. In his address to the Muslim Youth Conference hosted in March 1984, the Sultan underlined the importance of Islam,

I am thankful to Allah...for destining Negara Brunei Darussalam to be an Islamic country since the fourteenth century as the result of which it was able to absorb Islamic influences up to the present time, through the efforts of previous Sultans of the country. It is my intention as well as that of my Government to continue preserving the Islamic teachings in accordance with *Ahli Sunnah Wal Jamaah* as a way of life and foundation in the administration of the Government... in line with the position of Islam as the official religion of the country (Siddique 1985: 101).

One of the more determined advocates of MIB was Pehin Hj Abdul Aziz Umar, a former Minister of Education. In his paper, 'Melayu Islam Beraja sebagai Falsafah Negara Brunei Darussalam' (MIB as the National Philosophy of Brunei Darussalam, 1992), Pehin Aziz maintained that the objective of the government was to inculcate in Bruneians the importance of MIB and for them to practise the virtues of a Malay Islamic Monarchy.

According to Pehin Aziz (1992), the word 'Beraja' in MIB signifies a Malay type of monarchy, a system of government that is unique to the Malay world, which has been practised for six hundred years: its power is absolute. It also refers to a monarch who rules justly and consults with his ministers or advisers and always has the interests and welfare of his population at heart. 'Malay', in MIB, suggests the consolidation of the Malay culture as a dominant feature in the state's cultural life. The Malay language is given prominence and the *jawi* script has been revived. Another component of MIB, 'Islam', also received the attention of Pehin Aziz (1992). According to him, MIB has elevated Islam to the status of official religion and is a reference point for all activities in the state.

To further elaborate this viewpoint, the Sultan, in a royal address made on his forty-fourth birthday in July 1990, maintained that MIB encapsulates values important to Bruneians. He stated that the Malay language binds the people together and is an important signifier of Malay identity. Islam is a religion which guarantees the rights of the people. He also suggested that the

monarchical system has become part of the heritage of Bruneians (Saunders 1994: 187). But it must be emphasized that when MIB was officially sponsored in 1990, it was described as Brunei's national philosophy and not national ideology. It was in the following years that MIB was elevated to its status as an ideology. MIB has been widely discussed at various times by officials of the Ministries of Education and Religious Affairs and is also being propagated in schools (*ibid.*).

Mindful of the potential threat of Islamic extremism, the government pays great heed to the religion by building grand mosques, establishing religious schools and colleges, and even sponsoring pilgrims to Mecca. The Sultan participates in religious rituals, and Islamic subjects have been incorporated into the national educational curriculum. Financial institutions run along Islamic lines have also been introduced since the early 1990s, culminating in the establishment of the first Islamic bank in 1994. In order to highlight the importance of Islam, the Sultan, in 1990, called for existing laws in the state to be brought in line with the teachings of Islam, and this commitment is demonstrated, for example, by the ban on the sale of alcohol in the state. Nevertheless, although Islam has received prominence in the Sultanate, there has been little attempt to introduce *Shariah* law, except with regard to inheritance, marriage and divorce. Brunei, like other Islamic modernizing monarchies, has constantly made recourse to Islamic themes in a period of rising religious enthusiasm, with the aim of reducing the effectiveness of militant Islamic opposition (Voll 1994).

In the context of the Bruneian polity, MIB is assigned several roles; it forms the basis for national unity and development, and is a determining feature of Bruneian identity. MIB also encompasses the substance as well as the spirit of traditional Brunei. Since the mid-1960s, there has been an attempt to revive ceremonies, customs and traditions, which had been largely forgotten. The coronation of the present Sultan in 1968 provided such an occasion, and various traditional offices of state were revived. Symbols of the supremacy of the ruler, such as the regalia, the hierarchy of officials, the titles and terms of address and other royal paraphernalia as well as court ceremonies like the *puja pusp*a and *ciri gelaran*, which highlights the sovereignty of the Sultan, were also given prominence (Abdul Hamid 1992). There was also official encouragement of the revival of traditional arts and crafts. It is difficult to ascertain whether these ceremonials and heraldic rituals, which have since been formalized, were partly invented or had partly evolved through time.

