Culture, Tradition and the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*

By

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ABSTRACT

This project is the first scholarly study on *The Series of Bruneian Folklore* and its significance as a legacy for the culture of Brunei. It is also the first English translation of selected tales in the *Series*. The broad trajectory of this thesis examines the survival of Brunei’s powerful oral narrative heritage which existed for 500 years as a vital part of traditional Bruneian society, and which still survives in the form of published children’s literature. Amidst modern culture, however, it is considered an outdated object of the past; this explains its deteriorating presence as a formative cultural force in the Brunei of today.

This dissertation transforms this perception of the *Series* and recognizes it as the embodiment of an important cultural and historical heritage. The main theoretical foundation is Homi Bhabha’s, *The Location of Culture* (1994) and the main literary framework is the Gothic mode: together they both serve as an overarching framework for analysis in each chapter. International literary perspectives are employed to achieve a cross-cultural examination of the *Series*, addressing this published expression of Brunei’s complex narrative heritage within the context of recent literary discourse. As a product of hybrid cultural influences and historical practices, published in a contemporary time frame, the *Series* has been approached with reference to Western literary concepts and modes of critique, including Postcolonialism, Feminism and the Gothic, addressing its importance as the reflection of a unique narrative heritage.

A close analysis of the *Series* begins with the restaging of the Bruneian past, to reveal the long hidden “interstitial spaces”, as Bhabha names them: these are meeting points between tradition and colonial transformation which were maintained and developed for many years by leading cultural producers: namely the Bruneian traditional elders. The thesis then traces elements of the Gothic in the Bruneian past as a distinctive cultural phenomenon expressed in quite different terms from the conventions of Western Gothic. The *Series* depicts the spiritual world of ghosts and the supernatural in a way that enables both a reclamation of the Bruneian past and the formulation of a specifically non-western, Bruneian Gothic. In this way, the *Series* identified as an expression of cultural hybridity. Once this is established, it is further examined through a Postcolonial perspective using Bhabha. The previous perception of the *Series* as an outdated mode, and as children’s literature, is reconstructed. It remains valuable in Bruneian
culture and society as a reflection of the nation’s complex past, and shows that this oral heritage is strong enough to survive through the challenging years in different and evolving forms. Additionally, it becomes valuable as it takes up a position in world literature; this is a position that was not previously available, and that is rendered available through this work.

Finally, the thesis concludes with a discussion of the portrayal of gender in the Series. Western Feminism is utilized to recognize that strict gender bias did not exist in traditional Bruneian culture: rather, it was a culture that promoted balance and cooperation between gender roles. No previous substantial scholarly study has addressed a cross-cultural analysis of the Series. This thesis therefore provides an original and valuable work in the field of Bruneian studies and positions the narrative heritage of Brunei as an important investigation in relation to international literary research. Above all, the project foregrounds the value of the Series in its contemporary historical and cultural context.
STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

(Signed) NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

First and foremost, I would like to address my personal experience with oral stories and consequently with the tales from the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*. Oral stories were an important part of my life as I was growing up. Unfortunately, these oral narratives did not consist of gleeful, magical elements but were often constituted of horror and the morbid. My late grandparents were passionate narrators of oral tales. Their stories were always conveyed in snippets, often dropped unexpectedly into normal conversations and they never failed to leave me with feelings of uneasiness. As a child, I could deduce that conveying oral stories was a responsibility that my grandparents had to carry out. This responsibility was not at all a burden but something that they took pleasure in. For instance, when a conversation regarding jungles or forests emerged, my grandparents would warn me about Si Ranggau or give advice on fleeing the forest once a foul smell is detected. On many occasions, these supernatural narratives were supported by physical actions, thereby making them credible. For example, I recall my grandfather’s tedious and careful task of cutting down a banana tree. There was no room for negligence as this could invoke the evil spirit of the tree. It might seem a sombre warning but more often than not, my grandparents displayed their thrilled but controlled expressions, indicating how they were enjoying themselves, perhaps reminiscing about the time when they heard these stories from their parents. My grandparents’ stories were not simply warnings; they were precious guidelines as I was growing up and were a symbol of affection.

It was only in the later years of primary school that I finally discovered the published format of those childhood stories. The Institute of Language and Literature organized a library van which went to each school in the country. There was a three month gap between the van’s visits, but it was an event that I looked forward to. My first encounter was through *Married to Barbalan* (1981) and the illustrations mesmerized me. They transmitted the feeling of darkness and the archaic yet somehow I felt it was all something familiar. The daunting graphic images had such a profound effect on me that they always remained in the corner of my mind as I grew up. My discovery of *Married to Barbalan* (1981) triggered my search for other tales with similar elements. At this point, the purpose of my reading was purely for the thrill and curiosity. I became increasingly amazed as I found other terrifying tales. I understood that the tales were stories that used to be told in the past, but to me, even now, they are still as alive and vibrant as
they ever were, and they still resurface in daily conversations. For me, they were not detached or irrelevant stories that only belonged in a past that was long gone. For a long time, I only listened to the stories and seeing and reading the tales somehow authenticated my belief in the supernatural in my culture.

Many years later, I was introduced to the Gothic genre in Victor Sage’s course in the University of East Anglia, Norwich. That last year of my undergraduate studies was a crucial time for me as my view on the tales of the Series began to develop. It struck me that some of the tales contain Gothic characteristics. In order to pursue my interest in the Series, I decided to make it the central subject of my postdoctoral thesis. I soon discovered that the published version of the Series was not easily available. The public libraries in Brunei only held a small number of tales, not including those with Gothic qualities that I so vividly remembered. I was informed that the full collection of the Series is held at the main public library in the city. However, when I arrived, I was directed to the Bruneiana Section, a reference only section where the Series was stored. Before gaining access to the Series, the patron is required to complete a form which requests personal details and reasons for the loan. When the Series was finally taken out for me to read, I found that the collection was incomplete. Some were undergoing book restoration process. Thus, the number of tales published under the Series remains unclear.

The initial aim for my PhD research was to save the Series from disappearing by discussing selected stories in relation to Gothic elements. I also wanted to argue that its categorization as children’s literature is questionable because some of the key qualities and modern characteristics of children’s literature are absent. Narratives of Married to Barbalan (1981) and Vengeance of the Forest Spirit (n.d.), for example, possess aggressive and violent characteristics without providing clear moral lessons. For Kevser Koc and Carry A. Buzelli, a good children’s book always presents moral dilemmas (Koc & Buzelli, 2004). No matter how enmeshed children’s literature is with the subjects of magic, fantasy and adventure, moral conflicts such as the importance of life remain central and are part of what must authenticate the work as ‘for children’ (Pillar, 1979, p. 150). The tales from the Series ignore this notion completely: often celebrating death as the finale. The Kayong People (1981), The Mosquito King (1981), Eldest and Youngest (1983), The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990), Radin’s Poisonous Well (1994), The Banana Heart Princess (1995) all ultimately share the similar grim ending of death. Contemporary readers may feel uneasy because of the appalling themes of cannibalism, brutal
murder and gruesome deaths, freely offered to young children. With this premise, the tales can be seen as the antithetical to the aims of children’s literature as a genre. This project is not a critique of children’s literature but it questions the placement of the Series as children’s literature. At the same time, this thesis attests to the power of Brunei’s narrative heritage because it is a significant fact that the Series continues to survive in a published form despite its dubious generic location. This misconstrued branding of the Series as children’s literature does not present a total disadvantage, however. In fact, this oversight allows the re-examination of the Series through a mode that it relates to the most, Gothic.

Regarded as a flexible and adaptable mode (Elbert & Marshall, 2013, pp. 7-8; Monnet, 2010, p. 137; Snodgrass, 2005, p. 264), Gothic is relevant to the Series because both share similar themes: identity, origins and kin. Gothic also offers explanations as to why the Series is marginalized in contemporary Brunei: 1) the tales’ frightening motifs are not suitable for children, and 2) the animistic values dominant in the tales are frowned upon in an Islamic country. The Series is part of Bruneian culture (heimlich), yet it creates unheimlich feelings. Exploring the Series through the Gothic mode exposes this unstable relationship between contemporary Bruneians and the Series. The current static status of the Series as children’s literature and the fact that it is no longer published proves that there is an anxiety. How should we treat folklore with Gothic characteristics in contemporary Islamic Brunei? Ignoring the Series and casting it aside would mean repressing Bruneian past culture when it seriously needs to be expressed. This thesis sets out to explore if there is more than one form of Gothic which exists in different cultures and to rethink the status of the Series through the Gothic mode; a mode that has unexpected flexibility and has proven to be so useful that authors from different times and geographical locations are able to examine their cultures. This recognition initiated unprecedented, multifaceted research and cross-cultural analyses on the Series leading to new understanding of a long established form of cultural expression.

This thesis has two parts: I have translated into English selected tales from the Series of Bruneian Folklore and I have written a dissertation to accompany the translations. The latter includes a methodology chapter to contextualize the work. Chapter 4 addresses the Series in its original form as oral folklore which contains traditional taboos and was used as a tool to communicate social values, as well as to manage society. This chapter refutes the contemporary idea of trivializing traditional Bruneian taboos, rituals and folklore. Homi Bhabha’s (1994) notion of the
importance of restaging the past is the basis of the discussions in this chapter. In re-enacting the past, it is understood that Bruneian folklore was an important form of cultural production and through this the role of traditional Bruneian elders is brought to light. These elders were leaders, creative individuals who preserved Bruneian cultural mores for centuries utilizing the elements of what Bhabha calls, ‘interstitial spaces’. In the stories that make up the Series these interstitial spaces are comprised mainly of the human encounters with the supernatural, in which the relations between tradition and transformation are played out. This chapter encourages a look back into the Bruneian past and refreshes the views on taboos, rituals and folklore as a part of Bruneians’ valuable cultural heritage.

The following chapters, 5, 6 and 7, center on three separate ideas: Gothic, Postcolonialism and Feminism. Chapter 5 focuses on the ideas of Gothic and examines the Bruneian Gothic which aspires to reclaim Bruneian past tradition. An overview of the beliefs of traditional Bruneians suggests that there were Gothic elements present, so that the supernatural intercedes in everyday activities. Traditional Western Gothic is utilized here in order to draw comparison with Bruneian Gothic narrative. Both texts and illustrations of the selected tales published in the Series are analysed. Bruneian Gothic is complex because the supernatural is more material and is integrated with the daily life of the Bruneian people. This chapter partly focuses on the usefulness of Gothic elements in examining ideas of place and the continued resurgence of the past. Anolik advises that one should never underestimate the power of Gothic: “although it has been dismissed as escapism or as a simple catalog of conventions and clichés, the textual warnings of the dangers of legal systems indicate that gothic literature always has something important to say to its readers” (Anolik, 2003, p. 40). The last section of the chapter argues that the strong Gothic traditions of past Bruneians are still alive in the psyche of contemporary Bruneians in the form of mass hysteria. Although it seems that traditional Bruneian practices are remnants of the past, in actuality, they still exist in different forms.

Chapter 6 concentrates on the ideas of Postcolonialism and aims to utilize the tales of the Series to retrieve repressed Bruneian history. Under the subject of Postcolonialism, the Series here is treated as a hybrid product which was affected by many layers of foreign influence. Brunei’s colonial experience is discussed briefly in the beginning as an indication that the examination of tales with colonial elements will follow suit. The discussions in this chapter are built on Bhabha’s ideas of transcendent identity, that when considering identity, there is always “something else
besides” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 219) in culture that is often overlooked. The tales of the Series are not mere folklore or children’s literature, they contain Brunei’s history and the evolution of the Series attests to this: from thriving oral narratives in traditional Brunei before the country became a British protectorate to its containment under the British rule which led to its disintegration and its transformation into its current existence as children’s literature.

Chapter 7 investigates traditional gender roles through the Series with the foundation of Feminist ideology. Here, the Series, is again treated as a hybrid product which utilizes contemporary and non-Bruneian interpretations as a way of exploring the themes of tradition, identity and continuity. The representation of women in the Series is linked both with Gothic and with the notion of a hybrid postcolonial culture in Brunei exploiting this opportunity, the Series is approached through reference to Western Feminism. There is a shortage of historical discussion focusing on traditional Bruneian women, thus, the discourses on women in this chapter can finally and significantly contribute to greater knowledge of the roles played by traditional Bruneian women. The use of Western Feminism is useful because its use enable an emphasis on understanding that Bruneian culture possesses a balance between the roles of men and women. Through Western Feminism, it may be understood that in the Series, character is judged not through gender but through valuable input to the community. The application of Gothic here further suggests that Bruneian communities are more concerned with humanity than gender. Indeed, for that reason, punishment is always in the form of monstrosity.

Following this last chapter is a brief conclusion listing the major findings in studying the Series, the contribution of this project to the literary studies of the Series, an acknowledgement of a new discovery that can now be called Bruneian Gothic, and potential directions for future research. This first-time work on the Series of Bruneian Folklore therefore raises an awareness of how these stories are still an important part of Brunei culture and identity. This thesis gives the long overdue recognition to the Series as an important historical and cultural heritage, one that deserves to be treasured.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This project consists of English translations from the original *Series of Bruneian Folklore* and a thesis. The latter addresses the *Series* in its context through cultural, linguistic translation and textual analysis of cross-cultural themes and concepts. The project enables the *Series* to be recognized as a part of world literature.

SOURCES USED

The primary source for this study is the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*. This is a published collection of short colour-illustrated folktales classified in contemporary Brunei as children’s literature. The medium of instruction is the standard Brunei Malay language with occasional Bruneian slang. The original sources for the *Series* are traditional oral narratives which were recorded by the Brunei Institute of Language and Literature, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei Darussalam. These were then published by the Institute, in Bruneian Malay, as the *Series*. Permission to use these materials was granted in a written letter by the Director of the Brunei Institute of Language and Literature.


The *Series* was examined at the Bruneiana Collection at the Dewan Bahasa and Pustaka Library, Bandar Seri Begawan, Brunei Darussalam where it is catalogued under Reference Only criteria. Access is therefore very limited. An access form must be completed and the librarian in attendance will then retrieve the *Series* for reference only usage. There were circumstances
when some tales were under book restoration process which made access to them even more restricted.

A separate literature survey was not carried out because this research is thematically focused and is linked with the discussion of the Series. The close analysis of the Series undertaken for this study also relied on multi-faceted complementary research into the history, context and culture of Brunei. This research included oral interviews and visits to cultural sites: for example, a visit to the Museum of Malay Technology, Brunei. Permission to reproduce the images taken from this Museum was granted by the Director of Museums of Brunei.

Having previously written a research dissertation (The Horror of Imagination, 2007) on Gothic Literature as an undergraduate heavily influenced the selection of the tales. Unsurprisingly, the Gothic patterns of the tales emerged at the outset. This started as research on the traditional lived practices of Bruneians which were mostly governed by an apprehension of the power of the supernatural. This then triggered into the research on the meaningful implication of the Series as powerful oral narratives in traditional Bruneian societies. It was important to delve into Bruneian cultural and historical studies. The research would not be complete if the contemporary relevance of the Series was ignored. Thus, discourses on the Gothic, Postcolonialism and Feminism brought contemporary significance of the Series into a serious view. In modern day Brunei, complaints and concerns over the lack of written history on traditional Bruneians are often heard. Thus, a handful of Bruneian cultural studies or narratives such as Tingkong (2009), Yunos (2009) and Jukim (2014) provide a strong foundation in the research of Brunei culture in this study. It is high time for Bruneians to appreciate the Series as the solution of the inadequate historical resources. They are important sources of Bruneian past which encompasses social-cultural, economic, political and environmental knowledge, which are often overlooked as simple folk tales and dismissed as mere children stories.

The close textual and visual analysis of the Series undertaken for this qualitative study of how meanings are made through narrative also relied on multi-faceted complementary research into the history, context and culture of Brunei. Research methods included oral interviews and visits to cultural sites: for example, a visit to the Museum of Malay Technology, Brunei, contributed important knowledge on how traditional Bruneians lived. Other non-historical primary materials included news reports, blogs and social media outlets which provided valuable resources on lived practices of contemporary Bruneians. This project entailed substantial examination of a
wide range of relevant secondary resources such as published historical, literary and cultural commentaries.

The key theoretical anchor for this study was Homi Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture* (1994), which is a recurring secondary source throughout this thesis. Bhabha’s cultural theory acts as a catalyst in the discussions of the *Series*, contributing a strong foundation and initiating new discourses on the *Series*.

**RATIONALE**

The original premise of this project was to save the *Series* from disappearing. To an extent, the discontinuation of its publication reflects the lack of interest of the Bruneian public towards the *Series*. However, this is not to say that there are no current efforts being made in developing public interest in Bruneian Folklore. Since 1983, there has been an annual story-telling competition for children organized by the Brunei Institute of Language and Literature. The *Series* has long been part of the chosen materials in this yearly competition. Young contestants memorize their preferred stories and are judged through their creative story-telling technique which includes clarity in speech, engagement with the audience and expressive body language.

Undoubtedly this is a good attempt at keeping local folklore alive. But at the same time, the popular association of the *Series* with a children’s story-telling competition confines this important narrative heritage to the realm of mere children’s literature. This folk tale tradition is, however, much more broadly significant as a part of the cultural heritage of Brunei. Therefore more efforts should be put in, not just to ensure its continuity, but to unlock its potential as an expression of Bruneian cultural and social practices, values and beliefs which demand more attention, and a different type of attention, than that given to children’s literature.

Thus, this thesis foregrounds the *Series of Bruneian Folklore* as a vehicle for the transmission of Bruneian tradition and culture. It is a particularly rich historical, cultural and literary inheritance that deserves a space in contemporary discourses.

The trajectory of this study is based on how the *Series* still survives through the challenging decades. This endurance cannot be taken lightly as it shows that there are still strong cultural Bruneian values inherent and embedded in it.
APPROACHES TO INTERPRETATIONS

Translations

Two steps have been made in the process of translation: firstly, translation from oral narrative to written text which occurred prior to creation of this dissertation project; secondly, the translation of selected tales from Malay to English for the dissertation project.

Translating from Malay to English

In order to open up a wider recognition and understanding of the Series, translation into English was deemed necessary. The translating process might seem straightforward as the Malay text was designed very simply for children. An important consideration for this dissertation was whether at some stage of the translation, the original meaning was lost or inaccurate. This process created a heightened consciousness of how meanings can change over time. The Series itself is evidence of this. Traditional Bruneian Folklore narratives existed in past societies as pillars of instructions and guidance. However, as time passed, contemporary Bruneian societies have now become detached and separated from that traditional significance. Instead, these meanings are reinforced in the only way that Postcolonial Brunei knows how: as children’s literature.

Closely related to the complex process of translation is the problem of recalling the colonial. Translating into the language of the colonist might subjugate the Series to a further confinement. But considering that English is now a global language, and that English is the second language in Brunei, the issue of colonial language is less important than the survival of the Series.

Although the Series is part of the material for the annual story-telling competition for children, in Malay it is still static. When it is in English, however, not only are new interpretations allowed, but the Series can be perceived in a new light: it is a form of valuable cultural heritage which needs to be recognized as part of the world’s literature.

Translating the Series was indeed a cultural and an educational experience. However, assuming the role of a translator of language was already a challenging task, undertaking texts that have cultural significance is even more daunting. Regardless of the thoroughness of the translation process, there would always be a word, an idiom or a proverb that do not convey the precise
meaning. However, meticulous effort has been made in order to reproduce the original meanings of the texts. Writing and translating from this culture, at times there were feelings of dissatisfaction about English language readers concerning whether or not they would understood the cultural implications of the tales.

**Interviews**

Before interviews were conducted ethical clearance (HUM/08/13/HREC) was obtained from the Office of Research, Griffith University.

Due to a lack of records with contact information for the original story-tellers, and the fact that most of them have passed away, Interviews were only able to be conducted with the illustrators. The Brunei Institute of Language and Literature relayed information on five illustrators of the Series. Unfortunately, one had passed away, one illustrator lives in Malaysia and the other was unavailable. This narrowed the field to only two: the illustrator of *The Banana Heart Princess* (1995) and *The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost* (1990), Pengiran Zainin Pengiran Mansor and the illustrator of *The Kayong People* (1981), Abdul Rahman Mohammad.

The interviews were conducted on separate occasions: Mohammad’s on 27th June 2013 and Mansor’s on the 29th June 2013. The interviews were in a semi-structured format. The interviews were very beneficial as the illustrators conveyed detailed information about their perspectives of the Series. This was a crucial stage of this study as the realization emerged that the Series can best be seen as a form of cultural production. This shift of understanding shed light on how knowledge is produced and how culture produces it across time. The illustrators of the Series are not mere decorators. In this study, they are regarded as cultural producers whose work is integral to the insight, experience and meaning that the Series captures.

**Customs and Traditions**

This thesis approaches the Series with the understanding of the central importance of historical and cultural context. In its previous form as oral narratives, for example, the stories that came to form the Series were heavily embedded within a traditional belief system of concerning taboos and rituals. Homi Bhabha’s theoretical concept of “restaging the past” is particularly relevant in comprehending what the Series used to be and how the textual tales still convey the same meanings, albeit in a different form. Bhabha’s theory emphasizes the recognition of
“interstitial spaces” within culture. In these spaces are the traditional cultural producers, past Bruneian elders and contemporary cultural producers, illustrators of the Series. Inside these spaces are ambiguous maxims such as ‘inda kuasa’ (no power) which are often used to preserve the ambiguities of traditional Bruneian culture. Through explanation of sources of cultural traditions and beliefs, it is understood that the Series still exists today because of cultural preservers who held the culture for centuries, the traditional Bruneian elders.

The tales of the Series are critically analysed and have been approached thematically, relating traditional narratives to conceptual frameworks in scholarly discourse as a way of ‘restaging’ the value of traditional cultural forms in a contemporary Bruneian context.

Cross-cultural implications

A central impetus within this project has been the development of an understanding of this contemporary relevance of the Series, both locally and internationally. The approaches taken to this work as an expression of cultural heritage and production within a modern postcolonial nation, therefore encompass theoretical frameworks and cultural practices which traverse cultural, generic and temporal boundaries and conventions.

The Gothic Literary Mode

As this dissertation shows, approaching certain tales of the Series from the perspective of Gothic allows a redefinition of the Series: it definitively moves it away from mere children’s literature. Gothic mode triggers a way of looking back to the Bruneian past, where most customs, traditions and rituals were closely associated with the supernatural.

The works of Gothic scholars such as Fred Botting (1995) and David Punter (1996, 2000) are used here as light comparison with Western Gothic: this is necessary here, in the context of contemporary cross-cultural literary scholarship in order to specify the notion of Bruneian Gothic more accurately. Through this comparison it can be shown that nature in Bruneian Gothic is dominant and there is no guarantee of safety against the threat of the supernatural. Unlike Western Gothic, which tends to contain the supernatural, for Bruneians a supernatural nature it is everywhere, permeating every space.
Postcolonialism

The discussion of the Series under Postcolonialism acknowledges the tripartite transformation of the Series. As a group of oral narratives the stories acted as a mechanism for cultural instruction and social control before colonialism. During the colonial period, there was a suppression of the oral mode and character. Finally, in its third and current form, the stories became a collected Series as a children’s story book. It is through this evolutionary progression of the Series that it is able to be recognized as a hybrid product in a Postcolonial Brunei.

The theory of Postcolonialism used in this study has been developed in reference to the work of Homi Bhabha (1994) and Elleke Boehmer (1995), enabling the research to provide fresh perspectives on the Series. For example, applying Postcolonialism on the Vengeance of the Forest Spirit (n.d.) revokes the arbitrary truth that the Forest Spirit is the villain. The tale is dissected so a new and different facet is uncovered; the side of the repressed.

Analysing the Series from the perspective of Postcolonialism forces an appreciation of the original oral tradition. Even as children’s literature, the Series is still an embodiment of Bruneian cultural heritage and tradition, therefore its continued existence is still significant in Bruneian contemporary society.

Feminism

Due to the deficiency of historical materials on traditional Bruneian women, Feminist studies proved to be useful for placing particular attention on them. This initial research recruiting Western Feminism also indicates that there is more room for further studies.

Just as Bruneians were occupied historically by various imperial powers that changed Bruneian culture and society, so too, were Bruneian women colonized by new understandings of the role of women in culture and cultural production. Whether Postcolonialism or Feminism there is an ‘othering’ that occurs: for the former there is an othering of all Bruneians; for the latter there is an othering that occurs through traditional elders who tell stories about inevitable deaths of female Others. This has the effect of reducing the importance and limiting the power of the colonized. Western Feminist Literary criticisms are employed in different understandings of the women characters in the Series, especially those who are labelled as the Others. This again produces a clearer understanding of hybridity.
Undeniably, there are challenges that arise when importing a Western critical tradition such as Feminism to facilitate an understanding of the *Series*. Obviously, it is a different culture. However, a cross-cultural investigation allows a constructive comparison between Bruneian and Western traditions. It is understood that there are differences, but there are similarities that can be drawn as well. Furthermore, a non-traditional Bruneian way of interpreting the tales that specializes in the subject of women adds new and valuable interpretations.

It is through this Feminist observation that a link could be detected where it was the traditional elders who produced culture which disapproved idle women in society, women who do not contribute back to their communities: a striking pattern on the inevitable deaths of female Others.

**CONCLUSION**

The *Series of Bruneian Folklore* gives a complex portrayal of a culture. The *Series* is a symbol of Brunei’s Postcolonial identity in which traditional values exist along with the hybrid influence of a multi-faceted colonial experience. To an extent, the *Series* is evident to the emerging division of the human and the natural world, yet, somehow this separation is resisted by the echoes of traditional Bruneian culture which are still vibrant in present-day Brunei, reminding that oral culture is still a part of the daily lives of Bruneians.
CHAPTER 3

ENGLISH TRANSLATIONS OF THE SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

MARRIED TO BARBALAN

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: SABTU AMPUAN SAIFUDIN

STORY TELLER: PG TENGAH BTE PG MOHD SALLEH

ILLUSTRATION: PG OMAR BIN PG MOHD SALLEH

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
KOON WAH PRINTING PTE. LTD., SINGAPORE, 1981

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
SIRI CHĚRITA RA’AYAT BRUNEI

Bĕrīsteřikan Barbalan

Karangan SABTU AMPUAN SAIFIUDDIN
Pēnchĕritā PG. TĔNGAH BTE PG. MOHD. SALLEH
Lukisan PG. OMAR BIN PG. MOHD. SALLEH

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei
DIRECTOR’S FOREWORD

In this era of modernization in Brunei, it is important to celebrate the diverse perspectives contained within our history and culture. Until the mid-twentieth century, folklore held a central place in the Bruneian community through oral storytelling accompanied by rhythmic drumming and music (diangdangan, bermukun, bangsawan, penglipur lara). These stories reflected the ways and beliefs of Brunei for many centuries. We who live now may assume that the oral culture of the past, our folklore, is merely a collection of legends that do not have a place in the everyday social and cultural habits of contemporary society. To forget our traditions, however, would be a great loss to our cultural memory. Our folklore belongs to all of us and is a living part of our society: to deny this heritage is to deny our own unique identity and traditions.

Folklore has its own special role in literature. Its functions are similar to those of other ancient literary traditions. Folklore functions, on many levels, as a way to help us understand the world. It is a source of history, education and ethical as well as practical guidance for living well. It expresses social values, cultural codes and practices, and much more.

The folklore in this collection is based on the stories that were kept alive by the elders and guardians of our culture over many generations and transmitted through oral story-telling. Through the assembly of these tales, we can see similarities between the many stories that come from different villages within our region.

In a time when culture and society have become more complex and less reliant on local traditions, the importance of these stories may all too easily be overlooked. We cannot simply depend on oral story-telling as a way of ensuring their survival. Future generations may never know about them unless they are recorded and shared. The publication of this precious spoken heritage of the Brunei people, which was conveyed to generation after generation by the elders of the past, is therefore intended to preserve our folklore for future generations to come.
Once upon a time, there was a traveller called Kulop. One day, after a long journey, he arrived in a village far from his home. The pleasant and friendly temperament of the villagers made him happy, so he decided to stay for a while.
As time went by, he decided to marry a girl from the village, who he liked. His wife was a beautiful girl who loved him dearly, and they were happy together.

After they were married, the villagers came to consider Kulop as their own relative.
All the while Kulop lived in the village, he felt as if he belonged. He never felt left out or alone. If
he needed help, the villagers would gladly assist him. It was this feeling of understanding and
love which bound him to the village. Gradually he forgot all about the place he had come from.
Kulop and his wife had been married for quite some time, yet they were still childless. As it was important to him to have children, he told his wife that he desired to take a second wife. She did not repudiate his plan, nor did she become angry. In fact, she suggested that he might like to marry her cousin, so that their families could be closer.

Kulop accepted his wife’s suggestion. Although he had often heard about clashes between wives, this turned out never to be the case with his. They were quite different from others and lived happily together.
Kulop was generous with his wives. If he gained something in his daily work, he would always share it equally with them. Perhaps it was because of his fair and just actions that their family lived in harmony.

Kulop was a fisherman. That was how he took care of his family. He went to sea at night and came home in the morning. Every evening, before he sailed out to sea, his wives would pack him some delicious food to take. His favourite was fried fish. Whenever he went to sea, the wives made sure he had his fried fish with him. But, he sometimes thought, it was strange that his wives never allowed him to take a lime to squeeze over the fish, even though he had asked
insistently many times for them to pack some limes for him. They explained to him simply, that eating limes was against their customs.

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For a long time Kulop accepted this, but one evening when he went to sea, he secretly took a lime with him without his wives knowing anything about it. He was sure that the fried fish would be even more delicious with lime juice squeezed over it.
As usual, Kulop had a break from fishing during the night. He took out his food from the basket where it was packed. Then he cut the lime and squeezed a few drops of lime juice onto his fried fish, which had been prepared by his wives.

Suddenly he saw the fish turned into a human finger and then became a whole hand. Kulop was terrified by this strange and frightening experience. He lost his appetite and threw all of his food into the sea.

It occurred to him that the strange event might have occurred because his wives were not ordinary women at all, but spirit beings known as Barbalan. He had heard stories about how the Barbalan feasted on the hearts and intestines of human beings. He decided that he would keep his terrifying experience a secret and see if he could find out more about who his wives really were.
As soon as he arrived home the next morning, as usual he was greeted by his wives’ cheerful faces. Kulop said nothing about his experience and made sure that he did not show any strange expressions on his face. He just smiled and laughed with his wives as he always did. He paid extra attention to each of them, playing his part as the generous husband.

Meanwhile, the wives were cleverly playing their roles too. They made sure he was well looked after, that his meals were prepared and ready for him when he arrived from his fishing trips. Kulop was careful to eat, just as he always did, even though the memory of the strange event was still vivid in his mind.
The next night, as always, Kulop went out to sea in his fishing boat. But this time his purpose was not to go fishing. His plan was to sneak home early, before daybreak, to see what his wives were up to while he was gone. To trick them, he went to his boat as the sun was setting, just as if he was on his way to fish and everything was the same. Both wives waved happily to see him go.
An hour after leaving home, Kulop rowed slowly back to shore. He crept up to the back of his house and peeped inside. Everything seemed empty and quiet. He went around to the front and saw that the door was open. Now he was scared. Slowly he went inside and saw a shocking sight. Both his wives were lying on the bed, but their heads were missing!

Now he knew without a doubt that his wives were Barbalan. He assumed that their heads must be flying around the village in search of victims to prey upon.

Kulop left his horrid discovery and rowed out to sea. He resumed fishing as usual. In the morning he went home again, bringing the fish he had caught, just as he always did. He said nothing to anyone about what he had seen the night before and acted normally.
The next night, Kulop asked his wives to pack him some coffee in a glass bottle. All this while, they had always put his coffee in a kettle. It seemed strange to them so they refused. But this time Kulop insisted. He told his wives that it would not be necessary to pack him a cup. Instead he would just drink his coffee straight from the bottle. His wives were persuaded that this was a reasonable idea and so they put the coffee into a bottle as he had asked.

Kulop climbed into his boat and rowed away, giving the impression that he was really off to fish. He rowed past a couple of headlands, stopped, and tied his boat to a palm tree. He drank all of his coffee, then broke the bottle into tiny sharp pieces, and put them onto a plate. Now Kulop was ready and he headed home.
Once he was back at his house, he went upstairs to the bedroom. Again, he found the headless bodies of his two wives lying on the bed. Without wasting a moment, he put the broken pieces of glass into the cavities of the wives’ necks, in the place where the heads had been detached.

Kulop then hurried down to his boat and rowed frantically away. This time he headed towards his own village. It was a long way. He only arrived there two days later.
Meanwhile, at dawn, Kulop’s wives had flown home. They flew very fast, as they were always scared that their husband might find out what they were doing. As soon as they arrived home, the heads of Kulop’s wives went to reattach to their bodies. They screamed in pain when they felt the sharp pieces of glass which Kulop had placed in their necks.
They tried several times to connect with their bodies, but each time they failed. Each effort brought them pain and agony. They cried, terrified that their husband might see what they truly were. Day was approaching rapidly. Their fear grew stronger as they waited for Kulop with regret in their hearts.

The day passed from morning to afternoon and then became evening, but their husband was nowhere in sight. Finally, they became suspicious that Kulop had tricked them and then ran away.

Now they cried with all their might about their misfortune. They were filled with a fearful desire for revenge and decided to go in search of Kulop. That night, they flew to the next village, and then the next. For a long time they wandered, but still they could not find their husband.
Exhausted, they returned home to the house they had shared with Kulop. But there, they only found their rotting, useless bodies. The two wives could never fly away again. They could only experience a painful death as their bodies wasted away.
THE KAYONG PEOPLE

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: SABTU AMPUAN SAIFUDIN

STORY TELLER: PG TENGAH BTE PG MOHD SALLEH

ILLUSTRATION: ABDUL RAHMAN MOHAMMAD

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

KOON WAH PRINTING PTE. LTD., SINGAPORE, 1981

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
SIRI CHÈRITA RA'AYAT BRUNEI

Orang Kayong

Karangan SABTU AMPUAN SAFIUDDIN
Pénchêrita PG. TÈNGAH BTE PG. MOHD. SALLEH
Lukisan ABDUL RAHMAN MOHAMMAD

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei

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Among the stories that the wise elders tell was that of the Kayong people, who could come back to life on the night of their death, if they were not buried properly before dark. If the body of a Kayong person was allowed to return to life, the corpse would go in search of a victim to kill and eat.
One important thing to know about a revivified Kayong corpse was that it would always be terrified of water. Whenever there was a death in a Kayong family, and the body could not be buried in time to prevent its coming to life again, the whole family, or even the entire village, would move to the other side of the river, opposite their former village, so as to prevent the corpse from following and eating them.
The Kayong people were accustomed to these strange incidences in their community. After many years it became a tradition for a grieving Kayong family to leave their house on the night a relative passed away. The family would only come back in the morning to bury the corpse when it was finally dead.
If it should happen that two villages facing each other across a river experienced the death of family members on the same day, that night all the villagers would row their boats to the middle of the river to avoid misfortune.
One afternoon, four merchants arrived by boat at a Kayong village with the intention of doing business with the people. It so happened that there had been a recent death and when they arrived all the villagers were still anchored in the middle of the river. The four merchants were puzzled as they stared at the boats all huddled together. They called out to the people and asked why they were all there.
The Kayong villagers explained to the merchants that it was their tradition to leave the recently deceased on the first night of their deaths, so that they living would not be threatened if the corpse should come to life. After listening to their explanations, the four merchants found the stories hard to believe. They had never heard such a story before, of the dead coming to life again and pestering their own family members. Two of the merchants were so sceptical that they did not believe the story at all.
The bereaved families were not impressed with the attitude of the men. They challenged the two most daring merchants to stay the whole night with the corpse and to prove their story wrong. The Kayong villagers even told the men that they would be rewarded with money, if they stayed with the corpse all night and survived unharmed.
The two most sceptical merchants determined to show off their wit and bravery. However the other two were not so confident and decided to wait in their boat.
When they were ready, in the last light of day, the two merchants made their way to where the corpse rested. They entered the house and saw the dead body laid out. Night fell and all was quiet. The men could see that the family had taken precautions against its return to life by tying the corpse’s hands and legs together so that it could not easily wander.
They looked closely at the condition of the corpse lying still before them. With its hand and legs tied, the two merchants were sure that the dead body posed no risk to them. In fact, they were annoyed that the deceased’s family had tried to make it easy for them by tying up the corpse. The merchants were thoroughly confident of their safety and wanted to prove that the dead could never come back to life.
At approximately seven o’clock that evening, however, the corpse began to move, little bit by little bit. Gradually, it was able to work loose the ropes which bound its hand and legs. Now the two merchants were no longer confident. In fact they were truly terrified to see the corpse came to life.
One of the merchants wanted to run, but the other persuaded him not to be scared and tried to approach the moving corpse. By now the reanimated corpse was already standing up. As it gained the full force of its energy, the corpse began tearing up the pillow and mattresses, looking for anything near-by that could be its victim.
At this sight, both merchants jumped out of the house and ran towards the river. They shouted out for help to their two merchant friends who had remained safely in the boat. Without a glance behind them, they ran to the edge of the river, jumped off the bank into the water and swam as fast as they could towards the boat. The walking corpse pursued them just as quickly as they ran, until the very last moment. It stopped when it reached the river’s edge, because it could not get close to the water. Only the river prevented it from capturing the two merchants.
When the two merchants returned to their boat the night, they fell ill and weak because of what they had witnessed during this terrifying incident. In the morning, the two merchants who had remained behind in their boat helped the villagers in the burial of the corpse. Ambuyat\(^1\) was poured onto the grave to prevent the corpse coming back to life. Afterwards, the merchants tried to take care of their sick friends. But they were never to recover and died a couple of days later.

\(^1\) Traditional Bruneian delicacy which is made of starch of a sago palm
THE MOSQUITO KING

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: AK. MOHAMAD PG. DAMIT
STORY TELLER: DAYANG HAFSAH ISMAIL
ILLUSTRATION: CHONG FU

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
KOON WAH PRINTING PTE, LTD., SINGAPORE, 1981

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN
EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
A mother once asked her two daughters to collect palm leaves to mend their roof. The palm farm was quite a long distance from their house and was close to a river. As the two siblings were collecting the palm leaves for their mother, they were attacked by many very large mosquitoes and were severely bitten. The mosquitoes were as big as grey plover birds.
When the mosquitoes perched on Aminah’s body and tried to suck her blood, Aminah would hit them with a piece of wood. Some died and some flew away. The mosquitoes then tried to perch on Aminah’s skin again. Aminah hit them again, angrily. However, her younger sister Rokiah only waved her hands around to scare away the mosquitoes. The mosquitoes were persistent, and Rokiah had to keep waving her hands to stop them from biting her, but they would not leave the sisters alone.
“O, kind-hearted mosquitoes! Don’t suck my blood. Are you not afraid of death?” said Rokiah to the mosquitoes. Although she wanted the mosquitoes to know she was cross at being bitten, she spoke respectfully to them.

“If you are truly kind-hearted beings, then bring me to see your king,” Rokiah said in a gentler voice.

“Alright,” said one of the mosquitoes. “But won’t you be scared when you see him?”

“Ooh... no! Why should I be scared, when I have never seen your king before?.” Rokiah tried to muster up her courage as she sincerely wanted to see the face of the Mosquito King.

“If that is the case, we will fly you off to our king,” the mosquito said.
All the mosquitoes gathered around Rokiah, lifted her up on the cloud of their wings, and flew her to their king. As soon as Rokiah arrived in the land of the Mosquito King, he appeared before her and showed her a fierce and terrifying face. His eyes were huge, red and shaped like limes. His teeth were as big as Cavendish bananas. He had a long white beard that reached his belly-button, while his body was big and tall.

When Rokiah saw the ferocious-looking Mosquito King, she immediately fainted. The Mosquito King had Rokiah taken to his dwelling, in the midst of a dense forest.
After a short while, Rokiah regained consciousness and looked all about her. The Mosquito King was perched nearby. As soon as she saw the large creature so close to her, she started sobbing because she was so afraid.

“Dearest granddaughter, please don’t be scared of me, I will not hurt you, dear. Settle yourself...”

Surprised at his tone, Rokiah stopped crying.

He continued, “Dearest granddaughter, I think you must be feeling hungry. If you are, you can cook for yourself. I have prepared rice, water, a cooking pot and firewood, all for you.”
In truth, when the Mosquito King referred to ‘rice’ he actually meant maggots, while ‘water’ was blood. His ‘firewood’ was made of animal bones, and his ‘pot’ was a battered and blackened human skull. When Rokiah saw these things before her, she felt disgusted and frightened.

The Mosquito King flew away to attend to his royal business, but after a while he returned.

“Have you eaten my dear granddaughter?” The Mosquito King asked her.

“I have eaten, grandfather!” said Rokiah calmly.

The Mosquito King knew that she had not eaten anything, but he wanted to test Rokiah’s good nature. Now, the Mosquito King understood that she was a polite person with good intentions towards others.
Soon Rokiah asked for his permission to return home.

“Grandfather, I think I have been here for a long time. Could I please go home?” asked Rokiah.

“Ooh... of course. But before your return, I want to give you a gift, granddaughter.” The Mosquito King handed Rokiah a black box.

“Thank you grandfather,” said Rokiah, with a pleasant cheerful face.

“But granddaughter, you need to keep in mind the conditions of this gift,” said the Mosquito King. “My granddaughter, you should only open this box when you have arrived home. Before opening it you must make sure that you have put up seven layers of curtains, and the four edges must be weighed down by stones.”

“Alright, grandfather, I will abide by all of your conditions. But, how will I ever get home?” asked Rokiah.

“It is alright,” said the Mosquito King. “If granddaughter does not know how to get back to her home, I will help. Now close both of your eyes slowly and then open them again.”
Rokiah then closed both of her eyes slowly, and opened them again. When her eyes re-opened she found herself on her front lawn in front of her mother’s house. There were many people inside the house. The whole village had come. Rokiah’s mother was holding a funeral gathering for her daughter. She thought that Rokiah had died and was lost to her forever. Rokiah climbed up the stairs to the house and her arrival caused an uproar. Rokiah’s mother welcomed her daughter back with open arms and was deeply grateful for her return. She turned the funeral gathering into a thanksgiving event, to honour Rokiah’s survival.

It was only the next day that Rokiah told her mother and sister about the black box. Her mother went to open the box, but Rokiah stopped her. She told her mother that the black box was a special present from the Mosquito King to her, and that no one could open the box except for her. She explained the conditions told to her by the Mosquito King. Rokiah’s mother searched high and low for the seven layers of curtains and mosquito nets. In the end, she had to borrow them from their neighbours.
Together, the family prepared what was necessary, creating a little curtained room in which Rokiah could open the box. As soon as the room was ready, she opened the lid and saw something gleaming brightly inside. The box was filled with shining gold and diamonds. Rokiah came out between the curtains and mosquito nets and took her mother’s hands happily.
Rokiah’s mother was shocked to see her with gold and diamonds.

“Kiah, where did you get this gold and these diamonds?” asked the mother angrily. Rokiah explained to her that they had come from the gift box of the Mosquito King.

As soon as Rokiah finished explaining her story, Aminah came and tried to grab the box from Rokiah’s hands. But Rokiah held on tightly, refusing to give it to Aminah. Rokiah said that she would give a portion of the gold and diamonds to her afterwards. However, Aminah was angry and refused to accept her sister’s gift. Aminah was jealous of her sister. She decided she would have even more gold and more diamonds than Rokiah. Thus, without delay she quickly rushed to the palm tree farm where they had been bitten so badly by mosquitoes the day before. Rokiah tried to stop her sister, but Aminah ignored her advice.
As soon as Aminah arrived at the palm farm, a swarm of mosquitoes perched on her body.

This time, Aminah did not kill any of them. Instead, she said to them “Fly me off to see your king as I must speak with him”.

The mosquitoes acceded to Aminah’s request, as they had done with Rokiah, and flew her to their king. When they arrived, the Mosquito King came out to meet Aminah with a fierce and frightening appearance. Aminah fainted, just as her sister had done. The Mosquito King then had Aminah carried into his hut.
Before long, Aminah regained consciousness. She too cried out in fear when she saw the Mosquito King perched next to her. The Mosquito King calmed her down and coaxed her to stop her crying. He asked Aminah to cook herself a meal from ingredients that were very similar to those he had provided for Rokiah. But, Aminah was absolutely horrified by what she saw. She screamed out in fierce disgust at the sight of maggots, blood, animal bones, and the battered human skull pot. She told the Mosquito King outright that she could never consume the horrible food he had provided and asked him to allow her to return home to her mother without delay.

Before Aminah’s return, the Mosquito King gave her a gift too. This gift was a bigger black box than the one he gave to Rokiah. When Aminah saw the black box, she grabbed hold of it greedily. She did not express any thanks to the Mosquito King for his gift or his hospitality. As he
had done with Rokiah, the Mosquito King told Aminah about the special conditions she must abide by before opening the box: that it should not be opened before she reached home and only opened in a room protected by seven layers of curtains, weighed down at each corner by stones.

The Mosquito King then asked Aminah to close her eyes. The moment she opened her eyes again, she found that she was already on her front lawn.

Aminah climbed up the steps to her house happily and greeted her mother and sister. She told them proudly that she received a similar box but much bigger than Rokiah’s. She then asked her mother to help prepare the seven layers of curtains and mosquito nets.

When the curtain layers were ready, Aminah went inside and rushed to open the box. Suddenly, Rokiah and her mother heard a terrible scream. The box had been filled with poisonous snakes.
ELDEST AND YOUNGEST

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION:  JILINA A. TENGAH
ILLUSTRATION:  KAMSIAH MOHAMOOD

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
TOPPAN PRINTING CO., LTD., SINGAPORE, 1983

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
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Once, there were two male siblings who lived in a village near the sea. They were called Eldest and Youngest. Eldest was temperamental, envious and rude, while his younger brother was patient, hardworking and loved to help people.

Youngest was terrified of his older brother because of his violent behaviour. It was always Youngest who carried out all the chores such as washing clothes, gathering firewood, collecting water and cooking. Through thick and thin, Youngest never complained or uttered even a sigh.
To sustain their everyday lives, both Eldest and Youngest went out to sea to catch fish. The fish was sold and all the profits were always taken by Eldest, who never gave a cent to his younger brother.

On this particular day, Eldest and Youngest went out to sea as usual. They dropped anchor far out from shore, and dropped their lines. Youngest sat upon the centre thwart, while Eldest stood in the stern. It seemed very odd that Eldest could not catch any fish at all that day, while his brother caught many.

Eldest started to resent his brother for his successful fishing, but Youngest just kept quiet and continued to fish. Eldest became even more enraged to see his brother acting so quiet and humble.
A few minutes later, Eldest’s bait was taken by a fish but he could not free his line. He tried to pull his hook away, but it felt as if it was stuck. Eldest was now furious. Without thinking of the danger, he told his brother to dive down into the sea and take a look, to see if he could retrieve the stuck hook. At first, his brother refused his demands. He knew the dangers of swimming deep in the ocean. But Eldest kept pushing him to dive, becoming wild with anger. When Youngest saw that his brother was about to hit him with the wooden oar, he gave in. With tears in his eyes for his brother’s lack of caring, Youngest dived down into the salty water, following the fishing line.

As he swam deep towards the bottom of the sea, Youngest could not believe his eyes. A whole city was spread out before him. The city was big and beautiful and it had everything a city for fish would need. At the centre was a medical room for injured fish.

Youngest felt very wary of this strange sight, but he kept on following the fishing line to the point where it had become stuck. His heart was caught in a dilemma.

“If I release this hook and return to the surface, my brother will still be angry and will beat me with the oar,” he said to himself. He could not decide what he should do.
As he pondered, a fish came out from the city and invited Youngest to enter. Inside the city, he saw many nets, fish traps and other fishing materials. Youngest was brought into the medical room. There, he saw a smaller fish trying to retrieve a hook that had become stuck in the mouth of a larger fish. Now, Youngest recognised that the hook belonged to his brother. Inside the room, he could also see fishing tackle hung all around. As Youngest approached, the fish who was trying to free the larger fish from the savage hook asked, “Do you know any of these items hanging here?”

“I do not know them. This is the first time that I ever saw these things,” answered Youngest.

“Do you know how to take this hook out of this fish’s mouth?”

“No, I do not know how,” answered Youngest.

“Why are you here then?” asked the fish.

“I was just doing what my brother demanded. He is a fierce and a violent person. If I do not obey his commands he will beat me to death,” answered Youngest.
“You must be hungry, let us eat. Parang, please serve him a nice meal,” said the smaller fish to the one who had welcomed Youngest into their city.

Several dishes were served including a plate of eggs. Youngest only ate the eggs and did not touch the fish that was served. The smaller fish asked, “Why didn’t you eat the cooked fish?”

“I do not eat fish, I only like to eat eggs,” said Youngest.

The smaller fish smiled and said to his friend, “Parang, this human is not our enemy, so please send him home and give him a handful of diamonds and pearls.”
Meanwhile Eldest had been relaxing on the boat and eating the food he and his brother had brought with them. Now, he felt tired of waiting. He had not seen any sign of his brother for hours and he was growing irritable again.

“That insolent fool!” he grunted. “Why is he taking such a long time under the sea?”
Eventually, his brother rose to the surface, bringing with him the gift of diamonds and pearls.

Eldest was amazed to see those shiny stones and to hear of the strange underwater city. Immediately he was full of envy. He wanted to get more of what Youngest had found.

Without a thought, he jumped into the water. Youngest did not know what to make of his brother’s unusual behaviour. Warily, he called out, “Be careful brother, be polite.”
Eldest took no notice of what his brother had said. He dived down into the ocean until he reached the fish city. There two fish welcomed him warmly.

“Who are you?” they asked.

“My name is Eldest, the older brother of Youngest who came here just recently,” said Eldest proudly.

“Oh alright. But what is your intention coming here?” they asked.

“I came to take my fish hook that is stuck here,” said Eldest bluntly. It did not occur to him that this might offend the fish that lived there.
The fish took him to the same room that they had taken Youngest

“Tell us, do you know any of the items that are hanging in this room?”

“Yes, I know all of them; that one is a bamboo fish trap, that is a fishing spear, that is a fishing net and that is my hook,” answered Eldest.

The two fish exchanged a glance and smiled to each other. One said, “If that is so, you will know how to take the hook out of my friend.”

“Yes, that is easy. It is a job I know well how to do,” said Eldest.
Eldest released the sharp hook from the large fish and it was free again. Just like his younger brother, he was served a meal. But Eldest did not pause to think about the politeness of his actions. He ate all the cooked fish and left the plate of eggs untouched.
“Wow, that cooked fish was really delicious. Could I have more?” Eldest asked his fish hosts.

At this lack of respect, the fish became angry at Eldest. They said, “Parang, this human is of a bad nature; it is because of him that too many of our kind have been badly injured or killed. Return him to the water’s surface immediately.”

“Send me home, and give me diamonds and pearls. Give me more than my brother,” said Eldest to the fish.

“As you wish,” said Parang, handing some items to Eldest and sending him on his way.
Meanwhile Youngest had been waiting in his boat, worried about his brother. All of a sudden, he felt the fishing line came loose. At last he was able to pull it free. He realized that it must have been his brother who had released the fish that was caught on his hook. A while later, the water splashed up near his boat and he saw Eldest emerging with a sack in his hand.
But Eldest did not have a chance to greet his brother, as all of a sudden, a large fish jumped out of the water and attacked him with its sharp teeth.

Youngest had no time to help his brother. He could only witness that frightening incident with horror. Youngest knew that his brother was taken by the large fish who had been hooked by Eldest. He realized there was nothing he could have done to save him. Youngest went home alone that day with a feeling of great sadness in his heart.
SI RANGGAU

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: NORDIN HAJI TENGAH
ILLUSTRATION: ZAINUDDIN JAMIL

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

TOPPAN PRINTING CO. (S) PTE LTD., SINGAPORE, 1983
TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
Once upon a time, there were a loving husband and wife. 
Even though they had been married for fifteen years, they were still childless. 
All the time they prayed to be blessed with a child. 
Then one day, the wife felt something was not normal with her and she immediately told her husband. 
Both husband and wife were so happy to discover that they were going to have a child. 
They thanked God for granting their wishes.
The next morning at dawn, the husband went out with his supply of seven rice cakes and his spear, accompanied by his dog, Sampar. The husband crossed forests and bush land in search of a deer with white horns.
Night was approaching yet he could not find any animals at all, let alone the strange deer he was searching for. He kept on walking through one dense forest after another. He would not go home until he found the deer that his wife craved. He only stopped to rest at night, and fell asleep with Sampar on a tree branch.

The wife waited for her husband. A couple of days passed, but he was still not in sight. She was concerned for her husband’s safety. She regretted letting him out to hunt. Her craving for the meat of the white-horned deer faded because she was so worried. Her heart was troubled and sad, thinking about her husband hunting in the forest.
More days passed but the husband still did not return home. Eventually the time came when the wife was about to give birth, but no one was there to help her. She gave birth safely to a baby boy.
The husband, on the other hand, was still wandering in the forest in search of the white-horned deer.
Loyally, Sampar accompanied his master.
But because the husband had been in the forest for so long, something strange had happened.
He had turned into a strange wild being, half human and half monster.
His body was covered with fur, his teeth were larger and he was only clothed with a red loincloth.
His gentle nature became violent.
He killed animals and drank their blood.
He was possessed by the devil and his dog Sampar was possessed too.
In short, the husband had become Si Ranggau.
Si Ranggau sat alone on top of the highest tree branch with his ogling eyes. When he walked, all the branches would spin as though it was windy. Si Ranggau often sat on a fig tree remembering his wife and child, whom he had left by themselves in the village.

Years passed and the boy had grown into a young man. He understood how much his parents had loved each other and one day asked, “Mother, where is my father?” Tearfully, his mother told him about his father.
Your father went out hunting one day when I was pregnant with you. There is still no news about him after all this time. Whether he is alive or not, I do not know, my son!

"If that is the case, Mother, please allow me to search for Father. I will bring him home when I meet him," he answered.

"No son... I do not want the same thing happening to you. I am old. If you are lost too, who will take care of me in this small hut?" said the mother with a sad voice.
The son insisted that he should go and the mother could not resist his wishes. “Son, if you meet a black dog named Sampar, that was your father’s dog. Your father also possessed a spear,” explained the mother. And so, the son started his journey through the forest, all the while calling out to Sampar, the dog.

It was quite a while until he heard a dog barking at night. He quickly ran towards the sound. The son looked about. He was surprised to see sticks and branches spinning around, when there was no wind at all. When he looked up, he saw a strange figure squatting on a tree with a spear in his hand. The son spoke the dog’s name. Sampar came and licked his hand. He was sure now that the man who was sitting on top of the high tree was his father.
“Father! I am your son. Please come down, I have been waiting to meet you,” the son called. The man ignored his son’s calling until all of a sudden he heard Sampar’s bark. Si Ranggau came down from the tree.

“Come home Father, Mother wants to see you!”
“I cannot live with you and your mother anymore, I have become Si Ranggau, Go home. If you need help, call my name Si Ranggau, call Sampar’s name or my spear, Si Julang. I will be there. That is the only thing that I can do for you now.”

When the son heard his father’s words, he cried and gave up persuading his father. He realized that his father was no longer human. Slowly he went home, disappointed.

This was how Si Ranggau came to be. Those with evil intentions can call Si Ranggau to ask for help. Si Ranggau can be asked to kill anyone.
Merimbun was a place in the hinterlands of Tutong district. It was also known as Merimbun Lake. This lake was attractive because of its natural beauty, especially its blue, fresh water.
There was an island in the middle of this lake. This island was known as Labi-Labi Island and it was the home of a story about a Dusun family.

One night, when the moon was shining, Merimbun Lake and its surroundings were even more beautiful than usual. The leaves sparkled from the soft glow of the moon.

“Father, what is that shining high in the sky?” asked Malau.

“Malau, that is the moon. It is there up high behind the clouds.”

“Malau wants to own it, Father! Could you please get the moon for me?”

“My son, your request is extraordinary and impossible. Ask me for something else that is within my power, so I can get you that instead,” answered Malau’s father calmly.
But that night, the family talked more together than on any other night before. The father’s head was filled with his son’s magical request. He was worried that his son might sulk and be miserable because he could not have his wish.

The next night, Malau once again asked his father for the moon, thinking he could have it as his toy. Malau’s parents became disturbed as they were not able to give their son an answer he could understand.

The next day, the husband and wife went off to the forest to gather bamboo. They cut off many bamboo sticks. This was the only way they could think of appeasing Malau’s wish for the moon.
The bamboo sticks were carefully arranged to resemble a tower. As soon as the bamboo tower was built, Malau’s father climbed up high. He asked his son to wait for his return patiently. Obediently, Malau waited for his father at the foot of the tower.
The bamboo stick tower was incredibly high, so tall that it reached the sky. As the father climbed higher, he felt the wind blowing stronger, weakening his vision.

Below, Malau still waited at the foot of the tower, refusing to go home. He had high hopes for his father to return with the moon.
Days went by, but Malau’s father still had not come down from the sky.

Malau’s mother became wistful thinking about her husband. She could not see where he was and did not know when he would return.

The mother tried to persuade Malau to come home, but Malau refused stubbornly. He did not want to go home until his father came back with the moon.
More days passed, but still Malau’s father had not come down. The villagers came to talk with Malau. They told him that his father must have been blown away by the wind and he may never return. They told the boy that he should go home with his mother. Malau remained steadfast. He was confident that his father would return with the moon.
Malau’s father was blown so hard by the wind that he lost his grip on the tower and fell into the sea. He did not know how long it had been since he was separated from his son and his wife.
As he floated on the ocean’s surface, a tortoise swam towards him. This was a magical tortoise that could speak the father’s language.

“Grab my back and I will return you to where you came from. Wherever I bring you to the shore, that will be where you came from.”

Malau’s father climbed onto the tortoise’s back and held on tightly to its shell.

The tortoise swam with him from the ocean to the river in search of the father’s shore.

It swam a long way up several rivers, but each time he came to a point when he found he could not continue with his journey.

He tried to enter the Brunei River, then the Temburong and Belait rivers.

There was always something that prevented his journey.
So the tortoise changed his course and headed up the Tutong River. Even though the banks of the Tutong River were very narrow, the tortoise could easily swim between them.

Finally, the tortoise swam all the way to the shore of Merimbun Lake. When he passed the shore, a big log appeared, blocking his way. This log was known as the Yadu log. It was a very bizarre log as it would bleed whenever anyone tried to chop it.
The Merimbun Lake villagers were surprised to see a tortoise in the lake. For as long as they had lived there, they had never seen such an extraordinary event. The sight seemed all the more incredible when they saw a human sitting on the tortoise.

As soon as Malau saw the tortoise he shouted out to everyone that his father had returned. The crowd came running to see this remarkable sight and welcomed the return of Malau’s father after so long.
The tortoise sent Malau’s father to the shore. At last, the father was reunited with his family. Malau’s mother told her husband that he had been gone for six months, so long that many predicted he had died. To the husband it seemed that he had only been away for one month. To try to understand this, they shared their experiences of what had happened.
After sending off Malau’s father, the tortoise swam out of Merimbun Lake and back into the Tutong River. But he found he could go no further because the Yadu log still prevented his journey. He tried a number of times to pass through but failed. The log seemed determined to stop him from getting past.

The tortoise felt embarrassed at his failure to pass the Yadu log. To hide his shame, he swam to the middle of Merimbun Lake, and turned over his shell. As time passed, the tortoise stayed in the lake and was transformed into an island. This island was known as Tortoise Island. Even today it still exists. It resembles the shape of a tortoise with its head pointing towards the shore of Merimbun Lake and its tail directed to the sea. The Yadu log is known to appear every now and then, blocking the way up the Tutong River.

That is the story of how the Tortoise Island in Merimbun Lake came to exist.
THE MERMAID’S TEARS

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: MORSIDI MUHAMMAD
STORY TELLER: HASNAH AHMAD
ILLUSTRATION: CHONG FU

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
KOON WAH PRINTING PTE, LTD., SINGAPORE, 1988

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN
EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
DIRECTOR'S FOREWORD

SIRI CHERITA RA'AYAT BRUNEI

Titisan Ayer Mata Duyong

Karangan MORSIDI MUHAMMAD
Pencipta HASNAH AHMAD
Lukisan CHONG FU

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei

Hakcipta Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Brunei
Semua Hakcipta Terpdihara

DECLARATION

Dewan Bahasa & Pustaka
BRUNEI

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MOR
In this era of modernization in Brunei, it is important to celebrate the diverse perspectives contained within our history and culture. Until the mid-twentieth century, folklore held a central place in the Bruneian community through oral storytelling accompanied by rhythmic drumming and music (*diangdangan, bermukun, bangsawan, penglipur lara*). These stories reflected the ways and beliefs of Brunei for many centuries. We who live now may assume that the oral culture of the past, our folklore, is merely a collection of legends that do not have a place in the everyday social and cultural habits of contemporary society. To forget our traditions, however, would be a great loss to our cultural memory. Our folklore belongs to all of us and is a living part of our society: to deny this heritage is to deny our own unique identity and traditions.

Folklore has its own special role in literature. Its functions are similar to those of other ancient literary traditions. Folklore functions, on many levels, as a way to help us understand the world. It is a source of history, education and ethical as well as practical guidance for living well. It expresses social values, cultural codes and practices, and much more.

The folklore in this collection is based on the stories that were kept alive by the elders and guardians of our culture over many generations and transmitted through oral story-telling. Through the assembly of these tales, we can see similarities between the many stories that come from different villages within our region.

In a time when culture and society have become more complex and less reliant on local traditions, the importance of these stories may all too easily be overlooked. We cannot simply depend on oral story-telling as a way of ensuring their survival. Future generations may never know about them unless they are recorded and shared. The publication of this precious spoken heritage of the Brunei people, which was conveyed to generation after generation by the elders of the past, is therefore intended to preserve our folklore for future generations to come.
A fisherman and his wife once lived in a village next to the sea. The fisherman’s wife was expecting a baby.

One day, when the fisherman came home from sea, the wife asked him, “Could you please do me a favour, husband?”

“What favour do you ask of me, wife?” asked the fisherman.

“I crave terribly for seagrass fruit,”\(^2\) answered the wife.

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\(^2\) Seagrass fruit: a type of water plant that grows at the river mouth (it prefers wet soil). The fruit is delicious but it is difficult to find.
“That’s no trouble! I will collect it for you as soon as I came back from sea,” promised the fisherman.

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The next day, the fisherman went off to sea as usual to make his living.

Before he left for work, the wife reminded him to collect the seagrass fruit which she desired so much to taste. The fisherman promised to fulfill his wife’s craving.
But while he was at sea, the fisherman was unusually busy with his work. He was ecstatic as he caught many more fish that day than usual. He was so distracted with fishing that he forgot about his promise to his wife. It was only when his boat was full of fish that he remembered he was supposed to collect the fruit. But he had left it too late. Now he could not fulfil his promise, because the tide was already high and the seagrass fruit could not be seen below the surface. He said to himself,

“What can I do now? The water is already too deep.”

He thought that he would have to wait to get the seagrass fruit when the tide was low.

But then he considered, “If I do not collect the seagrass fruit she will definitely get angry. People say pregnant wives become angry all too easily. Ah! It is alright, I will get it tomorrow!”

The fisherman then went home with his incredibly large catch of fish.
The fisherman’s wife waited eagerly for his return at their doorstep.

As soon as she saw her husband was approaching, she smiled at him and asked, “Do you have the seagrass fruit that I asked for?”

The fisherman felt guilty.

“I forgot!” he answered uncomfortably.

He continued to talk in order to appease his wife, “But today, I have done very well. I have caught many fish.”

“Oh! That is useless! I don’t want to eat the fish until you have got me the seagrass fruit,” said the wife, beginning to get angry.

“Don’t be like that. I will get you the seagrass fruit tomorrow. I promise!” coaxed the fisherman.

The fisherman finally managed to soothe his wife’s disappointment with promises.
The next day, the fisherman went off to sea as usual. But again, he forgot to get the seagrass fruit that his wife craved. As with the day before, he caught an amazingly large number of fish and was too busy to think about the seagrass fruit.

He only remembered his wife’s request when his boat was filled with fish and the tide was already too high.

As usual, his wife welcomed his arrival at their doorstep. But his failure to bring the seagrass fruit made her angry as he had broken yet another promise. They argued a little but all the
fisherman could do was to coax his wife and promised for the third time to get the seagrass fruit for her the next day.

On the third day, once again, the fisherman failed to keep his promise. It was all just as before. His catch was better than ever and he was too happy and too busy to think of the seagrass fruit.

When he arrived home, his wife greeted him at their front door.

She immediately asked,

“Where is the seagrass fruit?”

The fisherman was hesitant in answering his wife’s question, but in the end he had to reply. With guilt in his voice, he admitted, “I forgot.”

As soon as she heard the same answer for the third time, she broke down crying. “Now I know that you don’t care for me. You hate me!”

The wife dashed to the bedroom and would not speak to him that day.

The fisherman felt guilty and unhappy at his wife’s reaction.

He tried to talk to his wife, telling her he was sorry, but she ignored him. All she could do was cry in the bedroom.
The next morning, the fisherman went to sea as always, but with a different feeling in his heart. He felt hesitant to go out. That day he did not catch many fish, and so it was that he decided to go home earlier than usual.

The tide was then still low, so he went to the seashore to look for seagrass fruit. As he searched for the fruit, he noticed someone sitting on the shore nearby. He approached the seated figure. To his amazement he realized that it was his wife. She was eating seagrass fruit with her legs out in front of her.
The fisherman asked his wife to go back home with him, but she refused.

Tired of trying to please his wife, the fisherman went home. There, he waited for her to return. But time passed and his wife did not come home.

The tide had started to rise. The fisherman became worried and anxious. Eventually, he went out with hopes of finding his wife and bringing her home.

When he arrived at the place where he had been fishing earlier that day, he was baffled by what he saw. She was still sitting with her legs out eating the seagrass fruit.

He asked his wife to come home, but she still refused and said,

“I don’t want to go home anymore. Let me be. You don’t love me. You didn’t fulfil my request. You should go home now!”
“Don’t be like that. I love you. I will always care for you. Let us go home.”

The fisherman tried to coax his wife into coming home, yet she was firm and refused to go with him.

By now, the tide was increasing very quickly. As the water rose, suddenly the wife’s legs became scaly.

The scales started to grow down to her feet, which then joined together to form a kind of tail, like a prawn’s tail. The fisherman was baffled by this sight. He could not speak a word.
The sea water rose and rose. So did the scales, which had now grown as far up to the wife’s belly-button.

The fisherman could not let out a word, he was so shocked. Only a tear rolled down his cheek. Sad too was his wife. She cried, shedding her tears and showing her grief.

Before it was too late, she managed to say some last words to her husband, “You will have to stay here on land. I must go to the sea. We cannot live together anymore. You are a human and I am a fish.”

The tide rose even higher and the scales spread farther. Finally, the fisherman’s wife was completely transformed into a mermaid. The mermaid then swam away, leaving the fisherman alone.

The fisherman was left with an overwhelming feeling of disappointment and grief. He could not stop shedding tears of sadness.

Since then, according to folklore, every time the mermaid is caught by humans, she will cry a tear drop as this would bring memories of where she once came from.
ORIGIN OF RICE

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: AK MOHAMMAD BIN PG DAMIT
STORY TELLER: DAYANG AISAH BINTI ABDULLAH
ILLUSTRATION: ABDUL HAKIM HAJI MOKTI

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS.
PUSTAKA NASIONAL PTE. LTD., SINGAPORE, 1989.