It is observed that in the discussions of MIB, the historical continuity of the regime has been given strong emphasis. According to official discourse, MIB originated from the time when the first Brunei monarch, Awang Alak Betatar, who reigned from 1363-1402, converted to Islam and adopted the name of Sultan Muhammad I (Pehin Aziz 1992: 1-2). It is argued that the Brunei Malay monarchical system, which has existed since the conversion of Brunei's first ruler, binds the monarch and his subjects in a single identity and has been firmly established and reinforced in Bruneian society through the Hashimite dynasty. The Hashimite (named after the Prophet Muhammad's

family, Bani Hashim) dynasty originated from Sharif Ali (the third Sultan), a descendant of the Prophet who married the daughter of Brunei's second Sultan. Since then, MIB has been alleged to assume an important role in the governance of the country and way of life of the Bruneians. Braighlinn (1992: 28) styles this legitimacy "from the distant past" and suggests that it is not unusual for authoritarian regimes to seek legitimacy more through "some kind of origin myth than popularly based ones" (ibid.). In the past, the Malay monarchies of Southeast Asia have created genealogies tracing their ancestry to a heavenly forefather.

Seeking legitimacy through historical continuity would necessarily imply continuity only with a "suitable historical past" and often this continuity is largely fictitious. Hobsbawm (1994: 2) argues that 'invented' traditions are

responses to novel situations which take the form of reference to old situations, or which establish their own past by quasi-obligatory repetition. It is the contrast between the constant change and innovation of the modern world and the attempt to structure at least some parts of social life within it as unchanging and invariant...

He further adds that there have been numerous examples in history of political institutions or ideological movements which were so unprecedented that "even historical continuity had to be invented, for example, by creating an ancient past beyond effective historical continuity" (ibid.: 7). The *Syaer Awang Semaun*, Brunei's foundation myth, maintains that Brunei's founders originated from a union between a heavenly figure, and the indigenous inhabitants. The state historian, Pehin Jamil, has also attempted to show that the first Brunei Sultan received his title and regalia from the Malacca line. According to a Brunei chronicle, which received much attention in 1971, the first Sultan of Brunei was crowned and converted to Islam by Sri Tri Buana, the legendary king of Singapore. The significance of historical continuity in the formulation of the national ideology is elaborated below.

Brunei's founders are thus of divine origin but they are also *bumiputera* (native), sons of the soil. Their actions legitimize Brunei's social hierarchy, validate many of its customs, and identify the founding line with the very geography of its landscape. In the versions now extant, Alak Betatar, as Sultan Muhammad, becomes the founder of the royal line culminating in Sultan Hassanal, thus underpinning his authority and his claim to represent in his person the embodiment of Brunei identity (Saunders 1994: 19).

Conclusion

It would appear that independence did not result in any important challenge to

Brunei's monarchical system. Royal supremacy has been sustained and an ideological framework that is both modern and Islamic has been institutionalized. As a semi-traditional polity, Brunei has shown itself capable of providing for the modern needs of its citizens and eighteen years of nationhood have evidently promoted stability, legitimacy and internal cohesion. It may be the case that economic development and modernity, the spread of literacy, has resulted in intensifying feelings of loyalty towards the Brunei nation and the Sultan, while simultaneously consolidating the institution of the monarchy.

However, as Brunei enters the second stage of modern nation-building, its capacity to deliver social services and sustain its welfare status may be constantly put under pressure by rising costs. Moreover the state is the largest employer and efforts to diversify the economy have met with limited success. During periods of economic slowdown, such as the 1997-98 recession, the capacity of the state to meet the demands of the people may be weakened. On the other hand, rapid economic growth may well lead to even faster growth in expectations of the people. The challenge lies in matching the demands of the people with the capacity of the state.

The Sultanate has shown itself capable of adapting and adjusting its political structure to meet these challenges and has experimented with other techniques of legitimacy in place of democracy. One technique used is the ideology of *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB), which allows for the pivotal role of Islam at the state level, and has enhanced the legitimacy of the Sultan. However, official promotion of MIB runs the risk of alienating and marginalizing the non-Muslim population such as the Chinese and the non-Muslim indigenous peoples. It may also be worthwhile to caution that the use of Islam as an instrument of legitimacy is a double-edged sword. It invites discussion and debate on the extent to which Islam has been incorporated into politics and may, in future, be used to question the legitimacy of a monarchical system of government in Brunei.

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