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN
EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
SIRI CERITA RAKYAT BRUNEI

Asal Usul Padi

AK MOHAMMAD BIN PG DAMIT
DAYANG AISHAH RINTI ABDELLAH
ABDUL HAKIM BAJI MOKTI

Diterbitkan oleh Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
Kementerian Kebudayaan Belia dan Sukan
Bandar Seri Begawan 2004
Brunei Darussalam

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Cetakan Pertama 1989

MILIK
PERPUSTAKAAN
DEWAN BAHASA DAN PUSTAKA
NEGARA BRUNEI DARUSSALAM

A达尔耗rol oleh Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, Brunei Darussalam
Ditukar oleh Pustaka Nasional Pte. Ltd., Singapore

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DIRECTOR’S FOREWORD

There is much folklore in existence in our country, but these stories are only known by the elderly. It is hoped that local writers could take opportunities to collect these stories from our elders and conduct research before, these precious narratives are lost.

This particular tale by Ak. Mohammad bin Pg. Damit was taken from the oral narrative of Dayang Aisah binti Abdullah, and was collected by the Research Section, Institute of Language and Literature, Ministry of Culture, Youth and Sports, Brunei Darussalam. This act of collecting folklore is one of the responsibilities of the department. The publishing of this book is hoped to provide reading material for children. It is also hoped that this book can benefit children in raising the culture of reading.
A long time ago, there was a boy named Tugal.

He was an orphan who lived with his elderly grandfather.

They lived in a village which was far away from the sea.

Tugal and his grandfather led difficult lives.

His grandfather was a fisherman who only had a boat and a net.
Their daily foods were fish with a side of vegetables, collected from nibung trunk, luba trunk, rattan and rumbia. That was how they lived every day.
After a few years, his grandfather died and Tugal lived alone.

Every day, he went out to sea to fish.

Tugal remembered his grandfather’s advice to always be diligent and hardworking.
One day, while out at sea, Tugal did not catch any fish at all.

However, he did not despair. He kept on throwing the net, even though it was empty every time.
One morning, when Tugal went to sea to try netting some fish, his net got stuck beneath the surface.

Worried and sad, Tugal thought about how to recover his net.

He whispered inside his heart, “I should dive in. It would be a blessing if I can come back safe. But if it is otherwise, what can I do?”

Tugal then jumped into the water.
Without any warning, a creature with the head of a fish and the body of a human appeared. Tugal was scared when he saw the creature.

Not long after, an elderly woman approached him and said, “Do not be afraid my grandson. Come...come my grandson! Grandmother will bring you into that palace.”

Delicious food was served for Tugal. He was baffled by the word ‘rice’ as he had never eaten it before. Tugal asked the elderly woman, “What is this rice made of?”

“This cooked rice was from paddy.”

The elderly woman explained while showing Tugal ripening rice fields.
She then asked, “Grandson, do you like to eat fish?”

Tugal answered, “No.” He was pretending.

The woman laughed in amusement. Tugal looked at her, baffled. She then explained that she and her people originated from fish and she was the queen.
Tugal was given a tour. He saw large yellow paddy fields.

The queen taught Tugal how to plant paddy, how to harvest and how to cook rice.

From then on, Tugal understood how to produce rice.
Before Tugal headed for home, he hid two grains of paddy under his tongue.

He was baffled to find his boat and his net exactly as he had left them, when in fact he had been in the underwater palace for a long time.

Tugal climbed onto his boat and rowed back to shore.
As soon as he arrived home, Tugal quickly planted the two grains of paddy which he had hid.

A few days later, the paddy grew beautifully.

He harvested them once they ripened.

Tugal now led a good life because of his rice.
From then on, rice was well-known amongst humans.

Some still refer to paddy as ‘Paddy of Tugal’ or ‘Tugal’s Paddy’.
THE ELF PRINCESS AND THE KALINDAHAU GHOST

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: SHARIFAH HAFSAH BINTIN SHEIKH ABDUL RAHMAN

ILLUSTRATION: AK ZAININ BIN PG MANSOR

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE

PUSTAKA NATIONAL SDN. BHD., SINGAPORE, 1990

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUE LOVELL
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The folklore in this collection is based on the stories that were kept alive by the elders and guardians of our culture over many generations and transmitted through oral story-telling.
Through the assembly of these tales, we can see similarities between the many stories that come from different villages within our region.

In a time when culture and society have become more complex and less reliant on local traditions, the importance of these stories may all too easily be overlooked. We cannot simply depend on oral story telling as a way of ensuring their survival. Future generations may never know about them unless they are recorded and shared. The publication of this precious spoken heritage of the Brunei people, which was conveyed to generation after generation by the elders of the past, is therefore intended to preserve our folklore for future generations to come.
Once upon a time, there was a woman who lived alone in a house near a hill and a forest. She had a farm where she grew winter melons, rice and other vegetables. Her name was Dang Ayang.

One season, Dang Ayang decided that she would plant maize instead of winter melons. So, she burnt her farm to clear away the winter melons from the season before.
The next day, Dang Ayang went back to her farm intending to clean up the burnt area. When she arrived in the garden, she heard a woman crying piteously on a mound of winter melons that had been set aside, which were not burnt with the discarded plants. She discovered a beautiful woman in a white dress who had long black shiny hair and skin that glowed pearly white. The woman was trying very hard to pull her fingernails out of the winter melon where they were stuck.
Dang Ayang asked, “Why are you here, beautiful woman?”

The woman revealed that she was an Elf Princess.

The night before, her people had a festival during which they went in search of winter melons. This explained how they had arrived to Dang Ayang’s winter melon farm.

It was during her stroll the farm that the Elf Princess’ feet became caught up in the roots of the winter melon plants. She had fallen and her fingers inadvertently dug into a winter melon.
As soon as Dang Ayang heard the Princess’s story, she felt sorry for her and expressed her readiness to help. Slowly and very carefully, Dang Ayang pulled the Princess’ nails out of the winter melon, but some of them broke away.
As soon as the Princess’ nails were extracted from the winter melon, she began to cry even more. Dang Ayang patted the Princess and talked to her quietly to calm her. When she was calmer, the Elf Princess spoke again.

“Oh human, I am in such grief. My magical powers have gone because my long finger-nails are left in the winter melon. Because of that, I cannot return to my invisible state and go home to my people. Will you let me live with you, as I am carrying a child?”

Dang Ayang felt that she had no choice but to agree, and brought the beautiful Princess to her house to live with her.
One day, Dang Ayang asked the Princess to take a look at her fish trap while she went to her farm. The trap was set in a river that flowed close to her house. Dang Ayang warned the Princess not to approach the fish trap if she saw the Kalindahau ghost in the middle of the river. In that case, she should leave and hurry back home.

“Yes, Kak Ayang,”³ answered the Princess.

³ Kak or Kakak is a respectful term to address an older female such as sister, female relative, female friend or female stranger.
When the Princess arrived at the river, she saw the Kalindahau ghost in the middle of the river holding onto Dang Ayang’s fish trap.
The Princess thought to herself: “What type of creature is this Kalindahau ghost? Perhaps it is human.” She went closer to the ghost.

“It has long red hair and its face is hidden,” she noticed.

“It is no wonder that in the past two weeks, Kak Ayang did not manage to get any fish in her trap. This ghost keeps eating them.”
The Elf Princess quietly went down to the shallow river and without warning seized the Kalindahau’s hair.

Standing behind the Kalindahau, the Princess said angrily, “Kalindahau ghost, why are you eating the fish in this trap?” The Princess repeated her question a few more times but the Kalindahau ghost gave no reply. So, the Princess pulled the Kalindahau’s hair.

Then the Kalindahau ghost became angry. She told the Princess that if she wanted all Kak Ayang’s fish returned, she would have to embrace her back. The Kalindahau told the Princess that she could not turn her head back because she was pregnant. The Princess gave in to the Kalindahau’s demand and embraced her back tightly.
The ghost asked the Princess: “Where are you human? Behind me?”

The Elf Princess replied, “Yes, behind you.”

When the Kalindahau heard that, she swiftly stabbed her sharp elbows into the Princess’ stomach. The Princess’ belly was ruptured, her organs and the baby in her belly all burst out, and almost immediately she died.

Her placenta, heart and liver were taken out and eaten by the Kalindahau ghost. When she was finished eating the choice organs of the Elf Princess, the Kalindahau picked up the Princess’ baby, which had burst out along with its mother’s splattered organs. While the baby sat on the Kalindahau’s lap, its long sharp finger-nail struck the Kalindahau’s eyes and its sharp little toe-nails stabbed the Kalindahau’s stomach. The Kalindahau ghost flung the baby away.
Now, the Kalindahau ghost was writhing in pain. At last, the ghost could no longer stand the pain from its wounds and died. But, before it died, it gave birth to two types of placenta: one was black and the other was reddish. This reddish placenta was the result of eating the Elf Princess.
Soon after this strange occurrence, a cat came creeping near the two placentas. Now, this cat was still recovering after giving birth to her own kittens. When the cat saw the placentas, she went over and sniffed and licked the black placenta to see what it would do. Nothing alarming happened, so it gobbled up the black placenta as quickly as it could.

After eating the placenta, the cat felt full of energy and strength. All the pain from giving birth to the kittens was gone.

Confidently, the cat then approached the reddish placenta. She scratched and licked it to see what it would do. All of a sudden the placenta moved along the ground, then jumped into the river and turned into a bakulan⁴ fish.

Such is the story of the Elf Princess and the Kalindahau ghost.

⁴ Yellow tail fish
THE BANANA HEART PRINCESS

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: AWANG AHMAD

ILLUSTRATION: PG ZAININ PG MANSOR

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE


TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
PUTERI TUNGKUL PISANG
AWANG AHMAD

Diterbitkan oleh Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka
Kementerian Kebudayaan, Belia dan Sukan
Bandar Seri Begawan 2004
Brunei Darussalam

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Cetakan Pertama 1995

Hiaskan Kutip dan Ilustrasi Dalam
Pg Zaini Pg Mansor

Rupatap Teks Times, 18/23 poin
FOREWORD

Folktales have their own unique identity in literature and local societies. It is such a disadvantage when one assumes folktales do not have a place in this era. It is indeed a loss for our own society and race.

The role of folklore, despite its oral quality, is as important as any other historic literature. Folklore which has historical aspects functions as an effective didactic exposure. Through folklore children can easily learn about culture and civilization.

In an effort to preserve our precious folklore, our faculty is constantly seeking, collecting and publishing stories with the aim of preventing them from disappearing.

Hopefully, this publishing will benefit not only children but those who are interested in folklore as well.

-Pengiran Haji Badaruddin bin Pengiran Haji Ghani

Director
Once upon a time there was a village where farming was the way of life for the people. They lived in harmony and were helpful to each other with everything. In that village lived a young man named Tunggal. He lived alone. His parents had died long ago.

Tunggal was a hardworking young man. He planted different kinds of fruit trees around his house, such as banana, jackfruit, durian and mango. Tunggal would start working on his farm early morning and he only came home in the evening, when his work was done for the day.

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Tunggal in the Malay language means ‘single’ or ‘alone’.
Late one afternoon, while Tunggal was working on his farm, he noticed a banana tree with almost-ripe fruit. At first, Tunggal thought that the best thing to do would be to cut down the banana tree the next day, but he was worried that squirrels might get to the bananas before he returned. So Tunggal decided he would cut down the banana tree’s stub before he went home. The sun began to set and the light was starting to fade. Suddenly his machete slipped and wounded his finger. In great pain he turned to rush home, completely ignoring the banana stub.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Malay elders have always advised to cut down a banana tree completely, never to leave the stub. It is believed that the stub could conjure up the spirit that lives in it into the human world.
He had only taken a few steps when Tunggal heard a woman calling his name. He stopped and slowly turned around. He was so amazed at the woman’s beauty with her long loose hair that he forgot all about his bleeding finger.

“Help me, my house is far. I don’t dare to walk home in the dark. Please, allow me to stay at your house for one night,” the woman pleaded for his pity.

At first, Tunggal felt very uneasy about this strange request, but the woman looked desperate. Finally, Tunggal agreed and welcomed her into his house.
As soon as the woman entered Tunggal’s house, she began doing the chores, cleaning, tidying and cooking his meal. She seemed to know where everything was. It was as if she was already accustomed to living in that house.

Tunggal was astonished.

“Come and eat with me,” Tunggal invited the woman while she served the food.

“It’s alright, go ahead, I am still full. I will eat when I am hungry,” answered the woman politely.
The next morning when Tunggal awoke, he found the woman was nowhere in sight. He assumed that she had left for her home.

However, that night, the woman appeared again outside his house. Tunggal was surprised to see her there.

“You did not go home?” asked Tunggal, bewildered.

“No,” answered the woman sadly.

“Why?” Tunggal asked.

“I was driven out by my parents. I don’t have any place to stay, that is why I am here to ask for your help,” said the woman sobbing.

Tunggal was in a dilemma. What would the villagers think of him if he let the woman stay? She was a stranger and it was not proper for her to be in his house. However, she looked so sweet and sad that he felt great pity for her plight, and allowed the woman to come inside to stay in his house again.
The woman knew how to captivate Tunggal’s heart. She kept him company cheerfully and worked hard in the house, doing all the chores and making him comfortable. She was always very polite and helpful. His life was much happier and easier now that he did not have to do everything himself. Inevitably, Tunggal fell in love with her and eventually asked her to marry him.
The other villagers made a terrible commotion when they heard about Tunggal’s decision to make the woman his wife. Some of the villagers advised him to look more closely into the woman’s background before he took the important step of marriage. However, Tunggal ignored everyone’s advice and opinions. He was already deeply in love with her and thought that her background could not matter to him. The villagers could not say or do anything to change his mind. Tunggal was adamant that his decision was the right one.

Tunggal’s bride asked for their wedding to be carried out at night. Tunggal was happy to oblige her. He did not think that there was anything strange about her request.

After the wedding, for a time, Tunggal and his wife lived happily.
But gradually, the villagers began to notice that Tunggal was changing. He looked increasingly thin and sick. His face was pale and drawn as if the life-force was being sucked out of his body. The finger he had wounded with his machete a month earlier was still not healed.

Tunggal was baffled by the changes in his health. His wife looked after him well, cleaning their house and cooking meals for him every day, but still he grew thinner and weaker. He was even more confused by his wife’s behaviour. To begin with, from the moment they were married he always slept alone. His wife was often nowhere to be seen. In the mornings, when he woke up, she was nowhere in sight. Whenever Tunggal asked his wife about where she had gone, she told him that she was visiting a friend in the next village.
One day when his wife was not at home, Tunggal went to visit a wise elderly man in a village across the river. Tunggal told him about himself, his wife and his unhealed finger. After the old man heard his story he took Tunggal’s hand in his own and looked closely at the still-bloody wounded finger. Instantly, the wise man knew the real identity of Tunggal’s wife. He advised Tunggal to prepare a long roll of thread and a box of pins. He then taught Tunggal how to use both of the items. He told Tunggal to go to bed early that night and wait for his wife to appear.

“She will come to you and suck on your bleeding finger. When you begin to feel your wife sucking your finger, attach this pin that is already tied with the thread to her dress. But remember, you must be very gentle and quiet. Don’t let her know what you are doing,” said the wise man.
Tunggal came home as usual in the evening after tending his crops. When he arrived, he found his wife busy, just as always, with cleaning the house and preparing food. Tunggal told his wife that he felt unwell and did not want any food that night. Instead, he would just go to bed and rest. He lay down and closed his eyes as if he were sleeping.
Later that night Tunggal’s wife entered their bedroom. When she saw Tunggal lying down on the bed fast asleep, she slowly lifted up Tunggal’s wounded finger and began to suck the blood from the unhealed wound. With his other hand, very gently so that she would not notice, Tunggal attached the threaded pin to her dress. He kept hold of the other end of the thread so that he could follow her wherever she would go.

When she was satisfied with the blood she had drunk, Tunggal’s wife stood and went out to their backyard, just as dawn was approaching.
As soon as the sun rose, Tunggal got out of bed and prepared to track his wife’s movements by means of the thread. In case of trouble, Tunggal took his machete with him as he left his house.

Tunggal followed the thread. To his great surprise, he found the pin embedded in a banana tree. He noticed that it was the same banana tree which he had taken the fruit from a month earlier, on the same day that his wife had first appeared.
Without hesitating, Tunggal drew out the machete from his waist sling. With one great blow he cut down the banana tree. As the blade struck the tree, a woman’s voice was heard shrieking in pain and blood splashed out from the gash. Tunggal was aghast when he realized that the screaming voice was that of his wife.
Later, feelings of remorse and pity crept into Tunggal’s heart as he reflected on what had happened. He knew now that his wife was not a human being at all, but a spirit which could resemble human form.

According to stories from the wise elderly folk, this spirit being is known as the Banana Heart Princess. She can appear beautiful and kind, but she survives by consuming human blood. She is the reason why the elderly always advise us to cut off the base of the banana tree completely when collecting its fruit. It has long been feared that if the stub is left intact, the Banana Heart Princess will emerge.
THE STOVE SPIRIT
A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: SADIAH HAJI MD. ALI
ILLUSTRATION: ABD WAHAB HAJI MOHD JAAFAR

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE
THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS.

AMAN ABADI PUBLICATIONS, BRUNEI DARUSSALAM, 2008

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
PREFACE

*The Stove Spirit* is a legend which originates from the water village. Thankfully, our society now has shown an interest in reading local books published by the Institute of Language and Literature. I am sure there are parts of our communities who do not possess, or never had a chance to read, books like these.

In this second edition, there was an effort to improve and minor additions in terms of story coordination with proper illustration; however, the plot and the story contents remained the same. The usage of Bruneian language is still the same with the help of a glossary for comprehension.

May books like these, which have local characteristics, capture the heart of the reader locally and also internationally.

- Dr Mataim bin Bakar
  Director
Once upon a time, there was an old man named Pak Kadok. He lived in the water village. The villagers assumed that he was an arrogant man, who did not want to marry the women from his own village. This was because they knew that he dreamt of marrying an elf woman.
Every day, Pak Kadok went to the Brunei River to catch fish with his net. His daily catch of fish was bought by the people who would come down to his boat from the village. With the profit from the fish, he bought rice, sugar, flour and clothes.

One night, he was cooking rice and fish in the kitchen. That day his fish had all sold out. Pak Kadok was so happy that he could not help whistling as he cooked his evening meal. All of a sudden, a beautiful woman appeared as if from nowhere. She was so beautiful that no woman in the village could compare to her.
She approached Pak Kadok and asked him, “Did you call me?”

Surprised, he just stared at the beautiful woman. “Perhaps she is an elf,” he said to himself.

“Yes! Yes!” Pak Kadok answered, nervously.
The next day, he went to the village head to express his desire to marry the elf woman. He told the village head what had happened the night before. The village head agreed that Pak Kadok could marry the elf woman. He also promised to keep her origin a secret. After their meeting, the village head went to tell the other villagers about Pak Kadok's wedding ceremony.
Soon after, Pak Kadok married the elf woman. At their wedding he brought her to sit with him on their wedding dais. The villagers who were present were all astonished to see the beauty of Pak Kadok’s wife. Some were wondering how he had been able to capture the heart of such a beautiful woman.

Now that Pak Kadok had a wife, he no longer needed to cook for himself. All the house chores were done by his new wife. The couple lived happily together. Not long after they were married, Pak Kadok’s wife became pregnant.
When it was time, she delivered a baby girl. Pak Kadok named their daughter Mayang Sari.
Pak Kadok loved his wife and Mayang Sari very much indeed. He enjoyed seeing his daughter grow up as the years passed.

One day, Mayang Sari was asked by her mother if she would pluck a white hair from her scalp. While the girl was preoccupied with trying to pluck out the white hair, she noticed a nail embedded in her mother’s head. The girl was very surprised at this sight and, when her mother begged her to take it out, she did as she was asked.

The truth was that Pak Kadok had buried the nail in his wife’s scalp eighteen years before. According to custom, it was that nail which had enabled her to become visible to the human world.
As soon as the girl removed the nail, her mother screamed out in pain. Mayang Sari was shocked to see her mother’s transformation. Only a moment later, there was a puff of white smoke and, in an instant, her mother was gone. Mayang Sari cried out to her mother not to leave her behind. From inside the white cloud, her mother’s voice called back to her:

“Stay my dear, I am going back to where I came from. Take care of yourself and your father.”

Afterwards, Mayang Sari bitterly regretted taking the nail from her mother’s scalp.

In the evening, Pak Kadok returned home from his day of fishing. He was puzzled to see his daughter crying and alone.

“Why are you crying my dear?” asked the father.

Mayang Sari did not know how to answer her father’s question. But Pak Kadok noticed a piece of the bloodstained nail lying on the floor and he realized what must had happened.
With overwhelming sadness, Pak Kadok looked lovingly at the stove where he had once cooked for himself and where his wife had prepared their meals for so many years. As he looked from left to right, he suddenly heard a faint voice coming from a little crack in the stove.

“Stay dear, take good care of Mayang Sari. I can never come back again.” With those last few words, the voice vanished.
After this strange incident, the people of the village realized that Pak Kadok’s extraordinarily beautiful wife could only have been the stove spirit, the elf woman who appeared from nowhere and had now returned invisibly to where she came from.

Pak Kadok did not blame his daughter for what had happened to her mother. He understood that it had been a fateful event and that nothing more could be done to bring the elf woman back. Pak Kadok lived happily with his daughter. They took care of each other as the elf woman had asked them to do.

One day, a handsome young man named Indera came to see Pak Kadok, to ask for Mayang Sari’s hand in marriage. And his proposal was accepted by Mayang Sari and Pak Kadok.
The young couple was married, and afterwards, their lives as a family were peaceful and happy.
THE GIANT’S CURSE

COMPOSITION: HAJAHAH SADIAH HAJI MOHAMMAD ALI
ILLUSTRATION: AMDELAH HAJI TUJOH

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE,
THE MINISTRY OF CULTURE, YOUTH AND SPORTS.

EZY PUBLICATION, BRUNEI DARUSSALAM, 2010

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN

EDITED BY: STEPHANIE GREEN AND SUSAN LOVELL
Awang Basar and his wife Dayang Mayang Sari lived in a small village. They had been married for only a few months. Early one morning, Awang Basar decided he would go out to collect banana stems in the forest. He was about to leave home when his wife woke up from her sleep.

She felt nauseous and said, “Husband, I have a craving for deer jerky.”

“Wife, I will happily go in search of a deer for you. I would even give you elephant jerky if you asked,” Awang Basar said.

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7 Basar means big in the English Language.
Awang Basar prepared his hunting gear.

“Wife, I will be off now to hunt a deer for you. Do be careful while I am gone,” Awang Basar asked for his wife’s blessing and she gave it to him.

He hurried off to hunt for a deer in the forest.

After quite a long time hunting, he found no deer in sight. He was still determined to catch one before returning home. The day passed, and then the night passed, and somehow through the passing of at least two full moons, Awang Basar was still hunting for deer. He was utterly disappointed and beginning to despair of ever finding one.
Further and further he went into the deep forest. He suddenly noticed the smell of an animal.

“It seems like the smell of a deer!” whispered Awang Basar in his heart.

Awang Basar walked slowly while peeping behind each tree. His instinct was correct. He saw a deer drinking water near the mouth of the river.

Without any delay, Awang Basar crept close, stabbed the deer between its ribs and chopped it into pieces so it would be easier for him to carry home.

Awang Basar had eaten very little in all this time and could no longer withstand his hunger, so he roasted and dried the meat, making it into deer jerky.

He put some of the deer jerky in his sack while he ate the rest. After that, Awang Basar prepared to head home.
On his way home, to appease his hunger, he slowly ate the deer jerky that he had stored in his sack. By the time he arrived, he had unwittingly finished eating all of the deer jerky that he carried.

“There is no more!” whispered Awang Basar to himself, shocked that the jerky was somehow all gone. Awang Basar felt terribly guilty for leaving none of the deer jerky for his wife.
Dayang Mayang Sari was happy to see her husband’s return and asked him, “Did you manage to get a deer, husband?”

“Hmm! I didn’t get any deer, wife. They all ran far away,” answered Awang Basar.

“If you did not get any deer jerky for me, it is alright,” said Dayang Mayang Sari, disappointed.

“I am telling you the truth. What can one do if there is none? I dare to swear, if I lied I would be cursed to be giant.” Awang Basar tried to coax his wife out of her disappointment. Because she loved him, his wife accepted his oath.
Awang Basar was extremely tired after his long journey and fell into a deep sleep. He was already snoring although all his hunting gear and his sack were still tied to his body.

Dayang Mayang Sari took off her husband’s hunting gear so that he could sleep comfortably. While Awang Basar was fast asleep, his mouth opened wide, showing his teeth. Dayang Mayang Sari saw that there were pieces of deer jerky stuck between his teeth. She cheerfully collected the pieces of deer jerky, then cleaned and cooked them with vegetables for dinner. Dayang Mayang Sari was offended and disappointed by her husband’s lies. Even so, she was thankful because he had arrived home safely.
When Awang Basar woke up, he saw that his wife had made a delicious dinner. While he was eating with her that night, he asked, “I feel that I have tasted this deer jerky before, where did you get it?”

“I’ve taken the pieces of deer jerky between your teeth,” answered Mayang Sari, smiling happily because she was finally able to satisfy her craving for the meat.

“Wife, my shame is so unbearable. I am at fault. I caught a deer and packed the meat to bring to you, but I ate it all as I journeyed home without thinking. I forgot my promise and now I fear that my own curse will fall upon me. I apologize to you sincerely. I am sorry wife. My tongue overcame me in speaking the curse. What will happen to me?” he said, full of regret.

As Awang Basar spoke, all of a sudden his body became bigger and taller. The curse had indeed fallen upon him and he was becoming a giant.
Awang Basar felt ashamed because of his lies toward his wife. He ran away into the forest without looking back.

Dayang Mayang Sari cried and regretted deeply that he had not told her the truth as soon as he returned. After Awang Basar’s departure into the forest, Dayang Mayang Sari gave birth to a baby boy named Awang Budiman. Awang Budiman was nurtured by his mother with love and care.
Years passed and Awang Budiman had grown into a teenager. He was determined to look for his father, as Awang Basar had never returned in all those years.

“Mother, where will I find my father?” asked Awang Budiman.

“Your father ran away into the forest,” answered his mother.

“Go and search for him in the forest. His body is very tall and very big and he can take enormous steps. If you meet him, please bring him home. Do not leave your father alone.”
After a few days of walking in the forest, Awang Budiman eventually met a man with a gigantic body. He went up to the man and hugged his huge leg with all his might.

“Who are you?” asked Awang Basar, looking down at the boy.

“I am your child whom you left when Dayang Mayang Sari was pregnant,” answered Awang Budiman.

Awang Basar remembered that his wife had been pregnant when he left her. Awang Basar felt ashamed that his son should see what he had become.
“Go home son. Your father belongs to a different place. Do not seek for your father anymore,” said Awang Basar, while holding his son’s shoulder.

“Mother begs for you to return home. What has passed is past. There is no need to remember it. Mother feels sorry to see you alone in the forest. Let us go home, father,” persuaded Awang Budiman.

“I cannot, son. I am already in a different realm. This has happened because of my blind heart. The truth is that I did not think enough about you both. I am already a dweller of this dense forest and I am lost to you now,” Awang Basar said to Awang Budiman.
Awang Budiman refused to leave the forest. He did not want to return without his father.

“Go home, son. There are many dangers in this forest. Be careful on your way, I cannot walk you home,” Awang Basar tried to persuade him.

“Take good care of your mother. Do not be disobedient. Be a good, wise and obedient son to your mother,” he advised. “When you talk, talk respectfully and with politeness. Never talk rudely or insolently, there is badness in that.”

“Do not take after your father’s behaviour. If you make a promise, fulfil it, never betray it. This is the effect of blundering words. As the saying goes, ‘A speeding boat can be reversed, but hurtful words have dire consequences,’ son.”
Awang Budiman continued to beg his father to come home, but the giant was adamant. Awang Budiman shed tears as he looked up at his father’s enormous body that could reach the sky. At last, Awang Budiman began to prepare for his journey home in disappointment.

Awang Basar walked away, leaving his son behind. From this time on, the father became a dweller of the forest and was always known as the Giant.

**Note:**

_The Giant’s Curse_ is the work of Hajah Sadiah binti Haji Mohammad Ali, one of several outcomes from a writing workshop that was organized by the Brunei Darussalam Institute of Language and Literature. This story originated from Dayang Hajah Sadiah’s grandmother, Dayang Janis binti Duraman.

This workshop was successful in collecting folk stories of a quality suitable to publish as leisure reading for students and young children, as part of a wider cultural memory project in this country.
**RADIN’S POISONOUS WELL**

A SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

COMPOSITION: NORTIJAH HAJI MD HASSAN

STORY TELLER: -

ILLUSTRATION: -

YEAR: -

THE BRUNEI INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE,
MINISTRY OF YOUTH AND SPORTS

TRANSLATED BY: NUR QISTIN MOHAMMAD HARUNTHMARIN
A long time ago, there were a poor husband and wife who lived in the village of Tanjong Nangka. The husband was Mudin and the wife’s name was Lumat. They had two sons. Sadly, when they had their third son Lumat died.

Mudin lovingly cared for all his three sons. The first son was called Radin, the second was Ugang and the youngest was Musa.

Mudin worked in the fields. He farmed and made sugar water from sugar cane.
The years passed, Radin, Ugang and Musa reached their teenage years.

One day, while Mudin was heating sugar cane water, something strange happened; a tiny sprout grew amidst the flaring fire. Mudin was baffled by this strange event.

“My sons, come and look at this,” Mudin called out.

“What is it pa?” asked one of his sons.

“Look at this, there is a plant in the fire,” Mudin said, pointing at the flame.

Radin and his brothers quickly came over and looked with awe at the sprout. After observing it for a while, they realized that the plant was Mallotus Rubiaceae.
As he and his sons stood together, observing the tiny sprout, Mudin told a story. During the story, Mudin said, “According to the elders, a strange thing like this can bring luck to its owner.”

After listening to the story, the three brothers wanted to compete for ownership of the sprout. Musa suggested that they should discuss it calmly first. Radin and Ugang agreed. “Musa is right. We cannot let that little sprout be the cause of conflict between brothers,” advised Mudin.
So Mudin decided the only way to prevent conflict between his sons was to divide the tiny sprout equally into three parts. Radin received the roots, Ugang had the stem and Musa had the leaf. The three boys were happy with their share. Initially, Musa wanted to store his leaf.

“Don’t trouble yourself, just eat it,” said Radin, while observing the roots he had received.

“Brother Radin is right. Let us eat it together,” said Ugang.

They finally agreed to eat the tiny sprout.
A few years passed, and the three brothers had reached adulthood. Radin became a poisonous person who killed whatever he came in contact with. Ugang became strong and agile, while Musa became a hardworking person. Amongst the three brothers, Radin was the most feared as his body seemingly contained venomous poison.

One day, Mudin sat, day-dreaming at his front door. Radin came to him. “Pa! It really troubles me. Wherever I go, the grass and the trees wilt and die. Whenever I go to take a bath at the river, all the fish die,” said Radin sadly.
Mudin was distressed to hear his son’s story. He could not return to his day-dreaming. He was worried about his son’s condition.

“Son, be patient. This is a test from God and we must face the reality. I am proud to have all of you as my children. Radin, my son, you must be firm and persevere through this life. Maybe your condition is actually your luck. If your mother was still alive she would surely be happy that you have such a special quality,” soothed Mudin. He sympathized with Radin and did not have the heart to see such sadness in his son.

Radin felt greatly relieved as he listened to his father’s encouragement. It gave him comfort that there were still people who loved him.
A few years later, both Ugang and Musa got married. Ugang had two sons while Musa had two daughters.

By this time their father Mudin, had passed away. The death of his father was very hard for Radin. He felt he had lost the only person he could lean on.

Meanwhile, the venomous poison in his body kept on increasing daily as he aged. Because of his poisonous and reeking body, no one ever wanted to have him as a son-in-law and he was alone.
The villagers of Tanjong Nangka were very disturbed when they discovered that the poison in Radin’s body was increasing every day. Everywhere, plants wilted and died when Radin touched them. The fish died and floated on the river surface whenever Radin bathed there. At last, the villagers became so worried that they decided to expel Radin from the village.

Ugang and Musa were hesitant to chase out their own brother but the villagers begged them to. They knew that they should stand by their brother through thick and thin. But at the same time, they could not let all of the villagers suffer because of their brother.
The next day, while Radin was playing with his nephews at the front of his house, Ugang roused his courage to tell Radin about the villagers' demands.

“Brother Radin, honestly, I do not have the heart to tell you this. But the people have grown angry and frightened. Everyone says you are dangerous and they insist that you leave our village,” said Ugang.

“I know,” said Radin. “I know I have created many problems and worry in this village. But where will I go? This is my village. I was born and grew up here. It is my home,” Radin said sadly.

“Brother Radin, how about this,” said Ugang. “How about we find you a place to live deep in the forest, not too far from here but far enough that the people won’t be troubled? We will build a hut there and we will visit you and bring you food every week.”

Radin was forced to agree with his brother’s suggestion, but he knew he would be lonely and sad.

“I have only one request. You must bring my nephews and nieces along every time you visit me.”
The next day, Radin, Ugang and Musa went to the forest of Tanjong Nangka in search for a good place to build a hut. They went deep into the forest. When they found a suitable place, they cut down some trees to use for the hut. Meanwhile, Radin started to dig a hole for a well close by.

Ugang and Musa stayed a few nights with Radin in the forest, to make sure he was settled there before they headed home.
When it was time to go, Ugang and Musa embraced Radin.

“Take good care of yourself, brother. We will visit you with our children every week,” said Ugang sadly.

Radin could hardly bear his sadness. He watched both of his brothers walked away with sorrow until they were gone from his view.

Radin was now alone in the forest. That was how he lived. He became accustomed to the sound of the wild birds and animals. He listened to the trees and drew his water from the well. But not one day passed without Radin reminiscing about his village and his family.
After a few months of living in the forest, Radin confessed to Ugang that he could no longer bear to be alone, cut off from his own people. He was in despair; loneliness and misery overwhelmed him. Moreover, the effect of the poison on his face and his body had worsened while he was there. The once-green and lively plants surrounding his hut had now wilted and died. He brought death to everything around him.

Radin had made a terrible decision: that his only choice must be to die. He asked Ugang to kill him by throwing a spear through his chest. When he heard his brother’s desperate plea, Ugang was shocked. He felt that he could never have the heart to fulfil his brother’s request. Ugang and Musa asked Radin for some time to think about what to do.
Ugang and Musa did not come to see Radin for another month. They talked many times about how to help Radin, but they found no solution. In the end, they felt that they must give in to their brother’s request. They went to the forest hut to tell Radin that they would do as he asked. When they arrived, they found Radin ready to receive his death. He was standing in front of his hut, next to his well, waiting for them.

Ugang and Musa said farewell to their brother, then stood a short distance away from him. Ugang was an expert in throwing spears. They agreed that Radin would give a signal when he was ready for Ugang to throw the spear. Musa stood quietly beside Ugang, waiting. Then Radin signalled. Ugang felt tremendous sadness, but he raised his arm and, with tremendous force, threw the spear, piercing through Radin’s chest.

Radin fell down next to the well. His poisonous blood gushed out and flowed from his body down into the well. Before closing his eyes for the last time, Radin managed to say goodbye to his brothers and they sat with him until he was gone.
Radin’s death ended his suffering, and afterwards the villagers lived peacefully. The threat to their way of life was gone. As the years passed, Radin’s well became renowned as a healing place. Its waters had been transformed. Although in life Radin had carried poison in his body, after his death the waters of Radin’s well could cure many ills. The villagers regularly used the peaceful forest glade surrounding the well as a place of meditation. Even now, people still visit the well and it is still known as Radin’s Poisonous Well, in honour of the brother’s sacrifice.
Děndam Hantu Rimba

Karangan WONG VOON SÈN
Pênchêrita UMOK BIN ASAT
Lukisan HARRIS HAJI MOKTI

Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei
In this era of modernization in Brunei, it is important to celebrate the diverse perspectives contained within our history and culture. Until the mid-twentieth century, folklore held a central place in the Bruneian community through oral storytelling accompanied by rhythmic drumming and music (diangdangan, bermukun, bangsawan, penglipur lara). These stories reflected the ways and beliefs of Brunei for many centuries. We who live now may assume that the oral culture of the past, our folklore, is merely a collection of legends that do not have a place in the everyday social and cultural habits of contemporary society. To forget our traditions, however, would be a great loss to our cultural memory. Our folklore belongs to all of us and is a living part of our society: to deny this heritage is to deny our own unique identity and traditions.

Folklore has its own special role in literature. Its functions are similar to those of other ancient literary traditions. Folklore functions, on many levels, as a way to help us understand the world. It is a source of history, education and ethical as well as practical guidance for living well. It expresses social values, cultural codes and practices, and much more.

The folklore in this collection is based on the stories that were kept alive by the elders and guardians of our culture over many generations and transmitted through oral story-telling. Through the assembly of these tales, we can see similarities between the many stories that come from different villages within our region.

In a time when culture and society have become more complex and less reliant on local traditions, the importance of these stories may all too easily be overlooked. We cannot simply depend on oral story-telling as a way of ensuring their survival. Future generations may never know about them unless they are recorded and shared. The publication of this precious spoken heritage of the Brunei people, which was conveyed to generation after generation by the elders of the past, is therefore intended to preserve our folklore for future generations to come.
There is a story about something important that happened in a Dusun village which lay deep within a dense, dark forest. Many wild animals lived in that forest and some were hunted by the people. One family in this village solely depended on hunting animals and planting crops for their livelihood. The head of the family was called Father Itho. He was a well-known hunter and was famous because of his skills in hunting. One day, Father Itho went out to hunt a wild boar in the forest near his village. It was approximately a day’s walk from home. The forest was usually teeming with many different animals that the people hunted. But as soon as he arrived on this day, he felt that the forest was somehow different.
To begin with, the forest was very quiet. Only the sound of crickets could be heard from the top of the high trees. His strangely silent surroundings made Father Itho wonder if something had happened, but he had his family to support and so he carried on with his plan to search for a wild boar. Father Itho spent two whole days looking for a wild boar, yet he found nothing. He felt very tired indeed after walking too far and too long, so at last he decided to rest under a shady fig tree. While he was resting under the tree, he heard twigs cracking behind him. He was terrified, and he could feel the hair on his neck rising. The sound became near and clear. Father Itho built up his courage and determined he would turn around to see what it was.
All of a sudden, a silhouette appeared in front of him. Father Itho’s fear vanished when he saw the figure of a man. “What do you want sitting under this fig tree?” asked the man. “My plan was to hunt a wild boar but it is dusk now, and I still cannot find it. I grew so tired that I had to rest under this fig tree,” answered Father Itho.

“If so, your intention is good. I will give you a chance to catch a wild boar on that side of the hill, not far from here.” Father Itho was happy to hear these words.

But the man continued, “However, I have one condition: when you catch your first wild boar, you must give half to me, or else you will not be able to keep it.” Father Itho first gave some thought to the man’s proposition and then promised to fulfil his condition.
So, at the man’s bidding, Father Itho went to the suggested place. When he arrived he saw many wild boars, so many that it seemed as though the wild boars were kept there especially for some purpose. The boars did not appear wild at all. They did not show any fear towards him. Father Itho was bewildered at how easy it was for him to kill one of them. After he slaughtered the wild boar under the fig tree, he cut it into two, one piece for him and one piece for the man he met earlier. As soon as he had finished, he decided it was time to go home.

Before he could begin his journey, the man spoke to him again and said, “If you leave any of your things here, do not come back. If you persist in returning to find them, you will encounter great danger. Do not return.”

After hearing this strange advice, Father Itho checked his belongings carefully. He was satisfied that all his things were properly packed and so he headed for home.

On his way home, Father Itho suddenly realized in dismay that he had forgotten his sharpening stone, which he had placed on a black stub near the fig tree. He was in a terrible dilemma: if he went back to where he had met the man that would mean he was breaking his promise. Yet, if he continued on his way home, he would forever lose his beloved sharpening stone. After thinking for quite some time, he decided that it was more important to retrieve his stone than keeping his promise. Thus, Father Itho headed back towards the place where he had been. When he was near, he felt afraid, but he gathered his courage to go on. He walked very slowly, peeping through the bushes to see if the man was there. Suddenly, he saw a strange figure voraciously licking boar’s blood on the ground and ripping the boar’s meat apart.

“I guess the one I thought was a man is not really a human being at all, but the spirit which guards this forest,” thought Father Itho.
In order to retrieve his stone, Father Itho dared to walk out of the bushes and reveal himself from his hiding place.

The spirit being was startled and asked him furiously, "Why did you come back? Haven't I told you not to come back again?"

"I wanted to get my sharpening stone which I left behind," answered Father Itho.
The spirit being rose up from the boar and rushed towards Father Itho, who escaped his clutches as quickly as he could. The spirit being chased after Father Itho. But, Father Itho was a clever and agile hunter. As he dodged away, he managed to take out his sharp sword and cut the spirit being into two.
This did not destroy the spirit completely, however. One part of the spirit’s body was still alive and kept on trying to attack Father Itho. But Father Itho ran away very fast from this part of the forest. Eventually he escaped the spirit’s clutches and safely arrived home.

A few days after this disturbing incident, the dead half of the spirit’s body rotted away and was lost to the earth, but the other half was still alive. Even more strange, its odour was extremely foul, even worse than that of the usual animal carcass. The half spirit kept looking for Father Itho, but was unable to find him. The half spirit became angrier and angrier. From that time on, it held fast to the desire for a terrible vengeance - to kill every hunter no matter who they were.
According to the legend of the Dusun tribe, that half spirit was the most feared creature among hunters. It was believed that when the spirit was around, one could smell a rotten odour. Wherever the spirit went, flies followed. To the hunters of the forest, this was a bad omen and a fierce warning. If any hunter persisted in going near the foul smelling half spirit, he would face certain danger or would gain no hunting spoils to take home to his family. Most hunters who afterwards encountered this strange occurrence would opt to leave the area quickly to avoid the misfortune of meeting the vengeful forest spirit.
CHAPTER 4

RESTAGING THE BRUNEIAN PAST: TRADITIONAL TABOOS AND THE SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

INTRODUCTION

Brunei Darussalam’s Traditional Culture and Ethnic Tribes in Brief

Brunei Darussalam is known to be one of the oldest kingdom in the Malay Archipelago which has been present since the 5th century (Tengah, 2016, p. 48; Yunos, 2007). Besides that, Brunei is also recognized as “the oldest documented state in Southeast Asia with an unbroken line of Islamic rulers from the reign of the first sultan Muhammad Shah who allegedly ruled from 1363 to 1402 to the present twenty-ninth sultan Hassanal Bolkiah who ascended the throne in 1968” (Oxford Group, 2010, p. 13; Kurtz, 2013, p. 217). It was historically stated that the ancient Brunei kingdom had relationships with India, China, Aceh, Johor and Sulu (Tengah, 2016, p. 48 & 50). The early exposure to other cultures and the assimilation of different beliefs consecutively, Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam with indigenous belief of animism (Tingkong, 2009, p. 31), inevitably led to the creation of a dynamic multiracial culture. Cultural diversity is not a new phenomenon, “Brunei has seven ethnic groups that existed side by side for centuries, namely the Brunei Malay, Tutong, Kedayan, Belait, Murut, Dusun and Bisaya” (Zohari, 2011).

This ethnic mosaic of traditional Brunei is embedded and is clearly reflected in the Series of Bruneian Folklore. The two tales that respectively revolves around a Dusun character and a Dusun family are The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit (n.d) and The Tale of the Tortoise Island (1986). Origin of Rice (1989), The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990) and The Banana Heart Princess (1995) present characters who farm for their daily sustenance, which indicates them as Kedayan (Druce, 2016, p. 37; Maxwell, 1996, p. 158; Tingkong, 2009, p. 4). Characters in Married to Barbalan (1981), The Kayong People (1981), Eldest and Youngest (1983) and The Stove Spirit (2008) are fishermen by trade which implies their ethnicity as Brunei Malays who inhabit the water village (Druce, 2016, p. 37).
Traditional Bruneian taboos, rituals and folklore

Benedict Anderson, in his discourse of nationalism proposes that it “has to be understood by aligning it, not with self-consciously held political ideologies, but with the large cultural systems that preceded it, out of which – as well as against which – it came into being” (Anderson, 1990, p. 19). Thus, this section will be focused on traditional Bruneian cultural systems: taboos, rituals and folklore. As mentioned before, within Bruneian traditional society, there are Malay cultures and indigenous cultures. Embedded in these traditional cultural systems are a shared affinity that can be found in each culture; the importance of the elders, which will be a crucial point of discussion in this section.

It is important to mention that studies on pre-modern Bruneian society are very limited. Thus, the exact provenance of oral folklore and taboos remains unknown. A local folklorist, Ampuan Ibrahim Ampuan Haji Tengah asserts that Brunei came into being in the 5th century (Tengah, 2016, p. 48) and had oral folklore handed down to one generation to the next (Tengah, 2010, p. 3). Hadijah Hassan (2001) similarly states the unknown origin of traditional taboos but gives a clear indication that their existence and longevity were due to persistently emphasizing an awareness of nature as capable of sending signs to humans. These signs mattered enough to be passed orally to the next generation (Hassan, 2001, p. vii). In his review of Essays on Modern Brunei History (1992), Black states that “the phrases “the history of Brunei” and “little is known of” sometimes seem inseparable. The contributors [...] prefer to call the historical study of Brunei “underdeveloped”” (Black, 1997, pp. 418-419). Due to this consensus, the Brunei Institute of Language and Literature, Brunei’s Ministry of Youth Sports and Culture, Brunei’s History Centre, University of Brunei Darussalam’s Language Centre and the Institute of Brunei Studies are industriously working in increasing and attaining knowledge and preserving Bruneian culture through publications, forums, conferences, competitions and others.

While these efforts are praise worthy, there is no denying that in the face of globalization, modernization and Islam, these traditional taboos, rituals and folklore are increasingly marginalized and seen as an outdated mode. Hassan (2001) explains that traditional taboos are becoming unimportant because children nowadays spend limited time with their parents who have high work commitments. Parents these days do not attempt to revive traditional culture
because their own knowledge is limited. Thus, contemporary Bruneian children are more keen on watching television than spending time with their grandparents and listening to oral folklore. Besides this, the influence of mass media, educational and technological advances can be seen as major factors in the dwindling reputation of traditional taboos. Another factor that causes the unpopularity of traditional taboos and rituals is their contradiction of Islamic teachings (Hassan, 2001, p. vii; Superstitions, to believe it or not," 2008). Tingkong elaborates that, “the Islamic faith forbids animism and superstitions as these can be seen as blasphemous practices and beliefs” (Tingkong, 2009, p. 4).

In regards to traditional Bruneian folklore, the main factor that deemed oral folklore as obsolete now is the rarity of traditional professional story tellers (Abdullah, 2011, p. 2). Oral folklore was created, transmitted and conveyed in an unlettered society from one generation to the next through traditional professional story tellers, who according to Jukim had their own unique qualities (Jukim, 2014, p. 2). Presently, if oral folklore is communicated, it is demoted to bedtime stories for children (Abdullah, 2011, p. 17; Sharif & Ahmad, 1993, pp. 76-77).

The Need to Restage the Past

In traditional Bruneian communities, taboos, rituals and folklore played major roles in transmitting social values. This chapter will therefore discuss traditional Bruneian taboos, rituals and folklore not as prohibitions or limitations but as “something [that] begins its presencing” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 5, emphasis in original), something that offers a re-evaluation of prescribed meanings in Bruneian culture. I consider Homi Bhabha’s notion of “restaging the past” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2), employing Bruneian taboos, rituals and folklore to invoke and restage the Bruneian past within a contemporary cultural context.

Applying Bhabha’s ideas as a foundation for this chapter encourages “the need to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1). Rather than authenticating Bruneian cultural tradition as true and natural, Bhabha’s ideas open up possibilities to view Bruneian tradition from a fresh and different perspective, presenting it as a valued constructive phenomenon which demands investigation. This investigation allows the recognition of what Bhabha calls the “in-between” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 1) spaces and the “emergence of interstices” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2) in culture that are often overlooked.
One such discernible interstitial space is the relationship between traditional Bruneian taboos and oral folklore narratives. Traditional Bruneian taboos and rituals are well-known for their strict guidelines and frightening outcomes which were once practiced to produce obedient and respectful generations. Yet, ironically, in many traditional Bruneian folktales, the main characters are those who do wrong. Jukim similarly asserts that “Bruneian folklore has a common tendency to negatively fashion its messages and values as antitheses” (Jukim, 2014, p. vi). It is indeed this variable that Bhabha aims to grasp, whereby, “in restaging the past, it introduces other, incommensurable cultural temporalities into the invention of tradition” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 2).

The establishment of Bruneian tradition can be further corroborated by the perception of traditional elders, as it is expressed in the printed folklore’s texts and illustrations. The honour of an elder is an undisputed fact in Bruneian society whether in the past or present. Jukim states that Brunei is known for being a culture which bears the concept “orang tua dituakan” (prioritizing the elders) (Jukim, 2014, p. 57). In the Series of Bruneian Folklore, elders are respected because of their wisdom and knowledge of both the material world and the supernatural world. Yet again, an irregularity arises here in terms of how the elders are represented. There are instances in the folktales where the elders are not as wise as they should be. Taboos were prescribed as an assurance to the rule-abiders that their future would be safeguarded. However, the folktales present the contrary; human frailty is often portrayed, the future is never certain, good intentions fail and it is in these moments that the supernatural can intercede in human affairs. It is in interstitial spaces that these two contradicting ideas of respect and disrespect are working simultaneously, proving Bhabha’s point that gaps are not necessarily empty; they may be space in which cultural values can be seen at work and traditions are being formulated with the focus of the future.

Traditional Bruneian taboos, rituals and folklore might seem insignificant in the society of contemporary Brunei, yet they still offer invaluable insight to the Bruneian past and therefore to understanding the Bruneian present. Folklore can be used as an important set of devices with which to decipher a past which lacks published historical documentation. Although very different from the roles they used to play in the past, the oral narratives of Bruneian folklore still deserve recognition as an expression of national cultural continuity and transition. In Bhabha’s words:
Once more it is the desire for recognition, “for somewhere else and for something else” that takes the experience of history beyond the instrumental hypothesis. Once again, it is the space of intervention emerging in the cultural interstices that introduces creative invention into existence (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9).

Existing in a different time, traditional Bruneian taboos, rituals and folklore as cultural expressions now permit a space for intervention, to explore the illusive purposes, to unmask the cultural producers behind the scene, and most importantly to be recognized as something that is still worthy and valuable in present-day Brunei.

CONTEMPORARY CULTURAL PRODUCERS

Bruneian traditional elders can be regarded as the pioneers of Bruneian culture. Continuing this tradition in contemporary time are the illustrators of the Series of Bruneian Folklore. For this project, I conducted two separate interviews with two illustrators of the Series: Abdul Rahman Mohammad, illustrator of The Kayong People (1981) and Pengiran Zainin Pengiran Mansor, illustrator of The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990) and The Banana Heart Princess (1995).

Confirming Bhabha’s idea of “received’ tradition” (1994, p. 2), both artists used their interpretations and their understandings of traditional Bruneian culture to produce illustrations. They are local artists with extensive experience as book illustrators. They state that it is important for them to create an environment, an atmosphere and a story setting that is traditional Bruneian in context. In general, the illustrations successfully capture the essence of how the supernatural was part of everyday life. They also correctly interpreted the high values that Bruneians place on their elders. The cultural validity of the illustrations enables us to see how culture is produced. The artists’ work on the illustrations is a form of producing culture as they are instilling cultural values within the stories.

My interview with Mansor strongly echoed Bhabha’s notion of the interstitial gaps that allow alternative or multiple narratives to emerge within tradition, including those which may be taboo. Mansor commented that Bruneian traditional communities were too engrossed in the supernatural and that a logical deduction was sometimes neglected. He further elaborated that traditional Bruneians often opted for supernatural explanations when they saw something new and strange, and these explanations often came down to spirits, genies or ghosts. Mansor’s
illustrations convey this “interstitial space”, or difference, by evoking the presence of the supernatural in daily life. In this gap, he expresses his opinions about traditional Bruneian beliefs. For instance, he argued that there were recurrent elements of exaggeration in traditional elders’ narratives, which tend to undercut the authority of the story. As a contemporary illustrator, he realizes his opportunity to keep this misrepresentation in check. In the illustration below (figure 1), Mansor states that he purposely drew the ghost with the attributes of an orangutan to ensure that the elders’ view could be questioned. Perhaps the original figure in the story was indeed an orangutan, yet because traditional Bruneians lived in a profoundly supernatural environment with very limited exposure to the outside world, they found themselves reverting to mysterious explanations.

According to Mansor, elements of excess, especially in terms of the supernatural, are often employed in traditional narratives to attract and influence the masses. Bruneian traditional elders effectively used the supernatural to uphold their respected positions throughout centuries. Deflecting from this long-established cultural value, Mansor provides a different perspective in his illustrations below from The Banana Heart Princess (1995). This folklore centres on a spirit of a banana tree who thirsts for human blood, but, instead of depicting the spirit with ghostly qualities, in figure 2, Mansor illustrates her with human characteristics. In figure 3, he intentionally avoids the Princess’ ghostly transformation because to him, she is still a princess and this usually implies a beautiful woman. Mansor comments further on this: “I purposely did not want to illustrate her as a real ghost. I do not want my illustrations to give a bad impact on children. I do not want to deter them from reading just because they are scared
by the illustrations. That is why I kept human qualities in the character of the Princess” (Harunthmarin, 2013). Throughout the tale, figure 2 is the only illustration which shows the authentic identity of the Princess as a blood-sucking spirit. Yet, even though her portrayal as a monster, Mansor keeps her in a human state:

Yes, her physical appearance is still human. However, I inserted that supernatural vibe such as her long hair. Also, I use the appropriate colours to show that there is something ghostly going on. Here, as you can see, I used mostly cool colours. These types of colours can create a feeling of eeriness. Other than images, children can feel that mysterious feeling through the presentation of colours. The colours here serve as a supporting tool: to enhance the night environment and to attract the attention of the reader solely towards the Princess’ action; drinking blood (Harunthmarin, 2013).

As a contemporary Bruneian illustrator, Mansor feels the need to intervene and make the “interstitial space” known. Through his illustrations, he conveys that there are inconsistencies and invalidities in traditional beliefs and teachings, showing that they are cultural constructions with a social purpose. At the same time, through his illustrations he shows that Bruneians
should treat these cultural incongruities with respect and appreciation, as without them, they would not have a cultural heritage to reflect upon.

BEHIND THE GHOSTS AND SUPERNATURAL POWERS: TRADITIONAL BRUNEIAN ELDERS AS CONSTRUCTORS AND PRESERVERS OF A_legacy

As the basis of this section, Benedict Anderson’s definition of a nation will be applied in order to understand the construction of Bruneian past and present narrative. Anderson defines the nation as “an imagined political community – and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign” (Anderson, 1990, p. 15). He further elaborates that “it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion” (Ibid.). Anderson’s idea contributes a deeper insight into traditional Bruneian past. The power of traditional Bruneian elders resided in the imaginary idea of kinship where everyone knows everyone; a potent idea that fortified the respected position of the elders. This also strengthened the figure of the elders as wise for they somehow knew when someone defied a taboo. At a smaller scale, this idea of kinship occurred in a tribe or a village, thus it is subjective and referring back to Anderson, it is inherently limited. The ideas of kinship and familiarity also work in geographically disperse locations, in other tribes and other villages. This non-exclusiveness shows how the idea of kinship is inherently limited because elders of each community shared the same ideological background and power. Each community had their own elders responsible in exercising the idea of kinship; taboos and folklore retained similarities but also showed local variations. In the local scene, the role of the elders was sovereign but broadly, the authority mechanism is shared amongst other elders. Thus, these different tribes and villages recognized a whole larger society by working together to promote stability. All of these ultimately, points out how traditional taboos, rituals and oral folklore are powerful bearers of cultural tradition and political power attributed by the imagination. Anderson’s definition of a nation is relevant to Bruneian oral folklore past as it was intended to function as a tool to strengthen the image of unity in people’s minds. Jukim conveys a similar idea, explaining that Bruneian folklore does reflect sense of belonging, solidarity and communion (Jukim, 2014, pp. 1-2).
Now, it is important to recognize who are the past and present guardians of Bruneian traditional culture. The forebears of Bruneian contemporary cultural producers were the traditional Bruneian elders. They produced cultural guidelines so successfully and instilled them so effectively that conflict amongst the people was rare: European visitors who came to Brunei in the 1500s described a peaceful and harmonious community (Nicholl, 1975, pp. 2, 4 & 17). Up to the 1900s, “there was scarcely any crime in Brunei”, “murder, rape and armed robbery were virtually unknown; even theft was comparatively rare” (Horton, 1984, p. 17). This heritage of respect and obedience had kept this peace for centuries. Although Bruneian society has changed in certain key respects since the beginning of the twentieth century, these values remain an important cultural legacy.

The fact that this cultural accomplishment was maintained throughout century shows Bhabha’s point that there was something ‘present’ there that needed to be recognized. It should be recognized that this cultural attainment did not just happen spontaneously, and that interstitial space or gaps may appear to be empty but cannot be, because cultural work is perpetual. Traditional Bruneians were people of customs who lived by sayings such as “hidup dikandung adat, mati dikandung tanah” (Serudin, 2013, p. 38) (Life is about embracing traditions, death is about embracing the earth) and “usul menunjukkan asal” (Serudin, 2013, p. Ibid.) (Your manners are a manifestation of your origin). As traditional folk narratives show, the Bruneians of the past understood that in order to preserve tradition it was necessary to instil respect and obedience in the community. Thus, respect and obedience have become two intrinsic attributes of Bruneian society, attributes which honour the senior citizen in terms of wisdom and experience gained through a long life. It is customary with Bruneians that the older the person is, the more respect they are given (Karim, 2014, p. 4). In these communities, elders are addressed as ‘kita’ which means ‘we’ in the English Language. The plural is used even when it is only one elder who is being addressed, which shows the elders’ top position in the community’s hierarchy. Besides strengthening the values of respect, this kinship term of ‘kita’ creates fictive kin, an asset of inserting power in a social structure like ‘the elder’ is both limited and sovereign. By addressing an unfamiliar elder as ‘kita’, a mutual recognition of closeness and familiarity can be attained even if the individuals are from different villages or from different communities (Janowski & Kerlogue, 2007, p. 56). To an extent, this kinship term of ‘kita’ plays a role in idealizing and preserving the ideal harmony of traditional Brunei.
As reflected in its longstanding tradition of oral folk narratives, Bruneian elders of the past contributed to maintaining peace in Brunei for centuries; within the wider community, they were the village heads, the oldest members and those who were knowledgeable in the supernatural realm: the shaman, the midwives, medicine men and women. Gimlette states that these medicine men and women enjoyed respect from many as it was their “business to give advice in matters of sorcery; to propitiate devils, to chide or coax evil spirits as occasion seems to demand, and to prescribe taboo for everyday life” (1971, p. 18). The importance of their standing in traditional society is further emphasized by Gimlette, describing them as the “pillars of local society” (1971, p. 22). Within the smaller scope of the family, the elders were the grandparents, parents and older siblings. Respect and obedience were essentially given to those who were older, even if that person was older by a day.

This veneration towards the elders still can be observed in contemporary Bruneian communities. For example, the junior generation customarily bend their backs with their hands down when walking past the senior citizen because of the wisdom and experience (Serudin, 2013, p. 39). Another widespread act of respect is kissing the right hand of a familiar senior person at every encounter. It was from this profound and long-established system of showing respect that Bruneian traditional elders drew their power. The right hand is about respect and is linked with good manners. These are shown clearly in the illustrations of the Series: when a piece of advice is about to be offered, the right hand is often raised (Ahmad, 1995, p. 14). In contrast, the left hand symbolizes disrespect, which can be seen in the illustration of The Banana Heart Princess (1995) where the vampire Princess sucks blood from her husband’s left hand (Ahmad, 1995, p. 20) and also in The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990), where the Kalindahau Ghost stabs the Elf Princess using her left elbow spike (Rahman, 1990, p. 20).

In Bruneian traditional society, old age was not associated with weakness but was seen as a form of strength. Old age signifies wisdom of both the material and the supernatural world. In essence, the elders were the guides and the leaders. They were individuals who could simply utter ‘inda kuasa’ and ‘ketulahan’ and be left unquestioned. ‘Inda kuasa’ literally means ‘no power’, however, Bruneians understand it as ‘it is taboo’. This vague answer is usually given in response to curious youngsters who are bold enough to ask reasons behind traditional taboos. ‘No power’ here refers to the young age of the question-bearer, which is synonymous with the
lack of experience and lack of understanding. Most of the time, ‘inda kuasa’ deters further inquiry as it serves as an ambiguous reminder that bad luck will follow those who disbelieve (Hassan, 2001, p. vi).

This is not to say that there were no transgressors. The elders sternly warned that those who dared to venture beyond ‘inda kuasa’ and those who defied the elders’ guidelines were in danger of a terrible fate called ‘ketulahan’. This is a curse invoked by disobeying the elders. The ill-fated outcome is unpredictable but the epitome of this well-known curse is the legendary Si Tanggang or Nakhoda Manis, an ungrateful son who was cursed into stone by his mother. Uncannily, this legend has a ring of truth to it, being partly substantiated by the actual existence of what seems to be Si Tanggang’s cursed stone remains. This sad memorial is called “Jong Batu, a small island on the Brunei river which looks like the keel of the ship” (Yunos, 2009, p. 7). Essentially, this legend functions as a dire warning that ‘durhaka’ (disrespect) against the elders is a major sin (APCEIU, 2010, pp. 61-63; Yunos, 2009, p. 9).

It is a tenet of traditional Bruneian custom that people are safe as long as they obeyed the elders, as demonstrated by the illustrations below. Here, elders are shown as authority figures. They are teachers, mentors and advisors, who are knowledgeable characters and can offer consolation to the young and vulnerable. The three illustrations shown below (figures 4, 5 and 6) present one common quality of traditional elders: they communicate with tenderness and affection toward the younger generation. The illustration (figure 4) from *The Banana Heart Princess* (1990) shows the elder listening attentively to the young man’s trouble. His intense eye contact and the detail that he is pointing his right index finger indicates that he is about to offer a solution. The image strongly reflects the traditional relationship of deference by the younger man towards his elder advisor. This is not a distant relationship, however, but one of closeness and shared understanding, signalled by the way the pair is seated, and the conversational gestures.

The second illustration (figure 5) is from *Origin of Rice* (1989). According to this tale, the rice paddy originally comes from the supernatural world. Here, the elderly woman, the queen of the supernatural realm is presenting a paddy stalk to the young boy. Her gentle, nurturing gaze and her right hand grasping the paddy stalk in front of the young boy reflect her sincere intention in
imparting knowledge of the supernatural. The rice stalk represents a blessed life-force that is given as a gift to humans.

In the third illustration (figure 6) of Radin’s Poisonous Well, the father is seen tenderly conveying knowledge to his three sons. It is discernible in all three illustrations that the elders are the authority figures, solely by the youngsters’ body language. The youngsters’ courteous behaviour can be seen by their slightly bent backs and their polite gaze. Besides this sense of deep respect, there is also a sense of comfort and ease seen in the younger generation depicted in the illustrations. This body language mirrors the strength of the elders, that even though they hold authoritative positions in society, they are still welcoming and approachable.

Figure 4: *The Banana Heart Princess* (1995, p. 16)  
Figure 5: *Origin of Rice* (1989, p. 18)  
Figure 6: *Radin’s Poisonous Well*, (n.d., p. 4)
These communal elders were not alone as a means of maintaining social order: family as a separate institution also played its role as guardians of “sopan santun orang Brunei” (Graceful manners of Bruneians) (Serudin, 2013, p. 38). Each member of the family understood their part in regards to transmitting (grandparents and parents) and receiving (children) cultural values. Children who were well-informed in cultural principles would then communicate these to their friends who seemed lacking. Traditional Bruneian society saw children who were well-versed in traditional taboos as good and obedient children, and this would then reflect back on their parents as good parents who had taught their children well. To have ill-mannered children was the biggest fear of traditional parents and is still a worry for contemporary Bruneian parents. Those insolent children would be labelled as “‘kera sumbang’ (a person who lacks manners)” (Serudin, 2013, p. 39). The literal meaning of this label is in truth more offensive; the person is referred to as an ‘idiotic monkey’. Through this act the elders are modelling good behaviour themselves, by demonstrating courtesy and kindness. Not all lessons are taught in words, some are demonstrated in behaviour.

Consequently, these cultural teachings and standards would be practiced on a social level when the communities came together in communal events such as the “Ghostly Ritual” (Jaafar, 1989, p. 58) and “Tak Bamban” (Hussin, 1989, p. 78). In these sacred rituals, there was only one general rule for spectators that they were to be obedient. It was forewarned that those who displayed improper behaviour would disrupt the rituals and eventually would be the cause of the termination of the ceremonies. Therefore, societal values and the power of ‘imagined’ communities pressured traditional Bruneians to behave for the good of society. Jukim outlines three aspects of Bruneian identity development, which begins with the individual, family and finally, society (Jukim, 2014, p. 52). He explains that each phase provides different set of social skills and that the person must complete all three phases in order to produce a ‘budiman’ Bruneian which is wise, prudent and kind; an ideal individual that will provide for the family and society as a whole (Jukim, 2014, p. 150).

Bruneian traditional elders thus effectively protected their teachings with societal obligations and with the ambiguous yet frightful idea of ‘inda kuasa’, which demands respect, and the idea of ‘ketulahan’, which insists on obedience. In general, the elders were never questioned as soon as those words were uttered. Their opinions or decisions were usually never challenged, which
explains how traditional taboos and rituals have managed to survive, and how the secrets behind them remained intact throughout centuries.

Traditional elders took full advantage of living in a society where the belief of the supernatural was rampant. As is made evident in traditional forest folk tales such as *Si Ranggau* (1983) and *Vengeance of the Forest Spirit*, traditional Bruneians were taught at an early age that they were vulnerable in the face of the supernatural (Hassan, 2001, p. vii). As shown in these traditional narratives, safety and prosperity relied on respecting the elders and the spiritual world. Almost all accounts of traditional Bruneian taboos have horrible physical outcomes. One example is the adage: never point to a rainbow lest you will suffer from a bent finger (Tingkong, 2009, p. 62). Even little children were taught to believe that disregarding a taboo would lead to the disfigurements of the natural body. Beliefs such as this implied that the consequences of breaking a taboo were not impersonal, such as a fine or doing tasks as punishment, but that social actions directly affect the personal physical body.

Even though without clear providence, perpetual oral exchanges of traditional Bruneian taboos were seen as a very powerful way of controlling people, psychologically and emotionally. However this control was not considered something negative. For Bruneian traditional elders, the ideals of a stable and harmonious society were of the utmost importance that the elders sought to perpetuate along with their influence in the communities. Traditional Brunei was a culture that viewed control, power, manipulation and guidelines as positive contributors to centuries of stability and harmony. When these traditional taboos are looked at closely, they were used to maintain order and there was a whole ideal philosophy which covered many aspects of life. Behind these taboos were the elders’ aspirations for the community, an expectation that people behave in a considerate way around their society and respectfully around nature which, when honoured, supports the physical well-being of people.

**AMBIGUITY: A MANNERISM OF TRADITIONAL BRUNEIAN BELIEFS**

Ambiguity also plays an important role in highlighting the complexities of ‘the past’ and the formation of ‘traditions’. Once we have lost sight of something, it is difficult to trace it back or even know what it is that we have lost, what remains is ambiguity. This reading of the ambiguity
is one way to approach that complexity, a way that seeks to understand the imagined. *Si Ranggau* (1983) and *Radin’s Poisonous Well* are two notable folktales that feature ambiguity as the focal point. Prior to his transformation into a forest monster, Si Ranggau is an affectionate husband, longing for fatherhood. However, in a journey to find deer meat for his wife he finds himself mysteriously trapped in the forest and inexplicably transforms into a forest monster. Radin is another pitiful character. He is an obedient son, a good brother and a doting uncle, yet he suffers the most unfortunate fate. His obedience to his father proves detrimental when it is the cause of his incurable disease. In spite of heart-breaking trials, Radin is still his usual kind self. The theme of ambiguity is at its height when Radin dies in the end. However, this theme of vagueness consequently redirects the focus onto the symbolism of the tale: Radin’s punishments. He goes through three consecutive punishments: first he suffers from bodily corruption or decay; as a result he is forced into isolation, not only figuratively but also a literal distancing which eventually causes him to accept death. The ambiguity in the tale is not purposeless; it compels a reassessment of the tale’s initial impression of unfairness and redefines Radin’s punishments as wisdom. The tale is about selflessness and self-sacrifice and it is ultimately about Radin’s own wisdom. He chooses death because he recognizes that it is the best for his community. His wise decision makes his character more respectful. In actuality, his death does not mean the end. It is actually a continuation of his presence as he leaves a legacy of healing.

What makes Radin’s mishaps unfathomable is his good character and furthermore, there are no signs or suggestions that he might have broken a taboo in the tale. However, perhaps the tale was designed not to be comprehensible but to reflect the sense of ‘no power’. Throughout the tale, Radin maintains his virtuous character; he perseveres and accepts what befalls him as a fate which he has no power to control.

These issues of ambiguity and ‘no power’ might be successful in preventing wrong doings but this does not mean that the people of Brunei have always lived with simple acceptance, or that they have not sought greater understanding of their world. In effect the recognition of ambiguity actually triggers curiosity about those aspects of custom which do not conform to the norms about respect. Thus, traditional tales such as *Si Ranggau* (1983) and *Radin’s Poisonous Well* (n.d.) are thought-provoking narratives which show the complexity of human experience.
Here, Bhabha’s notion of the interstitial space comes into view, showing that there are indeed forces working within this gap which allow a more complex set of understandings to emerge. In these instances, Si Ranggau and Radin are good men, so why are they punished? As both tales do not offer clear reasons, it is necessary to go back to the breaking of traditional taboos to understand them. In the case of Si Ranggau, for instance, in his exhilaration of becoming a father and his wish to retrieve deer meat for his wife, he might have forgotten to ask permission from the forest dwellers before entering their territory. It is also possible that he might have spoken aloud at the sight of a strange thing or a peculiar occurrence while in the forest. It is quite common for elders to advise youngsters “kalau jalan dalam hutan, jangan sekali-kali menegur benda-benda ganjil, inda kuasa, memberi masap” (Karim, 2012 Bandar Seri Begawan, ) (When in the forest, ignore strange things and never utter a word lest a calamity follow). ‘Masap’ is a calamity that happens when the person is in a state of over-excitement, a state that the elders warn against, as it can cause forgetfulness of traditional ethics. Even though it is not shown in the tale of Si Ranggau (1983), the bad luck that befalls him indicates that he might have broken a taboo during his forest journey. The curious and baffled reader therefore inserts into the gap the possibilities that make logical sense of the ambiguity. This further reinforces those teachings.

There are no clear solutions in these tales, leaving listeners and readers alike puzzled. To an extent this uncertainty serves as a reminder that the traditional younger generation has no power. Most importantly, the fact that this ambiguity continues to bewilder contemporary Bruneians only shows the potency of this cultural heritage. As Bruneians, we are a part of that culture, and being uncertain only means that we are becoming aligned to our culture. In this regard, the ambiguity in Bruneian traditional folklore has three purposes: as a sign that the human and the supernatural worlds are intertwined, showing Bruneian culture as culture that would not want to separate with the natural and the supernatural world, as all are required to be functional. The ambiguity also serves as an indicator that people have little control over their lives, and in turn this strengthens the position of the elders as wise characters who are necessary for the community. The elders were in a position where the younger generation did not know what was in their minds, thus, the elders were deemed to be wise in unimaginable ways. In the eyes of the younger generation then, the elders’ position was aligned with the
supernatural, whereby complete understanding was out of the question, thus compelling them to merely accept the mysteries and the difficulties.

However, living in contemporary Brunei means that this matter of ambiguity can be further examined. One important idea that arises is that idea of the vicissitudes of life. There is a harmonious development of wisdom in the Bruneian community. It is a valuable part of socialization which adds to the complexity of the system, where there is an acknowledgement that power is unequal. The existence of ambiguity signals that there is a whole life-cycle that needs to be maintained in an evolving culture. In the Bruneian system there is a mutual relationship, a harmonious exchange between the natural world and the human world. Young children were taught to give respect to the natural world at an early age. It was a moral lesson, emphasizing that one day they would grow up and become wise individuals, attaining authority and respect through age. When they attained this position, they would be the ones maintaining the stability, having wisdom, virtue, patience and trust in nature. The attainment of wisdom and respect in older age is compensation for the youthful ‘no power’ state.

What can be clearly derived from these tales is at least one definition of goodness according to traditional Bruneian teachings. Good people are those who obey traditional rules of taboos and rituals and respect their elders. Ambiguity is used as an apparatus to protect culture and tradition, not to unsettle it, as without it Bruneian traditional teachings would lose their unique manner. If the motives of the elders were transparent and understandable, ‘no power’ and ‘ketulahan’ would not have existed and would not have their powerful effect, an effect which heavily intertwines with the supernatural. Transparency was undesirable in this situation as it will lead to a potential lack of respect if somebody disagrees. Therefore, respect has more value and more worth when there is a lack of understanding. In general, the younger generation do not need comprehension as they act base on their trust of the elders. Arguments against the elders are useless as there are no logical reasons to defy them, which in turn makes respect more effective in maintaining order. Complexity is required to prevent understanding. This in itself is the transmission of custom. It does not matter whether the elders were conscious of how this works; what matters is that it is effective and in this way traditional Bruneian culture is transmitted.
SUPERNATURAL IN/AND NATURE

The relationship between Brunei and its forests is mirrored by the high percentage of forests preserved, 75% are still intact, while the majority are in pristine condition (Bakar, 2014; Engbers, 2010; No, 2012; Wong, 2014). The conservation of forests in contemporary Brunei is due to the increased interest in ecotourism (Shahminan, 2015), increased awareness in ecosystem stability (Wasil, 2016) and also the involvement of Brunei in the Heart of Borneo Initiative in 2005 ("Heart of Borneo ", 2010). However, before all these came into play, traditional Bruneians had only one simple reason to leave the forests intact and available for these contemporary understandings: they are homes for supernatural entities.

Southeast Asian countries are known for their deep rooted beliefs in supernatural beings. Brunei is not an exception. The supernatural is an important part of Bruneian culture. It was and still is a feature of the daily lives of Bruneians. The folklore of Brunei suggests that belief in the supernatural was present every day in traditional society, and that the purpose of this belief was partly to warn that transgressors of custom would face immediate punishment. This sense of a living spirit world was also closely aligned with the forests, where the supernatural beings were thought to dwell. Once again, Bhabha’s notion of an ‘interstice’ emerges here: it is the traditional value of respecting forests as a supernatural abode or as a source of spiritual energy that helps the conservation of Brunei’s forests. Continuously working within this gap is the lack of understanding which sustains the presence of fear. It is this idea of the mysterious and the unknown that controlled the actions of traditional Bruneians towards nature.

Forest folktales such as Si Ranggau (1983), The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit and The Giant (2010) symbolize Bruneian beliefs about forests being a site for the supernatural. These tales articulate the same binary oppositions of the outsider, the insider and the human and the supernatural. The moment Si Ranggau refuses his son’s request for him to return home, he acknowledges the forest as his abode (N. H. Tengah, 1983, p. 31). The Giant, on the other hand, explains to his son clearly that he “belongs to a different place” and is now a “dweller of this dense forest” (Ali, 2010, p. 21). In the Vengeance of the Forest Spirit, Father Itho as a human is the outsider who recognizes the spirit as the guardian of the forest (Sen, p. 14). Bruneians’
recognition of forests and jungles as the living space of the supernatural is also a form of respect which traditional elders instructed through taboos and folklore.

**SUPERNATURAL IN CULTURE**

Taboo and “the folklore of ancient Brunei was based on phenomena encountered in the inhabitants’ daily lives” (Gallop, 2005, p. 97). Most of these phenomena were interpreted through the lens of belief in the supernatural. Although they now seem to belong to the pre-modern world, traditional taboos were considered to provide a strong foundation in shaping good character. They taught Bruneians how to treat the most insignificant thing as precious and be grateful, no matter how small it is. It was typical for traditional elders to instil their principles in the community using the influence of the supernatural. A noteworthy taboo that is still practiced in contemporary Brunei is called ‘sia-sia pun’. This is a physical act of touching the food or tasting a little of it while saying the words ‘sia-sia pun’ out loud, at the same time touching the mouth, nose and then the forehead with the index finger which was used to touch the food. ‘Sia-sia pun’ is a traditional habit of Bruneians, especially those who do not feel like eating or those who do not have the time to eat. It is known that those who avoided this action will face bad luck as soon as he or she leaves the house. This bad luck is called ‘kempunan’. ‘Kempunan’ is “to get into trouble through going out without having satisfied some craving”, particularly food craving (Evans, 1923, p. 237). This taboo was implemented to teach against the dangers of ingratitude. It is an act of acknowledgment of the hard work of parents and guardians in providing food for their family. Food has special status in terms of gratitude which links back to the natural, and is also connected to the familial and the social.
The illustrations from the Series show that food brings families together; meal time is when family members leave their work or play to come and enjoy food together. The sharing of food represents unity. This is what ‘sia-sia pun’ signifies; it is not only the food that you are going to miss but also the bonding time with family.

The association of food treatment with the supernatural effectively taught Bruneian communities that food is a form of life-force, a blessed gift; how it should be viewed and treated is apparent through a well-known food taboo: “do not sing in the kitchen or else you will end up marrying an old man”. This is especially directed to girls. The act of singing is simply a ruse to hide its hygienic ulterior motive. Singing while cooking is a taboo because the cook’s spit might enter the food (H. H. Hassan, 2001, p. vi). Furthermore, there will be more focus and more reverential treatment of the food if you are not singing. In the past when food was hard to come by, it was seen as a form of wealth; the elders strongly prohibit wastage of food, which again reflects their teaching to be grateful. An ever-popular traditional story about food waste is the story about the mountain of gold and the weeping rice. The mountain of gold decides to change his course away from Brunei after his encounter with the discarded weeping grain of rice (Deterding, 2010; Omar, 2012). This seemingly insignificant folklore was an effective tool in inculcating social compliance. The social message, that the rejection of a small wealth would be the cause of the loss of wealth altogether, was effectively incorporated in the behavioural etiquette of Bruneians. The etiquette perseveres throughout centuries, retaining similar
reverence as when it was first introduced. Its resilience was easily accomplished because of the idea of ‘imagined communities’. ‘Imagined communities’ are not just connected across regions by similar practices but also through time.

Parents to this day still use this story of the weeping rice to teach children not to waste food (Chaniago, 2014). When I was a child my grandparents and my parents would admonish me and made me feel guilt by saying “the food will cry if you do not finish it”. Another taboo that is related to table manners is, “it is taboo to talk while eating lest you will accidentally eat a ghost child”. This was usually directed to young children and teenagers to avoid food waste, and to manage eating-time properly (Hassan, 2001, p. 18). Janowski’s description of Southeast Asian meals is useful here in comparison to the Bruneian context:

Southeast Asian rice meals are serious and silent. Everyday rice meals are not normally shared outside the household and they are eaten in a standardized, even explicitly ritualized fashion, with the food always laid out in a particular fashion and the participants in the meal sitting in a particular formation in relation to the food. (Janowski & Kerlogue, 2007, p. 8)

This observation is partly accurate in the traditional Bruneian environment, especially considering the two taboos recently mentioned. A meal-time was a serious family event where food wastage is forbidden and food must be treated with respect; therefore, being silent was preferred. Food’s position was not of any particular arrangement, but to show respect, rice and main dishes were usually served to the elders of the family first. In the Bruneian context both in the past and in the present, rice meals are shared outside the family circle as a blessing and also to avoid food surplus. This traditional attitude against food wastage still exists in contemporary Brunei, as a custom called ‘menapau’ (take away) (Thummarukudy, 2011). In any social gatherings, guests are encouraged to take the leftover food home. Hosts prepare plastic bags and containers for the guests. This principle of sharing food further strengthened mutual existence amongst Bruneian communities. Janowski notes that the sharing of similar life-force is the “basis of the most important kin ties between people” (Janowski & Kerlogue, 2007, p. 14). This was indeed the aim of traditional Bruneian elders, to inculcate positive values that would remain in the future generation.
Food was, and still is, the centre of every family gathering in Brunei. In these kinds of informal events, traditional Bruneians would speak of the importance of attachment, blood ties and loyalty by informing the junior generation who was who; subsequently it would be easier for them to address each person according to their honorific. They made it their affair to know how the villagers were related to each other. All of these were communicated over food. Another event that centred on food was a social activity called ‘gotong royong’ or ‘memucang-mucang’ which is understood as team work or as Banks translates it “work[ing] together” (1983, p. 49). ‘Gotong royong’ is a time when, without expecting anything in return, families and friends in the village come together to help with preparing social events, from weddings, rice harvesting (S. R. M. Hassan & Kiprawi, 2008; Jukim, 2014, p. 56) to simple activities such as cleaning (Hizam & Ng, 2007) or repairing (Thien, 2011). It is the “adat (tradition) to help each other, to contribute to activities for the common good and thereby to develop hidup sekampung (village life)” (Tingkong, 2009, p. 108).

A significant folktale about food is the Origin of Rice (1989). It involves something that is very basic but honoured because rice is the staple food of Brunei. This folktale interestingly reflects contemporary Brunei’s efforts in becoming self-sufficient in rice production (Kuncinas, 2013; Too, 2014). The process of growing rice is a tedious one, which explains the sayings of many Asian societies, “one grain of rice is worth one bead of sweat”, and also the prohibited act of
wasting rice (APCEIU, 2010). The story itself centres on gratitude and appreciation of how an orphaned boy steals paddy grains from the supernatural world to bring them to the material plane. In remembrance of the boy’s contribution the rice is named after him: “Tugal’s paddy” (Damit, 1989, p. 27). There is an alternative version of the story of the origin of rice, yet both of these versions suggest that rice originates from the spirit world which further emphasizes its significance. Throughout centuries, the perception and treatment of rice never changed. Bruneian communities have always appreciated it as a privilege and a blessing. Since Brunei is now working towards rice self-sufficiency and Bruneians’ ethnic perception towards rice is to avoid its wastage, a popular trend is to give a packet of rice as gifts to guests on life cycle occasions such as weddings (Deterding, 2011) or ‘mandi berlawat’ (baby shower). This reflects a difference between Bruneians’ treatment of rice, with the Western and Hindu counterparts who throw rice at newlyweds.

According to Binchin’s account, the first village to plant the paddy rice plantations was the Ukong village in the Tutong district. The villagers were allegedly cannibals but stopped eating flesh when they found rice (Binchin, 2008, p. 180). In this version, it is the elf child that steals the paddy grains from the elf world, called the Derato clan, and gives it to his playmate, a human child. When the rice paddy was ready to be harvested, its shining golden colour took the attention of the Derato clan. They asked the villagers of Ukong to perform the Temarok ritual to call them down to earth where they all could enjoy the freshly harvested rice together (Binchin, 2008, p. 182). Temarok or Adau Gayoh is a social ritual that is still practiced today by the Dusun tribe of Brunei. It is a social ritual as well as a worshipping and thanksgiving ceremony (Binchin, 2008, p. 180). These examples demonstrate that in the traditional culture, elders always emphasized that food is sacred and has a primary place in the spiritual and the supernatural network.
In this illustration from *Married to Barbalan* (1981) food has a different role. Here it can be a form of punishment to those who neglect the elders’ warnings. A reversal of the cannibalism in Binchin’s account, Kulop is shocked when he finds that his wives have been serving him human remains, while he has been happily thinking that he is eating fried fish, his favourite meal. Through such stories, the elders’ warned people that if they did not keep the right order of nature, and respect species hierarchy, we could also easily become the victims.

Another important component that arises from this tale is food as a symbol of trust. Kulop enjoys eating his fried fish with a hint of lime; however, his wives forbid this, giving the reason that it is against their customs. Kulop has been compliant to his wives’ demand until a time when he cannot avoid his craving. Initially, it seems that this is a moment of treachery against his wives; instead it reveals the truth about their real identities. When the lime-juice drops onto Kulop’s favourite fried fish, it instantaneously transforms into a severed human hand. Interestingly, this reflects the elders’ teaching that lime or any other citrus fruits can ward off evil spirits or black magic spells (Shaw, 1975, p. 83). In this particular folktale, food is used to build and control relations.

Food has moral values which are governed by social relations. Putting values of good or bad on food is a moral act. Binchin’s account of the cannibals of Ukong shows a positive transition of
their choice of food, from worst (flesh) to good (rice). Kulop, on the other hand, regresses horribly. The tale warns about social relations. Kulop’s ignorant character suggests that it is wise to stay alert especially towards outsiders: not overly suspicious but at the same time, not too naïve and trusting. Another underlying message of the tale is about falsity. Kulop’s wives are not what they seem and food is not food at all. They are just masquerades for Kulop, an ungrateful person who has forgotten what a true social relation should mean. Because of this, he has found himself where social relation means something completely different, damaging him in the process.

In this next illustration from *Eldest and Youngest* (1983) the balance of power has been switched around and has become a threat. The supernatural accrues more power than it should have. Humans become the food instead of the eaters because of their own undoing. Here, the supernatural intrudes to bring back balance, with a strong reminder that it is important to look at taboos as taboos. They were prescribed with a purpose to guide; thus, the least that should be given is respect towards the good intention.
Food in the above illustrations is employed as a test of character. When Youngest is offered a variety of cooked fish, he refuses politely, which expresses his humility. Youngest demonstrates that he knows his place and shows respect towards his fish host when he chooses boiled eggs instead. In contrast, Eldest’s hedonistic enjoyment of all the cooked fish angers the hosts. The hosts here are emblematic of the elders. Disregarding the elders would result in ‘ketulahan’, a supernatural punishment which indeed ensues in the end.

**DISCLOSING BRUNEIAN TRADITIONAL ELDERS**

For a long time, traditional taboos and folklore were considered strict guidelines, and the traditional elders’ intentions to shape good children only emerged quite recently. Traditional taboos and folklore in fact reflect a more important aspect that is often overlooked: the anxieties of traditional elders. The two main anxieties are the fear of the future and the fear of shame.

One particular taboo that mirrors the traditional elders’ fear of the future is: “it is taboo to take a picture of three people lest it will cut their lives short” (Hassan, 2001, p. 23). Besides exposing the elders’ anxiety, this taboo is a perfect example of cultural construction at work. Compared to the rest, this was a recent taboo, perhaps emerging around the 1900s. It was not a centuries old taboo, and therefore it was most likely to be lost and overpowered by the excitement of the
modern phenomena of social media. According to Hassan, these traditional taboos are starting to vanish because contemporary Bruneian children have limited communication with their grandparents, and thus experience less exposure to traditional teachings (Hassan, 2001, p. vii). Furthermore, the contemporary younger generation prefers a relationship with communication technologies which give them easy, direct and constant access to one another, rather than elders. In comparison, traditional teachings are ambiguous at best. Phrases such as ‘inda kuasa’ and ‘ketulahan’ are vague, as they were purposely designed to prevent full understanding.

Traditional elders’ fear of shame is usually connected to children: a disobedient child often means neglectful parents. The preoccupation of traditional elders, with taboos which were designed to shape good character and refine good manners, exposes their eternal fear of shame. One taboo that was mentioned earlier, “never point at a rainbow” was devised to instil politeness. It is believed that pointing at a rainbow could cause a deformed finger and the worst case would be the infliction of skin disease, which could cause the loss of the finger completely (Evans, 1923, p. 15; Tingkong, 2009, p. 62). According to traditional Bruneians, pointing with your index finger was considered to be very rude. Those who pointed with their thumb, however, were considered to be more refined in manners. A famous taboo amongst children was ‘buruk siku’ which means rotten elbow. Similarly, elders warned young children that they should never ask for the return of a gift because it would lead to rotten elbow (Zin, 2010a, 2010b).

When the taboos do not affect the physical body, they usually impact psychologically and emotionally, particularly producing fear. A behaviour that traditional elders tirelessly tried to instil in the youngsters is selflessness: “wash your feet before bed lest you will get a nightmare” is to teach children to be considerate not to soil the house, to make them bear in mind others in the house, as well as hygienic issues. “Sleep in the bedroom; it is tabooed to sleep or lie down in front of the door lest you will be stepped over by a ghost”. This is aimed specially at younger children. Elders forbade children to sleep or lie down in front of the main door as this could hinder others to come in and out (Hassan, 2001, p. 12).

A well-known taboo that induces fear is the game of hide and seek. It is a game that is coupled with ghostly effects if it is played recklessly. Elders warned children not to play hide and seek at
night or else they would be hidden by the Kalindahau ghost. The rationale behind this was that children might go to dark dangerous places and make their parents worried. Hide and seek games sometimes involved many players which could disturb those who were resting from a long day of work. The elders used the Kalindahau ghost to discourage children from playing hide and seek at night (Hassan, 2001, p. 34). The Kalindahau ghost is notorious because of her fondness for hiding children (MazMinisa, 2011); she is again related to two other taboos on hide and seek: never play hide and seek in the jungle (Ibid.) or in the house (Hassan, 2001, p. 35). Due to Brunei’s geographic closeness to Malaysia, the Kalindahau ghost is equivalent to Ma’ Kopek of the Malay Peninsula, “a hag that causes nightmare. Children playing hide-and-seek may lose themselves behind her prodigious breast and be found days later dazed and foolish” (Winstedt, 1951, p. 23).

The supernatural was fully utilized by traditional elders to stimulate the younger generation to be culturally aware. As discussed earlier, the purpose of taboos in Brunei was partly to train
younger generations to develop good reasoning and judgment, but also embedded within them are the traditional elders’ fear of the future and of shame. Thus, taboos additionally function to look after the safety of individuals during the absence of the elders and to avoid the individuals being called ignorant of traditional ethics. Before modernization, Bruneians used to cut their nails using knives and their only source of light was the oil lamp. However it became taboo to cut nails at night because it was regarded as a way to invite ghosts (Hassan, 2001, p. 37). In order to teach prudence, the elders deterred youngsters from this hazardous act by scaring them with ghosts. Another ghostly taboo that was devised for good sense is “do not sleep under the window lest you will be disturbed by ghosts”. During Bruneian olden days, leaves and cloth were used in windows. Sleeping under the windows would mean exposure to rain and heat. Elders wanted to teach children to be careful and choose an appropriate and comfortable spot to sleep (Hassan, 2001, p. 141). Such cultural practices taught the wisdom of the elders and encouraged people to stay safe.

In the Series, there are a number of child characters who excel in the practice of traditional ethics. These obedient children are often portrayed in the midst of unjust situations. For instance, the sons of Si Ranggau and the Giant loyally abide by their fathers’ requests even if it means to live without a father figure (Ali, 2010, p. 23; N. H. Tengah, 1983, p. 31). The gentle characters of Youngest and Rokiah prove their worth when they are rewarded by material gains (Damit, 1981, p. 21; J. A. Tengah, 1983, p. 17). However, traditional elders’ epitome of the obedient child is Radin, who bears his suffering patiently and perseveres through his calamity until his tragic end (Hassan, 1994, p. 25).

Re-establishing connection with Bruneian traditional elders

According to Bhabha, “our existence today is marked by a tenebrous sense of survival” therefore it is only natural for us to trace the questions of our culture (1994, p. 1). In the past, taboos and oral folklore were instructions for life and traditional elders were revered as wise individuals. The benefit of being in the here and now, in the present is to be able to finally see the ‘gaps’ that were hidden so well in the past. The illustrators of the Series as cultural producers are creating a difference in putting these ‘gaps’ into view and recognizing that there are forces/dynamics working within these gaps. Along with this recognition is the realization
that there are also challenges in those gaps, which are not just in the stories but in the whole culture, rendering the process of culture obscure at times.

Bruneian traditional taboos and folklore provide a window to the mysterious traditional elders. Through these, we are given a rare insight into how our ancestors lived. They were concerned about their younger generation, and therefore invented taboos as guideline and used the supernatural and ambiguity as elements to protect their heritage. The taboos might suggest Bruneian traditional elders as strict, controlling individuals, when in fact they were quite the opposite. Traditional elders were made strong by their cultural positions, their life experience and their wisdom. It was repeatedly stated that the young should show respect to the elders, but it is rarely discussed if the elders show the same respect. When examined closely, traditional elders did show similar respect as their younger generation. Traditional elders demonstrated their respect by talking in analogies (Serudin, 2013, p. 38) and by advising through taboos and oral folklore, instead of admonishing directly. In close knit communities, it was necessary for traditional elders to be subtle and creative at the same time. In order to avoid humiliation and offence, the elders concealed their teachings with supernatural elements, used to prevent further discussion on the matter.

One interesting feature of traditional taboos and folklore is that the outcome is not always punitive; it has a benefit as well. The elders’ taught that it is important to acknowledge that these stories show us how to live in a complicated world, where people are bound to make mistakes. Taboos and traditional oral tales recognized human weaknesses; they understood human tendencies to do wrong, to fall in love with the wrong person, to betray trust and to neglect duties and responsibilities to community. These archetypal elements of human nature are addressed in Bruneian oral tradition, instead of piously telling people what they should do. The elders intentionally explored tensions in the taboos and stories through characters who misbehaved. In spite of these tensions, there will always be a solution, for example through the counsel and advice of the elders. Illustrations in the Series imply that the elders were always there to assist and to nurture.
In general, the tales in the Series never portray the elders as judgmental and intimidating characters. Their presence in the tales mirrors their subtle nature. They were wise individuals who understood that complete control was impossible. Thus, they took full advantage of living in a society where the supernatural was as real as the material world. As a result, the elders’ managed to keep peace in Brunei throughout centuries.
Traditional Bruneian society placed importance on the respect due to those of older age. This was where the elders’ drew their power. The tremendous respect that they were given became a platform for them to transmit other cultural values such as gracefulness, team-work, courtesy and selflessness. By restaging the Bruneian past, we are tracing back our heritage that is slowly fading away. Restaging is not a mere account of what happened in the past hundreds of years ago, but it is a re-expression of an evolving tradition that shows Brunei’s rich cultural heritage, and its nuances of meanings in the fabric of culture which are easily overlooked. Bruneian traditional folklore and taboos are not old practices; they are the living past and the present, still vibrant and still living in a way, especially in how people respond and communicate with each other. These stories and taboos are still evident in Bruneians beliefs and the way they live, despite the rise of contemporary culture.

CONCLUSION

Homi Bhabha’s concept of restaging the past allows a critical view of Bruneian traditional past. Putting aside the previous perception of traditional taboos, rituals and folklore as a system of strict orders that must be obeyed, Bhabha’s ideas prompt a more contemporary idea, that these traditional practices can be regarded as ‘imagined’ and culturally constructed, thus, imperfect tools for maintaining social order. As the published folklore of Brunei shows, there are ‘interstitial spaces’, ambiguities which offer a sub-text to the wider narrative of respect and obedience that need to be recognized in order to better understand the complex transmission of culture. In Bruneian culture, as demonstrated in the illustrated stories discussed, these ‘interstitial spaces’ occur between traditional folklore and taboos and between traditional elders and the later generations. For centuries, Bruneian traditional elders successfully held and preserved Bruneian customs and traditions. There must be something that could be recognized that contributed to this success. Under Bhabha’s concept, there are indeed ‘interstices’ in the Bruneian culture that are often taken for granted. These are traditional phrases such as ‘inda kuasa’, ‘ketulahan’, ‘derhaka’ and ‘sia-sia pun’. One common quality of these traditional adages is ambiguity, a tool that is used to strengthen tradition. The elders protected their power and status through these self-serving narratives about wisdom of the aged. So effective were they, that validity was not needed.
The power of the supernatural in Bruneian communities can still be seen today by the preservation of virgin forests. This is the effect of traditional taboos and folklore that emphasize forests and jungles as the living space of the supernatural. The fact that traditional Bruneian taboos and folklore are heavily immersed by supernatural qualities gives rise to another ‘interstice’. Concealed behind supernatural occurrences are traditional Bruneian elders’ anxieties and fears. Their fears motivated them to construct an ideal culture that could protect their traditions and customs.

Traditional taboos, oral folklore and ancient elders are rarely discussed because their oral features create a shortage of written materials. This chapter establishes the foundation of further studies in terms of the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*. It is important to understand how the *Series* was perceived and accepted in the past, how traditional elders propagated cultural values, and how taboos, rituals and folklore as cultural expressions have changed over time, becoming “part of the necessity, not the nostalgia, of living” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7).

As a modern researcher, temporal distance proves to be beneficial in identifying the political mechanism that was actively working in traditional Bruneian communities. It is important, too, to recognize that contemporary illustrators of the *Series* are, of ‘necessity’, continuing the footsteps of their predecessors, the traditional Bruneian elders, in constructing culture. Existing in the present grants them the benefit of providing a different and new perspective, through questioning traditional elders’ validity, an act that was never thought possible before.
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CHAPTER 5

GOTHIC THROUGH THE LENS OF THE SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE

Introduction

The concept of ‘re-staging’, as discussed in the previous chapter, is an important way of articulating the process of recovering heritage. It offers a mechanism for tracking and recapturing the formative ideas, beliefs and practices that existed in Bruneian culture in past centuries. Over time, these traditional conventions changed and evolved. However, each change does not go unnoticed. Instead it is embedded and reflected in cultural artefacts such as the Series of Bruneian Folklore. The tales are not just static: they are stories which reflect an evolution of meaning and a channel from which we can derive new meanings and understandings. The notion of ‘re-staging’ therefore paves a new path for further examination of the Series. One new way to approach the tales as the reclamation and expression of an evolving heritage is through the lens of the Gothic mode.

Gothic is essentially a Western term. Originating in Germany, it moved to Britain in the medieval period and was reclaimed as a popular literary form in the eighteenth century when it gained both prominence and notoriety. The history of Gothic as a literary form includes criticisms and disapprovals mounted against it which mainly focus on its chaotic manner (Kilgour, 1995, p. 34). However, there is one feature of Gothic that is consistently noted and deemed unique among literary scholars: its ability to relocate and adapt to different cultural forms and contexts. Punter mentions that Gothic has an “awareness of mutability” (Punter, 2012, p. 3). Similarly, Bloom draws attention to this notion of Gothic’s versatility (Bloom, 2007, p. 1). The topic of Gothic’s fluidity and its unstable foundation may appear clichéd yet it offers a clarification of the Gothic’s upsurge in recent times. Hale offers a more concise description of Gothic’s early importation around Europe: “western gothic was from the start the product of cultural exchange, although then the exchange was primarily Anglo-French-Germanic” (in Punter, 2012, p. 370). So vigorous is this cultural exchange that it spreads to other parts of the world. Probably, even the father of the Gothic novel (The Castle of Otranto, 1764), Horace Walpole, could not have anticipated this Gothic chain reaction. For a mode that has long been under criticism, it is indeed remarkable to witness its diverse sub-divisions, such as “Asian Gothic”, recently discussed by Katarzyna Ancuta (Chapter in Punter, 2012, pp. 428-441) and “Japanese Gothic” explored by Charles Shiro Inouye
(Inouye, 2012, pp. 442-453). Arguably, there has never been such an obsession with the Gothic as in recent years. From literature to movies, Gothic conventions are widespread and are now a global phenomenon.

However adaptable Gothic may be, a legitimate question arises here: would this prevalence of Gothic conventions be flexible enough to be associated with the Series of Bruneian Folklore? Gothic as a term is difficult to define, even from its Western origin. Ancuta warns that “attempting to bring together Asia and Gothic in search of some relatively homogenous category is asking for trouble” (Ancuta in Punter, 2012, p. 428). Bhabha recognizes this trouble as a danger of “the calcification of colonial cultures” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9). In view of postcolonial Brunei, applying a seemingly Western concept would risk a re-colonizing interposition, not just on one level but two: through the English language (translation from the Malay language) and through a widely recognizable Western element of Gothic. On a more practical level, aligning Gothic, as a Western artefact, with the extremely different environment of tropical Brunei with its lush dark forests, spirit traditions and endless superstitions is already a challenge. There are also other levels of difference that must also be considered: differences in setting, chronology, cultural context and a clear difference in language. Another notable difference is that Western Gothic is about cultural change while Bruneian Gothic is about cultural continuity and the survival of tradition. There seems to be opposition between the association of this European historical concept of Gothic and traditional Bruneian folklore. Yet, these different expressions of supernatural, environmental and cultural anxieties substantiate the need to set forth this investigation further. This exploration aims to analyse the Gothic past of Bruneians through traditional rituals and the Gothic psyche of modern Bruneians. The power of Bruneian Gothic is represented by instances of mass hysteria that still occur, showing the importance of understanding the legacy of traditional cultural beliefs and practices for contemporary society. With reference to Fanon, Bhabha names this act of reclaiming tradition as a “celebratory romance of the past” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9). In order to avoid the calcification of the Bruneian culture, this chapter celebrates the Bruneian past by claiming Gothic as essential to a lived narrative tradition in Bruneian culture, with its own themes and characteristics and, which is far from being a Western imposition but deeply grounded in ancient local cultures, beliefs and practices. Thus, instead of relying on the Western understanding of Gothic, this chapter will define Gothic through the perspective of the Series of Bruneian Folklore.
Western Gothic and Bruneian Gothic

It is a prerequisite to take into account the influential and widely known European work *Grimm’s Children’s and Household Tales* (1812) when discussing folklore and also Gothic for that matter. *Grimm’s Tales* were collected and published with the aims “to reinforce and reinvigorate the cultural memory and heritage of the German people” (Jan, 2016). Although emerging from a contrasting cultural context, the publication of the *Series* was inspired by a similar purpose that is to revitalize Bruneian heritage.

*Grimm’s Tales* is considered as a global property due to its countless studies, numerous translations and continuous adaptations and retellings (Joosen & Lathey, 2014). Its comparison to the *Series* may at first seem to be unwarranted, considering its localized status and that it was only in the 1960s that mass illiteracy was eradicated in Brunei (Leonard, 2006, p. 202) and the earliest known publication of the tales was in 1981.

Setting aside the differences in literary status, most important and most notable common feature between the *Series* and *Grimm’s Tales* is that both initial publications have Gothic elements still intact. The Grimm’s explain that the first publication of their tales were intended for adults (Jan, 2016), thus, Gothic themes such as isolation, physical mutilation (*Ashputtel* and *The Girl Without Hands*), cannibalism (*Rumpelstiltskin* and *Hansel and Gretel*) and treacherous murder (*The Singing Bone* and *Fitcher’s Bird*). However, over the years, these Gothic elements have been watered down to cater for its wide readership which includes children. Similar to the first *Grimm’s Tales*, the *Series* can be said to still embody much of its original oral flair as Gothic elements for example, dark forests, monsters, victims and tricksters are still present, designed to incite fear as a means of inspiring compliance. One stark difference between *Grimm’s Tales* and the *Series* is the ending. Although the original *Grimm’s Tales* have Gothic conventions, moral teachings are fulfilled and endings are usually happy. Whilst most of the tales in the *Series* favour negativism as a conclusion (Jukim, 2014, p. 135).

Following this brief comparison of Western Gothic folklore is a comparison of the *Series* with Western Gothic novels. After all, Gothic novels are the successors of Western Gothic Folklore (Abbruscato & Jones, 2014, p. 6).

One of Western Gothic’s characteristics mentioned earlier is its fluidity. Gothic as a literary mode originated with fixed landscapes or settings yet it has the quality to adapt and change
according to its current period and cultural anxieties of that time. Castle explains that the birth of the Gothic was in the 1700s when Britain was rising as a strong imperial power, and “one of the first intellectual by-products of this new self-consciousness was a renewed interest in ‘ancient’ British history and the Goth in particular” (Castle, 2005, p. 681). Traditional Gothic is renowned for its formulaic landscapes and its preoccupation with the archaic. Conscious of the Gothic’s multifaceted significance, Punter offers one meaning of the Gothic as “fiction of the haunted castle, of heroines preyed on by unspeakable terrors, of the blackly lowering villain, of ghosts, vampires, monsters and werewolves” (Punter, 1996, p. 1). Botting gives a simple list of settings of the eighteenth-century Gothic, which is often populated by “spectres, monsters, demons, corpses, skeletons, evil aristocrats, monks and nuns, fainting heroines and bandits” and “decaying, bleak and full of hidden passageways [...] abbeys, churches and graveyards especially that – in their generally ruinous states, harked back to a feudal past” (Botting, 1996, pp. 2-3). Sage, on the other hand, provides a more detailed description of early Gothic fixation:

the setting in medieval and ‘superstitious’ Southern Catholic Europe; the expectation of the supernatural; the conflation of hero and villain; the decay of primogeniture and of feudal and aristocratic rights in general, and the rise of an ambitious bourgeoisie eager to exercise individual freedom in marriage and inheritance; the focus on the victimized, but often defiant, position of women; the use of confined spaces – castles, dungeons, monasteries and prisons, to symbolize extreme emotional states by labyrinthine incarceration.” (Sage in Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p. 146)

These widely agreed conventions of traditional Gothic proved to be momentary as Gothic is remarkably adaptable to its present time and its present predilection. In the nineteenth century, Botting states that as the Gothic landscape changed from labyrinthine castles to “dark, labyrinthine streets” the Gothic conventions transformed to “scientists, fathers, husbands, madmen, criminals and the monstrous double signifying duplicity and evil nature” (Botting, 1996, p. 9). Sage similarly notes the change in Gothic’s trend in the nineteenth century was to embrace the doppelganger (Sage in Mulvey-Roberts, Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p. 149).
Approaching the twentieth century, Gothic again shows its ability to mutate: Gothic horror and terror have shifted to the space of the home while external threats seem to be mundane. Reflecting this Gothic significant change, Henry James commented: “more interesting and terrible, were the strangeness closer to home. James states that a good ghost-story ‘must be connected at a hundred points with the common objects of life’” (James as cited in Botting, 1996, p. 115). In Botting’s words, this “domestication of Gothic style” (Botting, 1996, p. 123) is linked to Freud’s Uncanny (1919) creating, as Sage suggests “a new discursive field” (Sage in Mulvey-Roberts, Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p. 153).

Bruneian Gothic shares underlying similarities with Western Gothic, especially in terms of the use of the supernatural, the grotesque and the uncanny. However, there are distinctive differences. While Western Gothic requires changes of time and different public interests to mutate, Bruneian Gothic has been a part of the culture and society throughout the island nation’s history. Instead of confined spaces, it is the natural world, the forests, plantations and the seas that play important parts in verifying the existence of the supernatural. Moreover, these sites of the uncanny function in Bruneian Gothic as expressions of cultural continuity and social order. The home can easily become the unheimlich as in the case of Married to Barbalan Ghosts (1981) and The Kayong People (1981), but this is a different kind of domestic setting from the Gothic towers, attics, chambers and dungeons of the Western lineage. In Brunei, the Gothic home is a permeable space which is partly open to community members: human, animal and spiritual.

Beliefs of Traditional Bruneians

European visitors described traditional Brunei as the home of peaceful communities, a vision which seems to contradicts the living presence of the Gothic as an aspect of cultural life, with its demons, elves and vampires. In fact, this peace was upheld by Bruneians’ Gothic beliefs, in which the supernatural played an important role. As mentioned in the previous chapter, historical accounts of Brunei show that it is one of the oldest kingdoms in Asia (Al-Sufri, 1990, p. 1; Tingkong, 2009, p. 32). According to Chinese historical records, old Brunei was an established kingdom which was an active trading partner of China, especially between the years of 517-699 BC (Al-Sufri, 1997). The relationship of old Brunei and China was not only limited to commerce. China imparted its religious teachings through these business transactions which explain the existence of the combination of Malay, Hindu and Buddhist traditions within Bruneian
communities today. Another early belief of the people of old Brunei was animism. In *An Idealised Account of Brunei in 1521*, Maximilian describes the inhabitants of old Brunei as follows:

All these islanders are *Caphrae or Kaffirs*, i.e. heathens; they worship the sun and the moon as gods; they assign the government of the day to the sun and that of the night to the moon; the sun they consider to be male, the moon female, and that they are the parents of the other stars, all of which they consider to be gods, though little ones. They salute, rather than adore, the rising sun with certain hymns. Also they salute the bright moon at night, from which they ask for children, for the increase of their flocks and herds, for an abundant supply of the fruits of the earth, and for other things of that sort. But they practice piety and justice, and specially love peace and quiet [...] Hence they mostly pass their lives in peace and leisure. Robberies and murders are quite unknown among them. (Nicholl, 1975, p. 17)

Besides Maximilian, there were other European visitors who discerned traditional Bruneians as peaceful and nature-loving individuals. The first available account of Brunei was approximately in 1505, by Ludovico Varthema, whereby he states that “the people are pagans and are men of good will” (Varthema as cited in Nicholl, 1975, p. 3). A Portuguese visitor named Rui de Brito Patalim expresses similar depiction of traditional Bruneians; “they are good men and our friends”, “they are good people and clever merchants” (Nicholl, 1975, p. 4). Another description of the traditional Bruneians around 1515 was written by Tome Pires, where he remarked that Bruneians “seem to be peaceable men” (Pires as cited in Nicholl, 1975, p. 7).

These preceding observations of Bruneian traditional societies were recorded from a European perspective, but are indeed generally accurate. The traditional values in Bruneian culture honour respect and appreciation; they acknowledge all parts of nature, from the bright morning sun to a tiny pebble, each with its own part to play. This recognition of nature is still emphasized
today. This supports the traditional belief that forests, jungles and the seas are the homes of supernatural beings. Bruneian elders still practice the advice on their youngsters to behave in the forest as per their customs (Bandar Seri Begawan, Karim, 2012).

**Fertile Breeding Ground for the Gothic**

The earliest beliefs of Animism, Hinduism and Buddhism had left their traces in the cultural psyche of traditional Bruneians (Tingkong, 2009, p. 1). This concoction of beliefs resulted in endless strings of superstitions and taboos which played important roles in daily actions and decisions of past Bruneians. Although a number of these superstitions and taboos are no longer influential, they nonetheless directed and guided traditional Bruneians. So effective were Bruneian traditional superstitions and taboos as societal control that they created strong emotional validity to what Anderson termed as “imagined communities” (Anderson, 1990, p. 10). The image of communion was so profound that traditional Bruneians gained the reputation as harmonious people among early European visitors.

Many superstitions and taboos that have persisted to this day are the remnants of countless superstitions and taboos that existed in past Bruneian traditional societies. It is not an overstatement to declare traditional Bruneians as extremely superstitious. They were so superstitious that they believed there were ‘good’ and ‘bad’ days to do activities such as hunting (Tingkong, 2009, p. 16). Even natural events such as sun showers or the mere appearance of a rainbow, were evaluated through superstitions. Interestingly, more often than not these beliefs have supernatural elements, involving evil spirits and ghosts. In the event of sun showers, traditional Bruneians would remain indoors to avoid attacks from ghosts. The unusual natural appearance of such a phenomenon disturbed them. A bright sun and showers are considered opposites, and it was thought that these combined occurrences would bring bad luck. It was believed that those who were exposed to sun showers without any protection would be the targets of violent ghosts and their attacks would then lead to flu, illness, or in worst-case scenarios, insanity. However, traditional Bruneian elders did not desert their youngsters during these frightening consequences. There are traditional ways to prevent fatal mishaps. Those who found themselves trapped in a sudden sun shower, were taught to spit three times on a tiny leaf and place it on the right ear. By doing so, ghosts would mistake them as beings of the supernatural realm and would leave them alone (Tingkong, 2009, p. 60).
The supernatural was involved in every facet of traditional Bruneian society. Past fascination with the supernatural was so excessive that even an ordinary event such as the celebration of rice harvesting was enveloped by supernatural presence. One prominent example amongst many was a supernatural communal activity accurately called the ‘Ghostly Ritual’, which was practiced until the 1980s. Jaafar states in his article *Ghostly Rituals in Brunei* that this ‘Ghostly Ritual’ was as an ancient activity which was actively practiced hundreds of years ago (Jaafar, 1989, p. 58). This ritual was led by an experienced person who “knows how to play with ghosts”. This person must have a flexible ‘vital spirit’ which could easily allow his supernatural doppelganger to enter his body. Each different ceremony master had a different supernatural doppelganger. Translated directly from Bruneian Malay Language, this doppelganger is known as a ‘companion’ (sahabat) or a ‘reflection’ (gimbaran). Their ‘companions’ can originate from the mountains or from the forests (Jaafar, 1989, p. Ibid.). The purpose of this ritual can be mistaken due to its name. Some might consider it a ritual to worship ghosts, when its actual reason was remedial. It is in fact intended to cure those who are possessed by supernatural beings.

This intricate ritual does not just represent the strong relationship between traditional Bruneians and the supernatural, but it is a creative outlet. Although primarily seen as a supernatural event, it is greatly an artistic performance as well. It is a requirement for the master of ceremony to be a good dancer. It is through a passionate dance that the doppelganger is summoned. The ritual is accompanied by a small band of musicians making use of traditional musical instruments such as a *dombak*, *rebana*, *geritik* and violin. The master of ceremony will then start to dance as an indication of invitation to his/her ‘companion’ to enter his/her body. After the entering of the ‘companion’, the detection of sickness will begin. The master of ceremony is now manifest as multiple beings in one body, able to see beyond the worldly plane, and will then begin to explain the details of the illness to the sufferer and the taboos that must be avoided. Jaafar states that if indeed the sufferer is possessed by a demon, he/she will abide to the supernatural powers of the master of ceremony and willingly testify of his/her marriage union to the demon and the number of offspring they have borne (Jaafar, 1989, p. 60).

A similar climax occurs when the master of ceremony addresses the spectators. The sufferer is momentarily left sitting in the middle of the crowd while the master of ceremony, who is possessed by his/her ‘companion’, walks around half conscious. This aimless walk becomes
more frightening because the master of ceremony is armed with a sharp machete which is sometimes placed on a spectator’s body or head. The uncanny occurs when, no matter how hard the master of ceremony hacks the spectators’ head or body, they remain unharmed. Oddly enough, in the end, the sharp machete becomes damaged. Jaafar explains that this impossible act could only be carried out because of the spectators’ compliance to follow the conditions: they are forbidden to talk or to comment on the actions of the master of ceremony and they are to silently allow any actions (such as hacking or cutting) to be carried out on them. If any of these conditions are violated, then all of the actions of the master of ceremony would cause physical harm (Jaafar, 1989, p. 62).

Another popular mystical event amongst traditional Bruneian is called ‘Tak Bamban’. Unlike the therapeutic quality of the ‘Ghostly Ritual’, ‘Tak Bamban’ has a trait of celebration. The mystical item in this event is called bubu, a traditional portable fishing equipment made out of long threads of bamboo, which has an elongated horizontal shape with a wide circle opening at the bottom. Placed on top of it, is a half coconut husk which resembles a bald head. In A Close-up to ‘Tak Bamban’, Hussin (1989) states that this traditional mystical dance is every bit local, and the beginning of its existence has proved to be difficult to trace. Thus, the only justification is that it is beyond human understanding and human knowledge shrewdly designed by the ‘spirits’ (Hussin, 1989, p. 78). The popularity of ‘Tak Bamban’ should not be underestimated since it made its mark through its performance in the palace’s vicinity in front of the Duke of Edinburgh on the 1st of March 1965, which was indeed a rare and exceptional occasion (Hussin, 1989, p. 81). ‘Tak Bamban’ is based on supernatural powers obtained from the ghosts of the forests, mountains and the seas. Hussin describes that in order to convince ‘Tak Bamban’ to ‘dance’, a clean, new bubu should be used. It should be clothed in new garments and should portray the image of a woman. That is why it is named the Lady Bandan. Husin explains that the head of ‘Tak Bamban’ is made out of a ‘male coconut husk’ which is marked with a cross sign with white chalk that was charmed earlier. Eyes, a nose, eyebrows and mouth are drawn on the husk. A pair of sticks used as arms and hands completes the Lady Bandan’s bodily parts. When preparation is complete, ‘Tak Bamban’ is then chanted with the magic smoke (incense). Once the copious clouds of smoke are seen, ‘Tak Bamban’ is lifted up by two men and two women. It is then swayed according to the rhythm of the song (Hussin, 1989, p. 83). It is believed that this is the stage of the ritual where the role of the spectator is important. The spectators’ applause and cheers are a form of challenge to ‘Tak Bamban’ to dance. Initially, ‘Tak Bamban’ would
dance slowly at first, until it comes to the point when it would dance in a vigorous and frightening way. It is at this stage that those people who have a lack or no belief in the spirit of ‘Tak Bamban’ are dared to experience the supernatural strength of ‘Tak Bamban’ by carrying it. Similar to the ‘Ghostly Ritual’, there are special conditions attached to the practice of ‘Tak Bamban’; firstly, the head (coconut husk) of ‘Tak Bamban’ should not be touched. Secondly, ‘Tak Bamban’ should not be hugged while dancing. If it is touched or hugged, it will stop immediately. Hussin’s opinions regarding these requisites are that, according to traditional Bruneians, the head and the face represent honour, and if this honour is broken then there is no respect in that person’s social standing. This is the reason why the carriers of ‘Tak Bamban’ are only allowed to touch its base (Hussin, 1989, p. 85).

Although, the ‘Ghostly Ritual’ and ‘Tak Bamban’ are no longer practiced, their presence still can be felt and still continue to give meaning to the supernatural setting in Brunei. However, there is one conviction that is evidently still prevalent in Bruneian modern societies; the belief in the bomoh (medicine man). According to Tingkong (2009), the role of a bomoh is still significant in Bruneian modern communities especially for the elderly who favour traditional medicines. The author argues that this belief contributes to the survival of animistic values in Bruneian modern communities (Tingkong, 2009, pp. 22-23). Through these supernatural attachments of traditional Bruneians, the essential characters of the master of ceremony or the bomoh implicitly uphold traditional law and order by citing the rules that should be obeyed. Dire warnings are served as a second reminder if any of the rules mentioned are broken. In ‘Tak Bamban’ if the participants violated the rules, the spirit would simply stop dancing and the participants would have to face the wrath of many spectators. In opposition to this light punishment, the rule breaker of ‘Ghostly Ritual’ would have to suffer the consequence of knife cuts from the master of ceremony. Veiled behind supernatural elements, traditional Bruneians emphasized the cultural values of respect and obedience through such mystical events, at the same time displaying the Bruneian Gothic tradition of mystical occurrences.

Such were the lives of traditional Bruneians: entertainment was in the form of ghostly ceremonies, and being acquainted with someone who had spirits as his or her double was very common. Uncanny phenomena or experiences were accepted, although not expected. Gallop reports that in traditional Brunei, “the most unwanted phenomena seem to bring the best of luck” (Gallop, 2005, pp. 98-99). Gallop infers that coincidence was not a concept in traditional
Brunei. He further explains that for most people, a mouse deer, a snake, a mad monkey or a slow loris entering the house is an unfamiliar sight and almost unthinkable, but for traditional Bruneians it was a sign of good luck, and prosperity, if a *tolak bala* (repelling misfortune - a kind act to prevent bad luck for example giving money or rice to the poor) is carried out. If this *tolak bala* was neglected, the house would be haunted by evil spirits (Gallop, 2005, p. 99). Every part of the traditional Bruneians’ lives was governed by the powers of the supernatural, long before the term ‘Gothic’ was coined.

**Gothic Landscapes in the Series of Bruneian Folklore**

As in most things in Brunei, the supernatural is a common feature in traditional oral narratives. Some of the surviving oral narratives are manifested in their modern form in the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*, a publication which has been classified as children’s literature. One of the tasks of this thesis is to reclassify these stories and to consider their importance from other perspectives, including as an expression of Bruneian Gothic. As a literary mode, Gothic is in the process of liberating itself from its previous stigma as marginalized literature, and becoming a dominant narrative mode in contemporary culture. Now, Gothic is increasingly known as a liminal genre as it comes into being at times when social, political or literary systems are deteriorating (Bloom, 2007, p. 240). Some of the tales in the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*, especially those laden with horror, are indeed confronted with literary stagnation as a sign of cultural transition to modernity and to Islam. The books’ publication and productions have ceased and now are only available in the restricted section in Brunei’s public library.

As examined by literary scholars, Gothic mode has always been responsive to cultural changes (Ellis, 2000, p. 81; Punter, 1996, p. 5). In this Bruneian matter, Gothic comes into being not because of political upheaval (as was the case in Brunei’s Western counterparts, particularly the French Revolution) and industrial revolution, where lives became mechanical and boring, or even the decline of religious beliefs; Gothic becomes acknowledged in this Bruneian setting, entirely as a redeemer of significant cultural meanings. In actuality, it is not even remotely possible to redeem the status of oral narratives in the past lives of traditional Bruneians. However, Gothic can have a potent influence by giving a living space within the culture to disappearing Bruneian folklore amid this contemporary era. The tales of the *Series of Bruneian Folklore* are heavy with supernatural embellishments in which the Gothic mode seems more than befitting. In this Bruneian scene, Gothic as a nameless thing in the Bruneian past is now
able to claim its right as a cultural and literary phenomenon. Unlike its Western predecessors, Gothic here is not a dramatic revival; this newly identified literary mode in the Bruneian field is an awakening. It beckons modern Bruneians to understand their ancestors. Nameless then, the elements of Gothic existed in the realities of traditional Bruneians and still persist to this day.

Now that Bruneian Gothic has been introduced, this chapter will provide further literary dissection of the selected tales in the Series.

Bruneian Gothic

This section takes as its starting point the recognition that Gothic is a fluid mode, enabling the Series to be examined in a different perspective. The aim of this exploratory study is to focus on lesser known horror tales in the Series which are otherwise dismissed as mere ghost stories (Jukim, 2014, p. 122), and to show their importance in the Bruneian literary pantheon.

Since the tales are classified under children’s literature, and contain many carefully produced illustrations, much of the focus in this part of the discussion will be on the visual representation of the stories in the published version of the tales. As discussed in the previous chapter, nature in the Bruneian milieu exists as a sacred and a separate living entity which enabled it to be preserved throughout centuries, proving the traditional ethos of relationship between the human and natural worlds is mutuality. The long established and intimate connection with nature is reflected in the illustrations, exhibiting how nature was a dominant feature. This is different to traditional Western culture which celebrated and favoured the human form over nature (Glickman, 1998, p. 3). Another notable difference is the effect of the sublime. Edmund Burke explains that “whatever is qualified to cause terror is a foundation capable of the sublime” (Burke, 1759, p. 43). While the sublime occurs throughout the tales stemming from terror are similar with Burke’s classification, it is the sublime that occurs externally that is different here. The preservation of Bruneian pristine forest can be seen as the effect of the sublime through traditional taboos, rituals and folklore. The legacy of the sublime in Bruneian culture is perpetual and pragmatic whereas in Western culture, it is continual but aesthetic (Drennig, 2013, p. 552). In the Bruneian context, perception of nature has always been solid. Traditional taboos, pertaining to forests and jungles have long, in part, contributed in protecting Brunei’s woodlands area. While, the idea of nature in the West seems to be continuously under construction, for instance, the idea of nature in the 19th and 20th century was constructed as an
escape from the mundane, conventional life by urbanists and recreationists (Drennig, 2013, p. 555), and new ways engaging with nature was invented such as the ethics of Leave No Trace which maintains the “illusions of solitude and purity in nature” (Drennig, 2013, p. 558).

The tales of the *Series of Bruneian Folklore* serve as a reminder of the ways in which nature and the supernatural are closely interwoven with traditional daily life. From the outset, the natural landscapes in the tales are not merely a decorative background but act as active informants on the relationship of traditional Bruneians with nature. Traditional Bruneians were very much in tune with the natural world and this is reflected in the tales themselves. Portrayal of natural landscapes in terms of excess is a distinct feature of Bruneian Gothic, as depicted in the tales. In particular, the vast sea and the deep forest are recurring settings which evoke danger, anxiety and spirituality in order to reinforce the conventions of social order. Excess in nature is represented through the existence of active spirits and also in people who cannot withhold their desires. Thus, excess in the Bruneian Gothic context is expressed through the emotional reactions of the characters and readers. The tales culturally express how nature was perceived in traditional Bruneian societies and aptly show the forest and the sea in a human and in a non-human way. In the Bruneian frame, nature is not a photographic background or simply a beautiful and serene atmosphere; nature has substance and is fervently alive, deeply connected with the way in which people conduct their daily practices of life.

*Married to Barbalan* (1981) is one tale in the *Series* that heavily employs Gothic natural landscapes, particularly of the sea. The use of the sea as a landscape is justified by the main character Kulop’s occupation as a fisherman. The sea is a source of liberation for Kulop. Throughout the tale, the sea is always depicted as dark, deep and vast. Yet, it does not pose any threat to the humans: the dark sea is ever-present and is a space which aids Kulop’s survival; it is at sea that the truth unravels (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 14); it is also at sea that Kulop is able to conceal his plan (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 21) and in the end, it is the sea that allows his final escape (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 25).

The significance of natural landscapes is evident in this tale when nine out of fourteen illustrations are of wild landscapes. From the very first illustration (figure 1) an ominous atmosphere dominates. Although only a grey sketch, the obscure solitary mountain in the background seems to be symbolic of Kulop himself as a lonely traveller. The leafless trees in front are somehow signalling Kulop’s future misfortune. To add to the prophetic Gothic scene,
the sunset is marked with a background of red blotches. Kulop is seen with a grin, taking in the scenery, welcoming the night, a time which will witness his undoing but also his salvation. All illustrations in this tale are dark; the only time shown is night. Burke lists darkness as one of the cause of the sublime because it is threatening, it is “impossible to know what degree of safety we stand” (Burke, 1759, p. 48). In contrast, the tale do not exhibit darkness as a nuisance or the source of sublime, if anything, darkness invokes the beautiful which can be deduced from Kulop’s grin. We only glimpse the sun when it is setting (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 12). In this tale, sunlight is not given any chance (figure 2), as it is in its retired state and its vigour is depleting, showing day’s end, thereby giving prominence to the role of the moon as a protector.

Married to Barbalan (1981) is a nocturnal tale that uses a few nightly props to their full effect; the moon and the shadowy leafless trees both offer chilling sensations. The tale emphasizes its night-time milieu whereby the full moon is often present as a mute observer. The full moon is
the only source of light in the tale, which appears while Kulop is relaxing with his new wife on his wooden veranda. This first appearance of his new wife in the illustration (figure 3) triggers an uneasy reaction for the reader, creating a feeling that there is something amiss. Only her back is visible. Her striking long black hair touches the wooden floor, slowly building an eerie atmosphere (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 5). This is the second illustration of the tale and it is already exposing the true nature of Kulop and his wife, using the moon. Kulop is seen clearly as the moon-light shines on him. His expression is able to be understood. His position suggests that he is at ease and comfortable in the company of his wife. His relaxed posture also indicates his trust and familiarity towards his wife. Because of this he is nonchalant and sits in a vulnerable position, which is susceptible to attack, as the whole chest area (indicating his heart) is exposed. The moon’s light on Kulop enables the viewer to deduce his character as noble and truthful with nothing to hide. On the other hand, his wife is everything that he is not. Her expression is not visible and her sitting position is unknown. Aside from the lack of light, it is her cascade of hair which acts as a curtain or a shield, preventing full sight of her physical position. This particular illustration serves as an omen of what the story will entail. Kulop’s relaxed position reflects his vulnerability and his gullibility throughout the tale. In fact, this image of Kulop suggests he is an unsuspecting character who only uncovers the truth accidentally.

The full moon reappears again (figure 4) at a time when Kulop carries out his plan in order to find out his wives’ true forms (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 18). The moon is indeed a witness; it is there, although only half, it casts off partial light (figure 5), silently observing Kulop’s action of ‘decapitating’ his wives (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 24).
The role of the moon becomes significant at the end, even to the wives, who are anxious and keep checking the moon (figure 6); if it is still there, if it is still night time (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 28). The detached heads of Kulop’s wives are seen hovering on top of their bodies while their hair ends firmly grip the windows’ wooden bars. This graphically portrays their fear that the moon might disappear, that night time will be over (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 28). They clearly associate their powers with the moon which symbolizes the night, a source for them to do evil in the dark where they can hide. However, the moon here represents the reverse. Although visible, the moon is distant and it is beyond the bars, unsympathetic towards the Barbalan women. The moon witnesses their entrapment. Unable to reattach to their bodies, they are static in their ghostly form and the illustration captures this angst precisely, conveying a feeling of containment. The sublime is intense here due to the “apprehension of pain or death” (Burke, 1759, p. 17) producing this particular image as transcendent excess, relaying that there are much more beyond human existence. The illustration depicts a sense of suffocation, the
Barbalan women are not simply stopped but they are trapped and held. They are no longer able to hide and camouflage amongst the humans.

In traditional Bruneian culture, the moon was considered a source of fertility (Maximilian in Nicholl, 1975, p. 17). Indeed, the moon is not just a mute witness but it has a function to play; it serves as an important symbol. Although, it exemplifies the night-time, a time when all evils are loose, the moon still stays true to its traditional role as a source of fertility. It is never on the side of the Barbalan women because they are not real women and they cannot bear children. The moon allies itself with Kulop because he desires children. From the beginning of the tale, there is a clear relationship between Kulop and the moon; throughout the tale, it is present at Kulop’s pivotal moments. The Barbalan women disrupt the symbol of the moon as the symbol of fertility and their existence produces an imbalance in nature. Thus, the moon represents transcendent excess, silently witnessing and somehow allowing Kulop’s ‘decapitation’ of his barren wives.

Another tale from the Series that completely focuses on the outdoors is Vengeance of the Forest Spirit. From the first illustration (figure 7), green wild foliage can be seen with a backdrop of shadowy mountains. In broad daylight, the main character, Father Itho is strutting barefooted through the untrimmed grass heading towards the forest to hunt (Sen, p. 5, n.d.). The wooden stilt houses mirror the lives of traditional Bruneians whose lives are dependent on nature.
Similar to the tale of *Married to Barbalan* (1981), the images here communicate a sinister feeling and a macabre sensation. From the start, the forest indicates to its regular visitor, Father Itho, that there is something odd. The forest signals this by showing a different aura; instead of being vibrant, it gives an eerie graveyard feeling, where only the sounds of crickets can be heard (Sen, p. 6, n.d.). Burke explains that the sublime typically “comes upon us in the gloomy forest and in the howling wilderness” (Burke, 1759, p. 20). In this case, it is the unusual silence that induces the sublime. The forest (figure 8) suggests an impression of ancient mystical power. Gigantic trees prove their strength and power, with their roots visibly protruding from the soil, projecting the idea of the uncanny as the roots come from the darkness into the light. The trees seem to be as ancient as the forest. The forest here is more than just the trees: there are the vines, the animals, the light, the darkness, the shadows. All are connected in a supernatural way and generate the Spirit of the forest, who acts as a guardian. The presence of the Forest Spirit brings about balance in the forest and this is represented by the vines and the trees. Although the trees are encircled by strangler vines, the trees do not seem to be affected by them (Sen, p. 7, n.d.).
The forest in this tale represents the supernatural space. It is quiet, out of respect for the presence of its guardian. In the forest, the Forest Spirit is free to do whatever he pleases because it is his space. He has the power to direct the trees and the creatures of the forest, but he maintains it as a respectful place, a sanctuary for respectful people and a threatening place to the arrogant. In figure 9, the stability and orderliness of the forest are noticeable through the silence and the strangely domesticated wild boars (Sen, p. 13). The usual view of the forest as a place of the wild is completely overturned. The forest here is a place of order. Therefore, it is only justice when the Forest Spirit retaliates on those who threaten the peace of his forest. Father Itho is the catalyst in disrupting the balance of the forest. When he enters the forest for the second time without due reverence, the forest surroundings start to become malevolent because of the imbalance.

Nature in Bruneian Gothic is responsive. One of the conditions for nature to react is through imbalance. In Married to Barbalan (1981), nature, in particular the sea and the moon, subtly aid Kulop. Nature in Vengeance of the Forest Spirit is affected by the being of the Spirit; the forest,
initially a peaceful living space of the Spirit, has become a haunted and chaotic space inhabited by a vengeful entity.

Similarly, the banana tree farm in *The Banana Heart Princess* (1995) is not merely a decorative landscape; it serves as a source for the whole tale. It is the banana tree farm itself which triggers the unfortunate sequence of events for Tunggal. Serving a dual function, it is here that Tunggal once and for all resolves his problem of an uncanny resonance. His trouble begins when he unwittingly injures his finger while cutting down a banana tree. Little does he know that, the spatter of his blood on the banana tree summons a blood-thirsty spirit.

The last illustration of the tale (figure 10) is full of ennui; it captures Tunggal’s hopelessness, where he is sitting against a banana tree, with his right arm hanging on top of his right knee. His body faces the bleeding ‘body’ of his wife yet his gaze is pathetically cast downward (Ahmad, 1995, p. 26). Tunggal has lost his will, lacking in motivation; he is in a very vulnerable pose, which is evident by how far away his machete is located. In the end, the landscape of banana trees here operates as a place of reflection. Nature here is different from the two previous tales discussed. The images of nature are dark, shadowy and are saturated with supernatural elements. In this tale, the images are light with colours and the banana trees represent the only nature that the tale focuses on. Banana trees do not grow in the wild, as they are a form of cultivation and an economic crop, yet they are still part of nature. This tale suggests that in Bruneian culture, even something that is relatively benign can be inhabited by something terrible. This shows that the relationship between nature and culture is strong because the spirit world inhabits both the wild and cultivated, it also act as the medium between human and nature, as opposed to Western culture, where the wild and the supernatural are together at odds with the ‘civilized’.

![Figure 10: The Banana Heart Princess (1995, p. 26)](image-url)
*Si Ranggau* (1983) is a peculiar tale that revolves around the supernatural powers of nature. The tale starts with a normal husband and wife, but their ordinary lives are disrupted once the husband sets foot in the dense forest. In the illustrations, the forest is presented as a colourful and beautiful landscape; it is alluring, appealing and magnetic. The ground (figure 11) is abundant with luscious green shrubs, while the upper part of the forest is covered with the green leaves of gigantic trees (Tengah, 1983, p. 10). Nature here can be interpreted as abundance due to its light and colours. The illustrations of nature in this tale reflect one attribute of Bruneian Gothic: terrible things can happen anytime, even during the day.

![Figure 11: Si Ranggau (1983, p. 10)](image1)

The amenable atmosphere of the forest lasts only for a moment. The transformation (figure 12) of the husband and his pet dog into monsters reminds the reader that the forest is still a forest and a place that is not fit for humans (Tengah, 1983, p. 16). The forest in this tale is depicted with cheery colourful tones and shades, yet it exists to remind the reader that there is a fine line between the supernatural world and the human world. This thin boundary is still a boundary; that is why Si Ranggau is unable to return home to his family. Bonded by supernatural powers
that are incomprehensible to the human mind, Si Ranggau belongs to the forest (Tengah, 1983, p. 30).

The plot of *The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988) depends on and revolves around the vast sea. The illustrations indicate the sea as vast, boundless and uncontrollable, which corresponds to Burke’s statement that “greatness of dimension is a powerful cause of the sublime” (Burke, 1759, p. 22). The sea is the source of life for the two main characters; a fisherman and his wife. Throughout the tale, the sea is depicted as a space of trials. It is plainly illustrated (figure 13) with a few wavy blue streaks on the white backdrop. Behind this plain façade, the sea is the cause of tribulations. Mischievously, the sea tests the fisherman’s devotion to his wife by clouding his eyes with a bountiful catch, three times (Muhammad, 1988, p. 9).

In spite of that, the sea cannot be simply branded as malicious because it works with supernatural wisdom. It is as if the sea is mocking the frailty of human nature by testing the
fisherman with an uncanny situation, enchanting him with an unusually large catch. The fisherman lives a good life; he has a wife who is expecting a baby, yet his weak human mind cannot comprehend the bounty he already possesses. The sea exposes human fragility through the fisherman but, at the same time encourages the readers not to lose hope in his character. The fisherman fails his first trial but is given two more chances, two more opportunities to redeem himself. Standing true to the weak character of man, the fisherman ruins both his chances. In the end (figure 14), the sea claims his wife, transforming her into a forlorn mermaid (Muhammad, 1988, p. 20). Nature in Bruneian Gothic is active and it understands that life-force is vital to humans. Due to the fisherman’s greed, his wife is punished in order to punish him. The sea snatches his wife’s life-force, mocking the fisherman and always reminding him of his own foolishness; he cannot possibly continue with his occupation, when his wife is now a fish and belongs to the sea.

In *The Kayong People* (1981) the river is the main landscape. Although not dominant in the illustrations, it is nonetheless at the heart of the tale. Located in the middle of the two villages (figure 15), the river is a source of life: the villagers’ way of earning a living and a means of transportation. Aside from these typical reasons, there is one terrifying motive for the Kayong people to live near the river; it is to avoid the disturbance of the living dead. Compared to the contemporary notion of zombies, the zombie of the Kayong people only lives on the night of its death. To avoid misfortune, when a villager dies it is the norm of the family members of the deceased to leave the corpse in their home, flee for the night and take refuge in the middle of the river until daybreak. It is known that the zombie abhors water; thus the river is a place of safety and a refuge from evil.
The landscapes of Brunei as depicted within the tales of the Series are predominantly natural. Nature in the tales is presented as alive and strong, with distinctive characteristics, and it has a role to play in the story. The sea and the ocean are not simply background: they are the deep sea and the vast ocean. The river is sturdy and the forests are thick and intense. The extraordinary quality of nature expresses the tales’ connection to the supernatural, which has a heightened energy beyond the everyday. Nature in the tales is never diseased and it never yields. The tales indicate that nature is where the supernatural is rampant, yet throughout the tales, nature is not simply a landscape. It offers reflections, solutions, solace and refuge, but is also a place where punishment is executed. The tales’ landscape encompasses all of nature, which means that the supernatural entities are everywhere, and are therefore inescapable.

The tales convey insight into Bruneian Gothic, where the supernatural is not limited to nature but also occurs in the private vicinity of the home. In most of the tales, the supernatural phenomenon does not wait for night to occur, as it can easily happen in broad daylight. The Bruneian supernatural permeates all spaces: even the home does not mean safety and security. These tales were not designed for listeners or readers to read at home and feel protected assured that these are only made-up stories. These tales caution the listeners to behave or ‘you can be next’.

A recent tale published within the Series, The Stove Spirit (2008) shows that the supernatural does not only occur in nature, but also within the home. To be precise, it happens in the kitchen where Pak Kadok accidentally summons the Stove Spirit. Here, power and obscurity of the supernatural contribute to the conjuring of the sublime. Pak Kadok is aware that he accidentally summons a supernatural entity, but already enamoured by her beauty, insists on marrying her, unknowingly subjecting himself and his family under a mysterious supernatural power. As the tale progresses in the vicinity of Pak Kadok’s home, the unnatural union between a human and a spirit proves to be momentary and is bound to end (figure 16). As expected, this uncanny union ends in the place where it begins: the home.
Interestingly, this tale has a secondary landscape: the water village. The traditional water village of Brunei was the largest in Asia, and so astounding that a European visitor dubbed it the ‘Venice of the East’. However, the water village’s binary form of houses on water suggests the uncanny, simply because houses are usually associated with land. The water village is estimated to be about 600 years old (Yunos, 2011); this long existence also contributes to its uncanniness. The water village has its own share of supernatural occurrences, and The Stove Spirit (2008) is one of them.

Compared, with Bruneian Gothic landscapes, Western Gothic’s typical settings are of the sinister castle and the corrupted monastery. Nature is usually a momentary scene or a background. Nature is often associated with the primitive, a space where laws deteriorate, an asylum for thieves and thugs (Botting, 1996, p. 44). However, in the tales of the Series nature remains constant and dominant. The tales value the primordial space, understood to be untouched and preserved, a nature without human interference. Untouched nature is in its highest form there; it is a space that conducive to the sublime, generating the highest degree of passion (astonishment) to the lowest (admiration, reverence and respect) (Burke, 1759, p. 16), thus, a space of wisdom that is beyond human knowledge. If disrespect is shown, there will be no order; there will be an imbalance in nature, as what happens in the Vengeance of the Forest Spirit. Nature in the Series is presented how Bruneians perceive it and is never exaggerated.

Pastoral nature in the Western tradition do not focus on nature instead, “human presence is still paramount, and nature speaks of its inhabitants” (Glickman, 1998, p. 4), whereas, pastoral nature in Bruneian scene can be said as non-existent because there was never a need for it.
Gothic Motifs in the tales of the Series

A common generator of a Western Gothic story is the flawed family, with one failed family member who heedlessly subjects his/her family to the Gothic experience (for instance, Mary Shelley’s Victor Frankenstein). The tales in the Series contest this Gothic Western formula. At the beginning of the tales, the family is a harmonious unit. This is the case in *Si Ranggau* (1983) *The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988) and *Radin’s Poisonous Well*. Even if the happy family image is not directly stated, it is implied, which is the case in *The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit*. In intense tales which have extreme supernatural intervention, such as *Married to Barbalan* (1981), *The Banana Heart Princess* (1995) and *The Stove Spirit* (2008), the family is allowed to enjoy happy moments, although only briefly. Certainly, the depictions of happy families in the tales reflect traditional Bruneians’ values of how families are important. Significantly, this also reflects the strong belief by traditional Bruneians in the powers of the supernatural; anyone can become victims of supernatural interference and this does not exclude happy families.

A unique persistent pattern in the tales is the role of the elders. More often than not, in the face of the supernatural, the bewildered main character is always seen seeking counsel from an elder (Ahmad, 1995, p. 16; Ali, 2008, p. 8; Saifudin, 1981a, p. 12). The elders in the tales are crucial ciphers in identifying supernatural occurrences. They infuse a safe environment filled with respect and understanding; even the youth suffering from a supernatural intrusion comfortably confides in the elder’s wisdom. In *The Banana Heart Princess* (1995), it is through the elderly man’s guidance that Tunggal exposes the true nature of his wife. The elderly in Bruneian communities are treated with the utmost respect. Their voices are guidance, their counsel is true and their premonition is a concern.

Although the elders bestow insights into supernatural occurrences, it is only partially relayed so as to ensure the inexplicability of the supernatural existence. The supernatural is something that is accepted and expected in Bruneian societies. Almost every taboo is associated with the supernatural world of ghosts and spirits. Yet, there is still a barrier that exists in order to prevent the full understanding of supernatural occurrences. This barrier is what makes the supernatural existence in Brunei alive. It consists of ambiguity and doubt, which reminds the characters that there will always be things outside human knowledge and power, rendering a stasis between knowing and ignorance about the existence of the supernatural.
The supernatural as an overriding motif in the tales often manifests in conventional places. Traditional Bruneians are accustomed to natural places in their livelihoods as hunters, gatherers and fishermen. The tales emphasize the importance of these natural spaces, when almost all of the tales’ climaxes occur in the natural landscape. Truth is more often revealed in the space of nature. In the tales, everywhere is uncanny, the familiar can easily transform into the unfamiliar. There is no place that the supernatural cannot invade; even the home is not safe. Under the pretence of security and refuge, in some of the tales, the home is where ghostly goings-on occur, such as the case of Kulop and Tunggal.

The tales recognize human limits, illustrating weaknesses in the main characters. Interestingly, the erring individuals in tales are not conniving thieves, ruthless rapists or depraved religious heads, but have merely offended by disobeying elders. In Bruneian societies, this is the most fundamental rule that should not be desecrated. Most of the tales reflect this Bruneian value, showing characters such as Kulop who forgets his origins, Tunggal, who forgets the elders’ order, the Elf Princess, who ignores the warning of her older benefactor and the arrogant merchants, who have disbelief in the Kayong elders’ reports. The only crimes these characters are guilty of are either forgetfulness or scepticism. Honest mistakes are not allowed. As a sentence to these basic human flaws, the supernatural intervenes, which usually involves the temporary breaching of life-force, such as the case of Kulop and Tunggal; the latter is particularly plagued with perpetual trauma. There are also instances where characters’ life-forces are stolen, as in the cases of Si Ranggau, the Mermaid and the Giant.

As is the norm with any Gothic tale, these are saturated with spirits and supernatural entities. They range from benevolent to malicious spirits. There is also an instance where a kind spirit is driven to be malevolent, as is the case of the Forest Spirit. There are also instances where human characters become supernatural entities, such as the Mermaid and the Giant. Interestingly, there is also a circumstance where the supernatural entity becomes human (The Stove Spirit). The tales often present the spirits as living creatures that exist on the same plane as humans. They are depicted in their natural spaces; in the forest (the Forest Spirit, Si Ranggau, the Giant), the sea (the Mermaid), the river (the Kalindahau), they usually tend to their own affairs. They are not violent unless provoked. The more parasitical ones, the Barbalan ghosts and the Banana Heart Princess, haunt those who forget the elders’ warning. Compared to Kulop’s deliberate disregard of his origins, Tunggal’s error is an honest one as he is distracted because of
his wounded finger; nevertheless, he still forgets. Thus, retribution is due. The spirits here serve as a tool of punishment to those who desecrate the elders’ rules.

The tales’ Gothic motifs reflect traditional Bruneians values. The highest of these values is to respect and obey the elders. If these values are ignored, then unexplainable events will happen. Yet, these inexplicable occurrences can be solved by the help and wisdom of the elders. The haunting spirits or supernatural entities are not a form of the repressed. Instead, they are statements in favour of the elders’ superiority. They are there to communicate the elders’ instructions and beliefs, and these beliefs include the sanctity of nature. The elders are guardians of nature. As custodians, they protect nature through their rules and instructions on etiquette, such as: before entering the forest, in finding an appropriate place to relieve yourself while you are in the forest, minding your behaviour, voices should keep low out of respect, never destroy any plant life unnecessarily. This in fact has a double function: while teaching youngsters to respect nature, Bruneian elders are also teaching them to respect their elders. Thus, the act of disrespect is seen as the uncanny and as a transgression.

The characters that are inflicted with supernatural tribulations, such as Kulop, Tunggal and the merchants, are shown to have deserved it. It is their ignorance that ‘invited’ the spirits and supernatural entities. Kulop unwittingly marries the Barbalan women, inviting them to his house, thus allowing them to destroy his life. Similarly, Tunggal is weak in front of the beautiful Banana Princess; at first, he feels uncertain, yet he gives in to her persuasiveness. He invites her to his home, easily allowing her to carry out her horrifying plan. The spirits and supernatural entities in the tales wreak havoc because they are permitted to breach the rules by human weakness.

The tales show the Bruneian psyche; the belief in the supernatural was a vital part of the lives of traditional Bruneians. In the lives of modern Bruneians, this belief is more concealed, yet still present and may spring up at any moment. Traditionally produced, the motifs of Bruneian Gothic present several differences from its Western counterpart. Bruneian Gothic does not exempt anyone from the supernatural experience; it does not offer the security to listeners or readers that these stories are just stories. Living in an environment, where traditions are filled with supernatural interjections, Bruneians are automatically subjected to believe: to believe that happy families are just as much a target of the supernatural as a flawed family, and to believe that the elders are a source of solution in the face of the supernatural, to accept that
supernatural beings live among us, in nature and even in our homes, and to think and trust that someone inflicted with supernatural attacks usually deserves it, either because of their rash behaviour or their ignorance.

Reading these tales from the perspective of the Gothic demonstrates their contemporary and future relevance. These printed oral narratives provide a profound traditional, cultural and literary expression of traditional culture, which might otherwise be forgotten. Recognising them as belonging to the Gothic mode may provide a means of salvation for these tales. Their difference from their Western counterparts only proves how the Gothic as a fluid mode prevalent in all cultures, can manifest in a totally different space and time. Bruneian Gothic may lack enticing dungeons, labyrinthine alleys and towering dark castles, but it replaces these with lush forests, penetrable homes and, perhaps most significantly, a daytime that is susceptible to terror.

**Bruneian version of the Grotesque**

The discussion of the Bruneian Gothic can be examined further with reference to the Grotesque, which is an important theme of the Gothic. In particular, the Grotesque alerts us to the story-telling aspect of the Series. Not just folk tales, they are also narratives in which meaning is conveyed partly through tropes of intensification and distortion. For instance in *Si Ranggau* (1983), the story describes vividly the husband’s physical change into Si Ranggau, a type of forest monster: “he had turned into a strange human being. His body was covered with fur, his teeth became larger and he was only clothed with a red loincloth” (Tengah, 1983, p. 17). These types of descriptions in the tales remind the readers that they used to exist as exciting and scary oral narratives which had the purpose of entertainment, along with instructions to the listener for how to protect against threat. The aspect of the Grotesque here is also important because it deciphers and shares traditional Bruneians’ understanding of the world through the visceral elements of the tales, the bodily violations, physical changes, corporeal embodiment, demonic attack and spiritual possessions. Through the transcriptions of the stories, with their graphic illustrations, the tales vividly display the power of the monstrous through the eyes of traditional Bruneians. This sense of the monstrous undeniably stays in the consciousness of today’s Bruneians. The Bruneian Grotesque does not necessarily possess detestable facial features, although some do. There are entities that appear beautiful on the exterior, but are menacing characters, while there are entities that have the best of manners yet are physically hideous.
Through these depictions, the tales can be said to bring into question the boundaries between human and non-human worlds.

By examining Lovecraft’s creatures in ‘The Dunwich Horror’ (1929), Hurley describes the grotesque as creatures that “violate categories […] breaking down the distinction between human and inhuman, human and animal” (Hurley in Spooner and McEvoy, Spooner & McEvoy, 2007, p. 137). As Cornwell defines the grotesque “in literature it often involves freakish appearance or behaviour” (Cornwell in Mulvey-Roberts, 2009, p. 175). These observations on the grotesque are indeed accurate; however, Bakhtin’s description truly captures the essence of grotesque characters in the *Series*: “the essential principle of grotesque realism is degradation, that is, the lowering of all that is high, spiritual, ideal, abstract; it is a transfer to the material level, to the sphere of earth and body in their indissoluble unity” (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 19-20). These grotesque characters that will be mentioned below are debased either isolated permanently or by death.

**Vampiric Spirits**

The blood-sucking vampire of Brunei differs vastly from the iconic Western vampire, exemplified by Dracula, who is seemingly refined in manners and well-dressed. Bruneian vampires, however, share Dracula’s debauched characteristics. They are similarly deceitful and are deviant opportunists. Bruneian vampires in the tales (*Married to Barbalan* (1981) and *The Banana Heart Princess* (1995)) are exclusively women; stories of male vampires are unheard of in Bruneian communities. The Barbalan women are hideous in their true form. They are flying heads with bloody entrails, with their faces showing violent expressions often of hunger pangs. They are creatures of the night (Figure 9), flying swiftly with long dishevelled hair in search of their victims.
The Banana Heart Princess, on the other hand, is depicted as a beautiful young lady who is graceful and polite. She is a nocturnal creature, only appearing at night as an attractive woman. Nobody knows her true form. Although still in her human form, the most sickening image of the Banana Heart Princess is when she is feeding on the blood of her husband (figure 18). Her arched back, dishevelled hair, intense gaze and puckered lips shows she is hungry for blood (Ahmad, 1995, p. 20).

Jinn

Among all supernatural entities, Bruneians believe most in the existence of the Jinn kind. In Malek Sulaiman 2 (1990), the illustrations show a couple Jinn of a husband and a wife. Bearing little similarity to humans (figure 19), the pair looks revolting. They have sharp horns in the
middle of their foreheads, pointy long ears, long sharp finger-nails, and abnormal, menacing spikes protruding from their elbows. Their dishevelled hair and hairiness suggests their wild demeanour, and their green skin colour denotes them as Jinn. Their body shape is muscular and sturdy, showing their strength. Their protruding stomachs show their gluttonous nature.

Kalindahau

In *The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost* (1990), the Kalindahau ghost is an aggravating spirit who likes to disturb people’s fish traps and eat from them. Its physical characteristics are similar to an orang utan like-creature, although larger (figure 20). Two features that differentiate it from an orang utan are its long golden-brown hair which covers part of its face and protruding sharp spikes that are visible from its elbows (Rahman, 1990, p. 14). Kalindahau is a well-known spirit among Bruneian societies who fancies hiding little children under her long withered breasts. Due to this tendency of hiding children, she is forever linked to the game of hide and seek (Hassan, 2001, pp. 32, 34 & 35).
The living dead

The stories about the living dead are not as widespread as the Barbalan women and Kalindahau. According to the tale, *The Kayong People* (1980), the practice of abandoning the dead was common among a particular Bruneian community called the Kayong people. On the night of their death, the deceased will gain temporary life, not as their former being, but as a brainless zombie that desires to kill.

This tale’s credibility is supported by Tingkong, who states that traditional Bruneians used to leave their settlements when there was a death. He explains that traditionally, death in a community is a bad omen. They believed that the souls of the recently departed still lingered on and could spread ill fortune, particularly of death. They also believed that malevolent spirits gathered in the place where a person was on the verge of death. For this reason, the place was no longer suitable for humans and must be abandoned (Tingkong, 2009, p. 77). This traditional Bruneian pagan belief about shifting quarters was also practiced among aboriginal groups in the Malay Peninsula. Evans (1923) states that this custom was carried out under the “belie[f] that a ghost lingers near at hand for seven days” (Evans, 1923, p. 141).

Cursed supernatural entities

There are also instances in some of the tales where humans are cursed into supernatural entities. The Giant is cursed living in the forest due to his greed. Yet, the supernatural curse works randomly; it is not selective in the choice of its victims. In fact, the curse is extended to anyone; Si Ranggau is formerly a loving husband and father-to-be, yet under mysterious circumstances he transforms into a forest spirit. The tale does not describe or imply what is his fault. He does not commit any wrong-doings, but is cursed (Tengah, 1983, p. 17). Another unlikely victim of the supernatural curse is the Mermaid. Her absent-minded husband should have been cursed, but is spared, while she is left to suffer as a lonely mermaid (Muhammad, 1988, p. 23).

Tutelary Spirits

Guardian spirits are known to be benevolent creatures unless provoked. This is the case of the Forest Spirit, a fair and wise guardian driven by the lust of vengeance. The Forest Spirit is a
shape-shifter who can change into a human form. Contrary to his benevolent nature, he can easily be mistaken as an evil entity because his frightening true physical form resembles a devil.

Si Ranggau is also considered a guardian spirit of the deep forest who will respond when invoked, which is similar with the Stove Spirit, a type of elf who could be invoked just by whistling.

The existence of guardian spirits was greatly emphasized in traditional Bruneian societies. Elders constantly warned and reminded people to avoid places with tutelary spirits, or at the least refrain oneself from desecrating the places. Places which are famous for their tutelary spirits are usually the dense forest, trees, rivers, oceans and paddy fields (Tingkong, 2009, p. 6). The matter of tutelary spirits is of high importance amongst traditional Bruneians. Those people who want to inhabit or grow paddy fields in an area known to have a guardian will be strongly opposed. For fear of the spreading of bad luck, they will eventually be cut off from the rest of the community. This is because tutelary spirits will not just harass the offender but the whole community (Tingkong, 2009, p. 9).

Tingkong explains that Bruneian Malays are finicky about sacred places such as old graves, deserted lakes or rivers and ancient trees. These are the places where one must be cautious and keep good behaviour, be polite, respectful and graceful. Otherwise, it is feared that rash actions could easily offend the spirits who reside there, which then leads to attacks.

In the Series, the Grotesque is expressed both in the stories and the images. The Grotesque creatures in the tales are beings of natural places such as the forest or the jungle. They are depicted as beings that have their own lives and have their own activities. It is only when their lives are disrupted that they retaliate, for example in the case of the Forest Spirit and the Kalindahau Ghost. When the Grotesque invades the home or the private space, it is usually caused by human follies. The tales present the Bruneian Grotesque as living creatures, who have their own space: a space that demands respect in order to maintain peace and harmony and a balance between the human and the non-human worlds.

**Gothic Realities of Modern Bruneians**

In contemporary Bruneian society, superstitious oral narratives and spiritual or supernatural séances (such as the ‘Ghostly Ritual’) that involves invoking and worshipping supernatural
entities are no longer overtly practiced, existing now only on paper. This is because Brunei is an Islamic country that believes in monotheism. The past decade has shown Brunei’s effort in strengthening the Islamic identity of the country as ‘Negara Zikir’ (a country that is in full remembrance of God) (H.N., 2014). Brunei’s dedication in fortifying Islamic beliefs is further shown in its decision to enforce the Syariah Penal Code Order in 2013 ("Brunei Laksana Kanun Jenayah Syariah Semalam 23/10/2013," 2013). Due to this, Brunei has garnered much attention from international observers (Muller, 2015, p. 313). Perhaps, the step Brunei is taking towards a more Islamic government is puzzling to the outside world, especially in a context where global Islamaphobia is on the rise. Therefore, it is important to emphasize here, that Brunei embraced Islam as its religion since 653 years ago (Jukim, 2014, p. 55 & 84), thus Syariah Law is not something new as it existed side by side with the Brunei government since the sixteenth century (Muller, 2015, p. 321). The advent of Islam undeniably influenced and changed the lives of early Bruneians. Jukim explains that it is possibly due to this that mythical tales that portray gods, goddesses and powerful entities are difficult to find in Brunei (Jukim, 2014, p. 83 & 90). Whatever challenges the oneness of God is forbidden in Islam. However, oral tales which exhibit ghosts and spirits persist throughout the centuries because Islam acknowledges the existence of the unseen world (Muller, 2015, p. 334), and perhaps this explains why Bruneians have never lost that supernatural sensitivity.

This supernatural sensitivity perseveres throughout the centuries guarded by different cultural casing appropriate to each period. Jukim outlines that there are four stages of evolution of Bruneian tradition: oral tradition, writing tradition, publication tradition and now, cyber tradition (Jukim, 2014, p. 142). Even though, tales with Gothic characteristics seems to be unfavourable in the publication tradition, tales of the supernatural are still actively being exchanged on social media platforms such as Facebook. Such popular page is called Mode Seram, started in 2010, it literally translates into horror mode. Posts on this page are authored by different people, articulating and sharing their personal supernatural experience, most often of spirits or ghosts imparted by traditional oral folklore and occurrences related to traditional taboos.

One common narrative is that of a modern Bruneian living a hectic life in pursuit of worldly success. A rational person, never allowing foolish fancies to infiltrate the corners of his mind suddenly is faced with a mysterious illness that cannot be cured by modern medicine. This dazed
modern Bruneian becomes confused when his numerous medical tests come out showing him as a healthy man. It is at this crucial time, when the greatness of contemporary medicine falters that this modern Bruneian will then opt for the ‘traditional’ option, and the *bomoh* (medicine man) is sought for an explanation. In the smoky surrounding which is produced from coal burning on top of a bronze dish, next to a bowl of freshly cut limes and a clutch of wild herbs and flowers, the *bomoh* (medicine man) will then reveal to the supernatural sufferer that a black magic has befallen him, or he has earned the anger of a malevolent spirit. Newly awakened from his worldly delusion, the sufferer now permits a space for the supernatural in his mind: a story that Bruneians know too well. Up to the 1980s Bruneians were openly practicing supernatural and mystical events with the main purpose of healing, as described earlier in the beginning of this chapter. Medicine men and women were still active in the traditional medicine fields in the 1980s. Even today, there are some elderly people who prefer traditional medicine over modern hospital treatment (Tingkong, 2009, pp. 22-23).

Due to the difficulty in finding a legitimate account of a Bruneian *bomoh* encounter, Shaw’s (1976) detailed account of a black magic synopsis in Malaysia can substantiate the occurrences of confidential meetings with a *bomoh*. Tingkong states that the customs, beliefs and practices of Bruneians, predominantly Malays are very similar to those of Peninsular Malaysia (Tingkong, 2009, p. 31):

The case to be described concerns a young Malay, living in a village in the west coast state of Selangor, who had for some time been suffering from general debility combined with prolonged fits of coughing and difficulty in breathing. According to his own testimony he had undergone several medical examinations, in none of which any organic cause had been disclosed. Then one day, during a particularly severe attack of coughing, he vomited a worm about 8 inches long. This was said by Malay witnesses to have been a black magic worm [...] They called a white magician to confirm their diagnosis by occult means and to determine by whom and in what manner the spell had been set [...] An incense-burner [...] a tray was brought in, upon which were laid out: - one banana, one egg, one lime fruit
a saucer containing the petals of three different kinds of flowers [...] Incense was then thrown upon the glowing charcoal in the incense-burner and the bomoh, while gazing into the smoke and silently intoning a series of incantations, began tapping with his fingers upon the earthenware pot in order to summon the three Jinn.” (Evans, 1923, pp. 54-55)

Due to the implementation of the Shariah Law, bomoh practice is forbidden as it involves blasphemous act, but, this does not eliminate the existence of bomoh. It is estimated that there are still hundreds of bomoh in Brunei but 70-80 percent are foreigners, mostly from neighbouring countries, Malaysia and Indonesia, the remaining number are local and elderly (Muller, 2015, p. 333). This shows that the belief in the supernatural is still strong in Brunei contemporary societies. Muller states that bomoh still persists and maintain their existence despite under scrutiny, “many Bruneians admit to personally knowing a bomoh” (Muller, 2015, p. 333). Partly due to this supernatural conviction, the government aspired for “ideological engineering and faith control” (Muller, 2015, p. 314). Thus, in line with Islamic teaching, Darusysyifa’ Warrafaahah, a medicinal and Islamic welfare association was established in 2007. The formation was highly influenced by an Islamic healing centre based in Malaysia, founded by the late Haron Din, a prominent Islamic figure (Muller, 2015, p. 337). This centre is especially for those who suffer supernatural disturbances. Now, Darusysyifa Islamic healers are mostly sought after replacing centuries old, traditional bomoh. The outstanding status of Darusysyifa healers is proven when government associations become their regular patrons. For instance, Darusysyifa has carried out Islamic purification service at well-known haunted buildings namely, the Ministry of Defence, University of Brunei Darussalam and the public hospital. In fact, it was Darusysyifa’s personnel who took care the mass hysteria of 2014 (Muller, 2015, p. 340).

Aside from accounts of personal supernatural experience, there are instances where the public as a whole has evidently experienced supernatural subjection. In today’s Bruneian societies, psychic communal events are no longer held. However, a different form of the supernatural occurs sporadically: mass hysteria. This is when the supernatural disrupts modern realities. Amidst this supernatural threat, contemporary Bruneians were, in Bhabha’s words, temporarily “unhomed” and “displaced”. Bhabha explains this sudden and surreal blurring of the home and the world as a mystifying experience:
The negating activity is, indeed, the intervention of the ‘beyond’
that establishes a boundary: a bridge, where ‘presencing’ begins
because it captures something of the estranging sense of the
relocation of the home and the world – the unhomeliness – that
is the condition of extra-territorial and cross-cultural initiations.
To be unhomed is not to be homeless, nor can the ‘unhomely’
be easily accommodated in that familiar division of social life
into private and public spheres. The unhomely moment creeps
up on you stealthily as your own shadow [...] The recesses of the
domestic space becomes sites for history’s most intricate
invasions. In that displacement, the borders between home and
world become confused; and, uncannily, the private and the
public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that
is as divided as it is disorienting. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 9)

In the Bruneian scene, mass hysteria acts as a bridge which connects the past with the present.
It “creeps up” unexpectedly and reminds the contemporary Bruneians of the archaic past.
Possession by spirits is not a new phenomenon in Brunei, which explains the certain amount of
acceptance of the inevitability of spirit possession. Traditional Bruneians, especially masters of
ceremony of the ‘Ghostly Rituals’ and ‘Tak Bamban’, were accustomed to spirit possessions.
However, spirit possessions in this modern time are more insidious because they are not invited,
whereas in earlier times, the master of ceremony would open himself up to possession for ritual
purposes. In more recent stories of possession, these menacing spirits are usually said to attack
school children and even teachers. When collective spirit possession occurs in one school, very
soon news about violent spirit possession is relayed from other schools, which are ironically in a
different district. These incidents will trigger a chain of other spirit possession incidents in other
schools within the country.

A major ‘mass hysteria’ incident occurred in 2005 in an all-girls secondary school in the capital,
Bandar Seri Begawan (Citation of discussion forum, Projection, 2005). The pandemonium was
intensified by the rapid widespread footage of what had happened in the school. Videos of
possessed students were quickly shared through Bluetooth or other forms of media-sharing and the public was forced to experience this Gothic phenomenon. Social media plays its role in intensifying this ghostly phenomenon in terms of the ease of access of communication. To an extent, social media is the source of the ghosts and the spirits in modern Brunei. Up to this day, these videos are still being shared on social media such as Youtube, which undeniably shows the presence of a vibrant cultural manifestation (Wong, 2006). To face this kind of supernatural occurrence in this modern time seemed absurd, yet it occurred. The atmosphere in the community was tense. Parents were apprehensive to let their children go to school, and were constantly worried their schools would be the next target of these malevolent spirits.

At this time, the intense topic of spirit possessions dominated most conversations, and newspapers were sold out so people could keep track of these mysterious occurrences. Arguably, the curious public was more interested in the past than the present. They questioned what triggered these large-scale spirit possessions in the first place. In response to the upscale terror created by the spirits. The State Mufti of Brunei produced a book called Possessed! Its treatment and Prevention (2008). This book was first published in 2005 in the Malay Language; printed five times, it became the bestseller in the nation and abroad (Juned, 2008, p. ix).

In the new revised book, the State Mufti gives details on how the spirits were invoked, and “[i]t was said that the whole episode started when someone used old coins to summon the Jinn in order to know the questions in the coming examination. The method of invocation involved smearing the coins with blood” (Juned, 2008, p. 15). The Mufti also mentions that spirit possession occurs every day, whether day or night, and although it is common, these occurrence are not always recorded or reported by the media (Juned, 2008, p. xiii).

Bruneian belief in the supernatural is strong enough, even now, that if an outbreak of mass hysteria occurs, the public would assume that these disturbances are of the Jinn kind. A local online newspaper dated April, 26, 2014 demonstrates how serious Bruneians are when it comes to the matter of the supernatural. The Ministry of Education closed the affected school and urged both students and teachers to always be on constant alert “in case of another hysterical outbreak of evil” (BruDirect.com, 2014). This is unique in Bruneian communities, whereby psychological pressure is acknowledged but taken rather lightly in favour of supernatural reasons.
This example of a recent supernatural event shows how Bruneians are still in touch with the Gothic past of their ancestors. The most Gothic aspect of the phenomenon is perhaps the uncanny way in which an alleged spirit possession stirs up the public when it is least expected, forcing them to experience uncertain things. When the public almost reaches the point of believing, it will then quickly fade from the public scene for a while, waiting for the right time to remind them about the existence of the supernatural, and that they are haunted beings, proving that traditional culture is still inherent and alive.

Conclusion

Punter’s statement about the function of Gothic mode precisely describes its connection with the Bruneian scene:

A particular attitude towards the recapture of history; a particular kind of literary style; a version of self-conscious unreality; a mode of revealing the unconscious; connections with the primitive, the barbaric, the tabooed [...] and our present apprehension of the term is usually an uneasy concatenation of them, in which there is a complicated interplay of direct historical connections and ever variable metaphor. (Punter, 1996, p. 4)

The Gothic attitude of the tales discussed in this chapter evokes the ancient world of Brunei, a time when oral literature was rife, where narratives were invented as deterrents, a mode that was designed to protect the elders’ position, but at the same time reveals their anxieties. Contemporary society’s ambivalent connection with the world of the supernatural still preserves a sense of this mystical relationship, and our present uneasiness proves Gothic power of belief, as expressed through culture in a different metaphor; mass hysteria.

Gothic mode provides a re-expression of Brunei’s evolving tradition: it allows the exploration of Bruneian past and recognizes the lingering presence of this past in the present fabric of culture. Bruneian Gothic is a valid avenue of inquiry as it provides new reflections and perspectives on local traditional culture. The gothic mode has long been in existence and used as a vehicle for acculturation, which compel its practices and ideas worthy of being re-staged and celebrated.
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CHAPTER 6

POSTCOLONIALISM AND THE SERIES OF BRUNEI FOLKLORE

INTRODUCTION

Thus far, this thesis has attempted to understand the Series of Bruneian Folklore in restaging the past by recognizing the ‘interstitial’ spaces and reclaiming past tradition as part of contemporary Bruneian culture. There is a need now to go a step further and employ the Series to retrieve repressed history. To an extent, the Series’ current format as Western Children’s Literature proves this is subdued history. Subsequent to restaging and reclaiming of the past is the need to reconstruct how the Series should be viewed. Liberated from its antiquated perception, the Series can be considered as part of Bruneian history, a reflection of Bruneian identity that is still relevant and applicable in Brunei.

Bhabha’s discussion about transcendent identity is significant in relation to the Series:

Difference is neither One nor the Other but something else besides. In-between- find their agency in a form of the ‘future’ where the past is not originary, where the present is not simply transitory. It is [...] an interstitial future, that emerges in-between the claims of the past and the needs of the present.

(Bhabha, 1994, p. 219)

The Series is this “agency”, a valuable source and informant which validates the Bruneian past, survives in the present only to authenticate the future. Considering the Series as part of the Bruneian future is an act of stripping off its negative connotation as antiquated material. Bhabha’s reference to Forrester regarding the categorization of temporality, again is appropriate on the topic of the Series, highlighting “a transferential function, whereby the past dissolves in the present, so that the future becomes (once again) an open question, instead of being specified by the fixity of the past” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 219). Thus, this chapter aims to retrieve the repressed colonial past of Brunei and link it back to two specific tales of the Series, The Kayong People (1981) and The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit (n.d.), exploring how these two tales foreground the matter of colonialization.
BRUNEI’S COLONIAL PAST

The twenty first century has witnessed Brunei Darussalam’s rise to economic glory due to its active production of oil and gas. A small but wealthy country, Brunei is currently implementing its national vision towards the year 2035 which covers every facet of life ("Brunei Darussalam Millennium Development Goals and Beyond: Revisited," 2010, pp. 3-4). This pursuit of modern advancement seems to have consigned Brunei’s dark colonial past to oblivion. For a non-native, a colonial history is inconspicuous; in the case of Brunei the veil drawn over the past is especially intensified by the way that the country is now savouring its economic achievement. In fact, even for average Bruneians, Brunei’s colonial history barely crosses their minds. The colonial topic is indeed a sensitive one. Whenever it is discussed spontaneously or formally taught as a historical subject, more often than not, it is treated as a bad dream, a nightmare that is preferred to be left in the past. Nevertheless, it is a topic that should be explored because the past is part of our identity; it is a way of making sense of ourselves.

Long before colonization, Brunei enjoyed a peaceful period and at that time earned the name ‘Darussalam’ which means city of peace (Al-Sufri, 2000, p. 20). Brunei enjoyed its golden era in the fifteenth century: it was a powerful kingdom ruled by an ambitious and dexterous ruler, Sultan Bolkiah who had sovereignty not just in Borneo, but also the Southern Philippines (Al-Sufri, 2000, p. 21). The earliest recorded Western visit to Brunei was in the early sixteenth century. These early visitors were the Spaniards, the Portuguese and the Dutch. But, it was only in the nineteenth century that Western powers (Portuguese, Spanish, Dutch, American, German and British) showed their interests in Borneo to compete for colonial domination (Hussainmiya, 2006, p. 4).

The first aggressive foreign invasion of Brunei was by the Spanish in 1578, based on an excuse to wipe out piracy (Yunos, 2011). Eventually, the truth of this invasion was exposed when it became known that two Bruneian noblemen were aiding the Spanish. One of the noblemen, Pengiran Seri Lela enticed the Spanish with a tempting offer of Brunei as a tributary state if they agree to conquer Brunei and appoint him as the sultan (Al-Sufri, 2002, p. 23). Histories of Brunei attest that it was this mistake of over dependency on foreign aid that led to the subsequent disintegration of Brunei, at one time, even to the dangerous point of extinction.
Brunei’s next fateful encounter with a foreign power was rather ironic. In 1774, the British took refuge in Brunei against Sulu’s encroachment (a band of pirates from Southern Philippines). The Sultan, who suffered similar Sulu threats, sympathized with the British and welcomed them. The Sultan’s generosity went so far as offering the British an opportunity to set up base in Brunei and presenting Labuan, a valuable Bruneian territory, in exchange for British protection against external threats. Seeing no economic benefits, the British rejected the offer (Hussainmiya, 2006, p. 4), but a century after, they would come to realize that Brunei was indeed a treasure trove. The British established a strong foothold in Brunei in the 1880s, they were there to stay, leaving Brunei regretful of its generosity. While other Britain’s Southeast Asian colonies enjoyed early independence (Burma in 1948 and Malaysia in 1957), Brunei only achieved independence in 1984.

Throughout British rule and protection all executive powers were handled by the colonizers. The Sultan was only responsible for customs and religion. The most painful memory of Brunei’s colonial past was when Brunei’s territories were dismantled mercilessly by James Brooke (a colonial tyrant who appointed himself as the White King), and the British North Borneo Company leaving the indisposed Sultan helpless in the midst of bankruptcy and foreign conspiracies. The Sultan realized that the British Government did not care whether or not Brunei existed. The dejected Sultan, betrayed by his so-called protector, lamented in a letter to King Edward VII in 1902:

> From the day I set my hand to the Treaty Protection [17 September 1888], I have not once received assistance or protection from Your Majesty’s Government and I beg, with all deference, for your Majesty’s help. Not a single Consul has done anything to help strengthen my country. They all seem to help Sarawak and to try to hand over my country to Sarawak. (Hussainmiya, 2006, p. 15)
In their era, the British assumed the role of colonialists who usurped native lands and were unsympathetic to the local people. Yet, this century of British rule seemed benign compared to the three and a half years under Japanese occupation (16th December 1941 until November 1944). The Japanese ‘iron fist’ administration completed Brunei’s colonial experience. Unlike the British, the Japanese disrupted Bruneian customs by the implementation of Nipponisation, whereby every Bruneian had to learn the Japanese language and memorize the Japanese national anthem. The Japanese currency was introduced and youth programs to instil Japanese values were set up. It was an ironic twist; the original aim of the Japanese was to free Asian countries from the greedy clutches of Western colonizers, but in the end, they themselves became the most hated colonizers in Brunei (C. M. B. Darussalam).

COLONIALISM AND ITS EFFECTS

It is often emphasized in Brunei’s history books that Bruneian customs and traditions did not suffer many changes during the colonial period (Hussainmiya, 2006, p. 63 & 64), even treaties made by the British stated that they would not interfere in Brunei traditions, customs and religions. Historian Hussainmiya describes this relationship between the British residents and the Sultans of Brunei as rather peculiar: “[t]he British Resident and his staff on the one side, and the Sultan and local chiefs on the other side – were shackled together by idiosyncrasies of imperialism. [...] Hence, side by side with the Western structure of economic and administrative growth, the form and substance of the pre-Residential Brunei continued largely unchanged, resulting in minimal dislocation to traditional life” (Hussainmiya, 2006, p. 64). In reality this was not the case. Although there were no immediate changes in the traditional lives of Bruneians soon after colonization, disruption of traditional life was still evident especially in terms of Bruneian values. It was through colonialism that European ideas such as the industrial revolution and capitalism were introduced (Knight & Heazle, 2011, p. 179). This could be seen when Brunei’s bureaucratic government was advancing under the British rule. As there was no space for the uneducated locals, eager Malays were disappointed by missing the opportunity to take part in the new administration led by the British (Hussainmiya, 2006, p. 64 & 65); “as educational levels in the country did not improve much, the lower levels in the bureaucratic service that needed to be conducted in English was largely filled by outsiders” (Hussainmiya, 2006, p. 64). This disappointment shows that Western materialistic and competitive values had
started to seep into the mindset of the locals. As opposed to this inconspicuous change, there were two visible changes resulting from colonialism: the extinction of the 500 years of tradition of the famous local women vendors of the Brunei River and the near elimination of a 500 year old oral tradition that became confined in children’s books called the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*.

The advent of colonialism brought its inevitable by-product: globalism. Traditional Bruneians who used to live in the familiar confinements of their villages were awakened by a new and foreign mentality, a broader consciousness that represented them as “lesser: less human, less civilized, as child or savage, wild man, animal, or heedless mass” (Boehmer, 1995, p. 79). The world of traditional Bruneians that was filled with supernatural reasoning and mystical interpretations of life was gradually deteriorating in the face of Western values. Theorists, Knight and Heazle neatly summarize the unavoidable permeation of traditional colonial societies by a foreign consciousness:

> Ways of living altered as the external world progressively intruded; with it came a changed consciousness. No longer was the world limited to the village or township, for the boundaries that had defined the geography of local community were now breached and the certainties of traditional existence challenged. This made possible a shift to a spatial vision in which one’s place and community were linked to other places, both near and far, and in which for the first time the world could be imagined as a whole. Imagining the world in turn suggested the possibility of being part of it, interacting with it, being mobile in it, learning about it and, importantly, adapting aspects of it into local cultures. (Knight & Heazle, 2011, p. 179)

The traditional Bruneian world which depended on oral narrative to transmit values, rules and regulations disappeared with rising literacy rates (Rahman, 1990, Director’s Foreword). In postcolonial Brunei, traditional oral narratives that were once guidelines and instructions for life...
now appeared as children's literature and some are no longer even published. This oral folklore is frequently associated with grandparents’ past times, which distances the younger generation who often refer to the folklore as superstitious nonsense.

“POSTCOLONIAL SPACE”

This is exactly where the “postcolonial space” is called into being. It is a space that allows intervention which “has a dual purpose: to recall colonial past and to look to the future” (Nalbantoglu & Thai, 1997, p. 7). As children’s literature, the privilege of Bruneian traditional oral heritage was significantly reduced. However, its materialization into children’s book is not all negative; in fact it shifts the focus to the tripartite temporal frame of Bruneian oral traditions. The first period is pre-colonial Brunei, a time when oral narratives were rife and were used to manage societies. The second period is the colonial era, a time that witnessed the deterioration of oral traditions, and the third is postcolonial Brunei, a time that beholds oral heritage in the limited form of children’s picture books.

Once this realization is attained, it triggers an awakening, primarily of the third “postcolonial space”. It is a space where the Series of Bruneian Folklore is recognized as a hybrid product, which Bhabha earlier refers to as something different. But this difference is constructive as it gives an understanding that the Series can be utilized to look into the past, the present and the future. This third “postcolonial space” identifies the Series’ triple sequential evolution and celebrates its perseverance and endurance through time as something worthy. On the surface, these oral stories seem to only consist of a list of advice from the elders, yet, it is an expression of the “postcolonial space”. Therefore, this space acts as a stimulus to untapped discussions that have never been examined before.


There are two notable folktales which deal with the destructive relationship between the colonialists and the indigenous people: The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit and The Kayong People (1981). It is indeed remarkable that a colonial discourse was present in Bruneian
traditional folklore long before foreign invasion of Brunei. Both tales reflect pre-cursors to Western colonialization: conflict between community groups. The stories are partly trying to resolve boundaries of the forest and the village, the confines of the forest and the village and finally the consequences of breaching liminal spaces, specifically of the social, cultural and the embodied, all of which demand respect and understanding.

_The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit_ figuratively depicts the destructive intrusion of non-Western colonial activities. The tale initially shows the forest as a calm, peaceful and self-organizing place before foreign intrusion, but after foreign invasion, the forest drastically changes into a chaotic space, which is a space emanating dark threats. The forest finally becomes a forest, a place of wild creatures, untamed nature, unforgiving to those who are unaccustomed to it (Sen, p. 23). The Forest Spirit is symbolic of the native who is the owner of the land. He is portrayed as kind, considerate, welcoming, generous and polite. As soon as he detects human presence in his space, he transforms himself into the figure of a human to avoid terrifying the human trespasser (Sen, p. 8). His transformation is not undertaken in order to chase out this unwelcomed visitor and instead of being judgmental, he considerately inquires about the human’s intentions. Learning of the man’s difficulties of finding a wild boar, the Spirit sympathizes and feels that his unwelcomed guest has good intention. The benevolent Spirit then tells of a place which is filled with a herd of wild boar (Sen, p. 10). However, this exceptional character of the Spirit breaks apart when the human intrudes once again. This time the foreigner’s intrusion is truly disrespectful. The Spirit is unaware of the foreigner’s presence manifests in his true form. The vision of the Spirit in his original form does not only invokes fear in the intruder but also invokes his colonial gaze (figure 1) (Sen, p. 15).

![Figure 1: The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit, p. 15](image-url)
This is a crucial point in the tale where the hybrid is seen at work; distinguishing the existence of other new perspectives other than the dominant gaze of the colonizer’s. Bhabha explains that:

Hybrid hyphenations emphasize the incommensurable elements – the stubborn chunks – as the basis of cultural identifications [...] the regulation and negotiation of those spaces that are continually, contingently, ‘opening out’ remaking boundaries, exposing the limits of any claim to a singular or autonomous sign of difference. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 219)

The hybrid element revokes the dominant colonial interpretation of an ‘intruder’ which has long been unchallenged with three other points of views. In restructuring the boundaries and disputing the limits, a cross-cultural gaze occurs as a result, where there are now the perspectives of traditional Bruneian narrators’, the colonized Bruneians’ and the Forest Spirit’s.

From the point of view of traditional Bruneian folk tellers, the ‘intruders’ are those who mimic colonial mentality and attitude of classifying hundred years of oral heritage as a mere children’s book. The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit as a hybrid substance also discloses the perspective of the colonized Bruneians who were threatened in their very land, the intruders were the pirates, the Spanish, the Japanese and the British. The last point of view is none-other than the Spirit’s. From the point of view of the Spirit, the intruder is the disrespectful Father Itho who interferes his realm and takes advantage of his benevolence.

Arguably the most powerful point of view in this tale is from Father Itho, the colonizer. It is his colonial gaze that aggressively strips the Spirit off his benign character, as a result, reconstructs him as a representative of the destructive Other (Holden, 2009). This highly critical gaze of the colonial causes the tale to shift and the scene now has to be understood through the eyes of the intruder. According to anti-colonialism scholar, Boehmer, this act of forceful interpretation is inherent in European colonizers’ attitude:
European colonizers held the conviction not merely that the rest of the world could be understood in its terms, but that the rest of the world also could – and indeed should – be encouraged to interpret reality in a European way [...] simultaneously an act of evaluation, usually of downgrading. (Boehmer, 1995, p. 79 & 80)

Once the colonial intruder sees the Spirit in a crouching position, eating boar meat on the ground, with his hands and his teeth smeared by the boar’s blood, the Spirit’s kind nature is quickly forgotten. The Spirit is now judged solely through his physical appearance; uncouth, not human, devil-like and barely clothed. In the colonizer’s distorted view, it is permissible to overcome the uncivilized native. At this instant, the figure of the colonizer here is purposely left unmentioned, because the Spirit’s point of view is irrelevant even if he is defending his territory against a true trespasser, intruder and an invader.

Father Itho is symbolic of the colonizer. Even from the beginning he shows initial intentions to take bounties from the forest (another land) to bring them back home (motherland). His character shows of a dominant culture compared to the Spirit’s. He is human and clothed. The fact that he has weapons ready for his hunt shows his intention to take bounties from the forest (Sen, p. 5). He does not only shows physical characteristics of a colonizer but he also displays the attitude of a colonizer. He solemnly promises the Spirit that he would not come back to the forest, but then returns for his sharpening stone, easily dishonouring his pledge (Sen, p. 14). While, the Spirit puts his confidence and his trust in Father Itho and believes that he will not return, he feels it is safe to transforms into his original form. The Spirit who has tried to save Father Itho from this sight - is shocked to find him back in his forest. Clearly agitated, the Spirit no longer bothers to transform into a human form (Sen, p. 17). When he chases Father Itho, the Spirit seems to just be intent on chasing him out of the forest. It is Father Itho who strikes the Spirit first which splits the Spirit’s body into half (Sen, p. 18). The surviving rotten body of the Spirit vows to have his revenge on every hunter who trespasses his forest thereafter (Sen, p. 21). Father Itho’s return serves as a sad reminder of the Spirit’s mistake of welcoming a stranger in his midst, a similar regret that Bruneians (in particular the ‘dejected Sultan’) had when colonialists decided to stay (Horton, 1984, pp. 5-6).
Another tale that involves colonial attitudes is the *Kayong People* (1981). The colonial theme focuses on the four merchants who have just recently arrived in the village of the Kayong people. They have learnt the village’s weird tradition of evacuating the home when a family member dies. The whole family would then take refuge in the middle of the river to avoid the wrath of the living corpse which only comes to life on the night of its death (Saifudin, 1981, p. 7). Two of the merchants profess their disbelief. This in turn leads the family of the deceased to offer the merchants money if they would dare to stay with the corpse for a night; a challenge that is daringly accepted by the merchants (Saifudin, 1981, p. 17). This attitude of belittling other cultures and tradition is indeed inherent in colonial mentality. The merchants here acted as typical colonialist, who are eager to rid of superstitions and ostensibly enlighten the indigenous people. By discrediting the Kayong people’s tradition they are showing to the natives’ that their culture is more dominant, which is a manner of the colonials in every way; a trait which can be termed the “colonial unconscious” (Lopez, 2005, p. 5).

In *The Vengeance of the Forest Spirit*, it is clear that readers are supposed to find the Spirit as the villain because he is non-human, while Father Itho is the hero, just because he is a human. This interpretation could be deduced when Father Itho strikes the Forest Spirit (figure 2) (Sen, p. 19) along with the text describing him as a “clever and agile hunter. He managed to take out his machete and cut the spirit into two” (Sen, p. 18).

Figure 2: *Vengeance of the Forest Spirit*, p. 19
This simplistic view can be problematized by applying an approach such as Postcolonial Gothic. It allows new point of views. Postcolonialism permits an investigation of unconsciously altered culture while the Gothic offers a view from the repressed. Wisner argues that “the postcolonial Gothic rehabs and reconfigures, it reinstates and newly imagines ways of being, seeing, and expressing from the points of view of and using some of the forms of people whose experiences and expressions have, as Toni Morrison puts it, largely been unheard of and even discredited” (Wisner, 2007). In resisting colonial interpretation, the other side of the story can be understood. The Spirit is initially benign in character but demonized and is forced to be the Other. It is the foreign invasion of his forest that triggers his unfortunate fate. In a typical colonial scene, the native is always the victim. Father Itho is an anti-hero, a typical colonizer who obtains the native’s bounty, inflicts suffering to the native and escape without any retribution. The disruption of this reckless foreign invader creates a menacing forest with an accursed Spirit as its forever guardian. The mutilated body of the Spirit, which is cut in half by Father Itho indicates Brunei’s hybrid future. Under the British Residential System (1888-1984), Brunei’s administration was indeed divided between the Resident and the Sultan. Presumably, the half living body of the Spirit represents Brunei’s tradition and customs. The fact that the half living body is diseased; a rotten carcass, emitting a foul smell which attracts flies foretells that Brunei’s struggle to keep its tradition and customs alive under colonialization. The deteriorating half body of the Spirit, on the other hand, symbolizes hope. Although it is deteriorating, most importantly is that it is still alive. This ultimately echoes the current form of the Series which indirectly informs of the colonial influence in Brunei. Indeed the Series no longer embodied the reputation of oral narratives in traditional communities, yet, its survival exemplifies something significant in a modern world that is often intolerant to traditions. The Series as an outcome is in itself a hybrid proving that traditional Bruneian customs and traditions are strong and still surviving albeit in a different way.

**BRUNEIAN TRADITIONAL VALUESVERSUS COLONIAL VALUES**

Characters such as the Spirit and the Living Corpse are in the tales for a reason. They are fierce protectors of the sanctity of traditions and customs. They are there to counter colonial figures such as Father Itho and the merchants who have the ability to “‘corrupt, to confuse or redefine the boundaries of power, knowledge and ownership”’ (Holden, 2009). The Spirit and the Living
Corpse function as a reminder of a prevalent instruction throughout Bruneian folklore which is to always obey your elders. This is the code that the folklore is based on. This was a value that ancient Bruneians held dear which proved to be continuously under threat in the face of colonialism and is led from a stance of assumed Western superiority (Knight & Heazle, 2011, p. 12).

After colonization, Southeast Asian countries still struggle against colonial mentality. In the 1990s, several Asian political leaders, such as Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore and Muhammad Mahathir of Malaysia extolled the virtues of ‘Asian values’ – harmony, obedience, loyalty, group solidarity, hard work, spirituality – to reject perceived Western arrogance and interference. These so-called ‘Asian values’ were used to counter what they regarded as the negative characteristics of the West, particularly its materialism, individualism, lack of harmony, and laziness (Knight & Heazle, 2011, p. 20). Soon after gaining independence from the British, Brunei was aware of the looming threat of globalization and therefore sought unique national identity as a “Malay Islamic Sultanate in Southeast Asia” (Melayong, 2010, p. 258). This national philosophy is to remind Bruneians that they are Malays who uphold traditions, Islamic since the reign of the first Sultan, and proud to belong to a reigning Monarchy for 500 years. Brunei has been tirelessly implementing the ethos of national coherence, the concept of “Malay Islamic Monarchy” in every aspect of life such as in terms of formal dress codes. “Malay Islamic Monarchy” is a compulsory course in local high schools and also at University level. The promotion of “Malay Islamic Monarchy” is still active today. In the World Architecture Day Conference 2014, the Minister of Development, Haji Suyoi Haji Osman stated that “Malay Islamic Monarchy” should be present in Bruneiian architecture showing “principles on peace, security, welfare, respect and happiness” (BruDirect.com, 2014).

THE SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE AND COLONIAL LEFTOVER

Traditional Bruneian folklore which dated from before the 14th century has indeed undergone a drastic transformation. Once shared collectively as a powerful social tool, it is now shared separately, in the form of children’s story books. The fact that Brunei’s folklore has been transformed to children’s literature only shows that “colonialism is not a thing of the past” (Boehmer, 1995, p. 10). The Series is vulnerable to criticisms such as national treachery now that...
it is translated into the English Language and is interpreted through Western thoughts. This can be equated with Bhabha’s notion of Western enculturation through language as an act of mimicry whereby the colonized is copying the colonizer’s cultural values, practices and expressions a cultural mode which is common in former colonized countries. For Franz Fanon, a literary work that needs to be translated into the English Language in order to remain viable is a terrible case indeed. Using a different language means that identity falters because it is gradually be taken over by the culture of that language. In Africa, the usage of English in African schools was known as a “national betrayal” after independence (Boehmer, 1995, p. 207; Parry, 2004, p. 15). However, in this postcolonial present, Upamanyu Chatterjee explains that English is an “”unavoidable leftover””. Chinua Achebe similarly agrees to this and claims that the English language unites Nigerians who have two hundred different languages. He also emphasizes that it is permissible because “English is spoken by Africans on African soil” (Boehmer, 1995, p. 209).

There was similar anxiety when the English language was first introduced in Bruneian education system. Deterding and Sharbawi indicate that a widespread concern was the deterioration of traditional Bruneian culture which would eventually cause the loss of Bruneian identity. However, Deterding and Sharbawi cite Jones shortly after, explaining that this worry was in fact baseless (Deterding & Sharbawi, 2013, p. 38).

Although many in Brunei continue to worry about the moral values of young people, just like in societies all round the world, most people accept that, in today’s globalised world, access to the internet using English is inevitable, and a greater concern today is whether all pupils have sufficient skills in English to make full use of that access [...] Indeed, it is the norm for children around the world to learn two or more languages, and in fact bilingualism is often believed to offer cognitive advantages for the child, so this psychological worry is no longer so prominent in Brunei. (Deterding & Sharbawi, 2013, pp. 38-39)
In a Forum on English for ASEAN Integration in 2013, the Dean of the University of Brunei Darussalam’s Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Associate Professor Dr Hj Othman, states that “the English language is not seen as a threat to Brunei’s identity” and that Bruneians are comfortable in using both Malay and English Language (Yap, 2013). Therefore, English in Brunei is an important part of students’ education (M. o. E. B. Darussalam, 2014) and bilingualism is highly supported in the Bruneian education system (Trust, 2013). Young children are exposed to the English Language from pre-school onwards. A typical weekday for Bruneian primary and high school students is attending English school in the morning and religious school in the afternoon. English is an inevitable residue of colonization, but it does not necessarily mean that it is harmful. If the only written version of the Series of Bruneian Folklore is in English then at least its continuity, rather than its disappearance, is assured.

THE SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKLORE AND POSTCOLONIAL GOTHIC

It is important to recall that the original form of the Series was as oral stories, a fluid form which lasted for hundreds of years; transmitting very different ideas, such as vulnerability, loyalty to the monarchy and anxiety about potential external threats. Horton refers to McArthur’s report which describes the nature of Bruneians before the British residency as “‘intensely suspicious’ of foreigners” (Horton, 1984, p. 9). It is crucial to examine this heritage in order to obtain an understanding that the oral stories served different purposes in Bruneian past communities; they were protecting communities because of different threats relevant at that time.

The modern publication of these tales therefore presents a different risk from its predecessor. In its modern form it is fixed and is defined by its publication format which, while it offers a valuable cultural record, has lost the dynamic and evolving diversity of the original stories as told over time to succeeding generations. Yet, all is not lost. As this thesis argues it is still this published format that can ensure the continuity of the Series. These tales now exists in a modern form and in a modern time, therefore, it is necessary for the tales to be looked at in a modern way. Through this publication the importance of a connection with Gothic mode can be detected. Gothic offers a way of approaching the tales’ dark themes, so that they can be discussed openly: this is not a loss but a continuation of the luxury that the tales previously enjoyed in their old form. The popularity of Gothic mode also offers the Series an abiding future
among young readers, also ensuring that the tales continue to be shared and celebrated. Meanwhile, in a postcolonial era, these ancient oral stories have come to be understood as an integral part of contemporary Bruneian cultural identity, an identity that is impaired in the modern world. Postcolonialism provides a bridge to the past to retrieve that lost Bruneian identity. Hall explains that the experience of loss in a cultural identity can be reinstated with aspects of the past:

They are resources of resistance and identity, with which to confront the fragmented and pathological ways in which that experience has been reconstructed within the dominant regimes of cinematic and visual representation of the West. (Hall, 1994, p. 294)

New Bruneian generation can understand how Brunei used to view its cultural identity before colonialism and how that cultural identity has become what it is today.

When talking about Bruneian identity, Bruneians are also including the identity of their ancestors and their elders, the preceding generations who cannot exist without one another. Hall further states that there is a need to acknowledge the loss of the past through colonial rupture, in order to experience that shared sense of identity; “we cannot speak for very long, with any exactness, about ‘one experience, one identity’, without acknowledging its other side – the ruptures and discontinuities” (Ibid.). Postcolonialism gives a chance to the Series to take place once again in the lives of Bruneians by reassessing its current situation through history, through foreign cultural influences and through its new form. It is what the postcolonial aims to achieve, “to establish control over the past and to give it form” (Boehmer, 1995, p. 199). From this perspective, the Series format as children’s literature is called into question and its Western connotation is dismantled, this is “the project of a postcolonial critique [it] is designated as deconstructing and displacing the Eurocentric premises of a discursive apparatus which constructed the Third World not only for the west but also for the cultures so represented” (Parry, 2004, p. 37). Postcolonial Gothic opens up an exploration of the Series that has never been available. It gives control back to its rightful owners, replacing Western perspectives in favour of an evolving native tradition which links modern and traditional narratives of meaning.
For instance, it is within the frame of Postcolonial Gothic that the character of the Forest Spirit is redeemed. In a traditional Bruneian narrative his character is demonized mercilessly despite being the ‘owner of the land’. According to Azzam, Postcolonial Gothic gives light to the “problematic questions concerning legitimate origins; rightful inhabitants; usurpation and occupation; and nostalgia for an impossible nationalist politics are all understood in the postcolonial gothic as national questions that are asked of everyday, domestic realm” (Azzam, 2007, p. 32). Finally, a cause that can justifies the unjustly and wrongly depicted Forest Spirit.

In conclusion, the *Series* in its modern form permits modern interpretations making it part of world literature. It does not only emerge as the reminder of Brunei’s past, but it is there to contribute knowledge to the world about Brunei’s interesting heritage. As Boehmer suggests, the “Postcolonial discourse concentrates its energies on hybrid texts because they not only signify but seem to encourage and give support to cultural interaction” (Boehmer, 1995, p. 248). Although, the discourse of Postcolonial Gothic is “a discourse of loss” (Punter, 2000, p. 108) yet it is through the postcolonial gothic sphere, that loss can be fully acknowledged. Postcolonial Gothic analysis positions the *Series* with understanding of its tradition and colonial impact which is otherwise invisible in contemporary culture. Throughout the years of its popularity (before colonialism), then its fall (under colonialism), and its constrained existence (after colonialism), the *Series* has been subjugated and suppressed, it is only high time, for it to return. This is a long awaited “return of the repressed”.
REFERENCES


CHAPTER 7

GENDER IN THE SERIES OF BRUNEIAN FOLKlore

INTRODUCTION

As mentioned in Chapter 4, there is a shortage of Brunei historical study (Brown, 1988, pp. 3,4, 16 & 75) which explains deficient knowledge on traditional Bruneian women. This chapter observes this lack of historical resource as a means to promote the Series of Bruneian Folklore as a significant source of Bruneian history, as it contain centuries of Bruneian oral tradition and oral history. Historian, Morrison identifies oral history as valuable because “all societies have a history and all history begins as oral” (Morrison, 2000, p. 9) and it is in oral history that the past is preserved (Brown, 1988, p. 76).

Also, previous chapters in this thesis have reconsidered the importance of themes that have become marginal or trivialized, often because of their association with the supernatural and the legacy of traditional cultural narratives. Here, the aim is to show how women are portrayed in the Series of Bruneian Folklore in relation to these broad themes. As part of this discussion, the use of Western Feminist and Gothic will be justified. It will be argued that the utilization of cross-cultural critical discourse can assist the exploration and understanding of longstanding traditional values within a Bruneian culture that has become increasingly complex due to successive waves of Asian and European colonialization, as represented in the Series.

The discussion addresses how the Series seemingly victimizes women characters to the re-articulation of Bruneian traditional women from the Bruneian past and provides a reconsideration of how they are represented in the Series. The role of women in relation to the definition of ‘goodness’ as expressed within the Series is explored, and is consequently followed by the discussion on how gender stability is supported by the Series. Through this discussion, the image of traditional Bruneian elders from previous chapters is reflected. As cultural producers, the elders are subtle and gentle talkers who transmitted and enforced ideas such as complementary gender roles in society which are seen as preferable because they provide stability and harmony. Avoiding the image of strict or rigid elders, they made full use of the supernatural by providing Gothic punishments to both human and non-human transgressors disregard of gender status.
In a Different Light: Women in the Series and Feminist Gothic Criticisms

Despite the lack of mention in Postcolonial history books, it is in traditional Bruneian folklore that women seem to dominate, albeit at times, notoriously. The current embodiment of this folklore as children’s books serves as a justification for exploring traditional Bruneian women’s role in the Series from a new and fresh perspective. Applying Bhabha’s theory of “the hybrid moment” in understanding traditional Bruneian characters suggests that there is a need for “rearticulation, or translation, of elements that are neither the One […] nor the Other […] but something else besides, which contests the terms of both” (Italics in original, Bhabha, 1994, p. 28). Traditional Bruneian characters of women are present in a hybrid moment where past perceptions and current perceptions need to be considered along with “something else”: this is a third element which enables a more complex understanding. In the context of this study, the inclusion of Western literary critical perspectives, will contribute to the development of a different understanding of traditional characters of Bruneian women, just as Postcolonial discourse contributed to more complex understandings of the Series in Chapter 6.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that there is a duality or a binary opposition in recruiting Western perspectives. There is indeed an apparent danger of revisiting the terms in which colonization appropriated oriental cultural values and expression. Yet, at the same time, it does offer new observation of unchartered spaces. In a now globalized culture, it compels new understanding and perceptions. It is no longer feasible for one culture to remain separated and confined in its nation culture.

Through Feminist literary criticism, the pattern of the portrayal of monstrous female, deaths of female Others and female isolation are easily detected from the tales of the Series, particularly Married to Barbalan (1981), The Banana Heart Princess (1990), The Stove Spirit (2008), The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990), Si Ranggau (1983), The Mermaid’s Tears (1988) and The Cursed Giant (2010).

The Barbalan women, the Banana Heart Princess and the Stove Spirit have one particular thing in common; they are inhuman or ‘abhuman’ wives:

\[N\]ot-quite-human subject, characterized by its morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming other. The prefix “ab-“ signals a movement away from a site or
condition, and thus a loss. But a movement away from is also a movement towards – towards a site or condition as yet unspecified – and thus entails both a threat and a promise. (Hurley, 1996, p. 3)

All of the women mentioned above have transformative qualities. For the Barbalan women and the Banana Heart Princess, their metamorphoses occur at night. The Stove Spirit’s transformation occurs when the nail from her head is removed. The nail is hammered into her by her husband. As long as the nail is embedded in her head, she will always remain human. The phallic nail symbolizes her husband’s authority over her; the nail prevents her transformation so she has no other choice but to stay in the human world. Thus, the promise of being human is always threatened by this morphic ability.

The act of Othering female characters in the Series perhaps can be explained by cultural anxieties pertaining to the female embodiment. As in other cultures, women are seen through the body: menstruation, bodily fluids and giving birth. The cultural traditions of many societies have positioned women as mysterious and unpredictable. In the Western cultural tradition, Adrienne Rich states that “men have traditionally viewed ‘the female body [as] impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, generous to masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination’” (Rich, in Cummins, 2008, p. 183). This partly explains the illustration of the female creatures or ghosts in the Series; the Barbalan women are depicted as flying heads with their bloody guts exposed and the story of the Banana Heart Princess is climaxed with the frightening illustration where the Princess is greedily sucking her husband’s blood through his left index finger (Ahmad, 1995, p. 20). The Stove Spirit’s illustration (figure 11) shows that the nail ‘anchors’ the Stove Spirit to the human world so that once the nail is removed from her head, she is no longer limited to human form; her face drastically changes, blood gushes out, boils start to appear all over her body, her nails become longer and sharper, her teeth become razor sharp and her long hair dishevelled. Without the nail, she cannot control her body which proves fatal (S. H. M. Ali, 2008, p. 18).
Elaine Showalter describes women’s bodies as fragile and unsteady;

The female body, in other words, was intrinsically pathological, and the subject inhabiting that body was erratic and unstable, its fluctuability and incompleteness a function of the not-quite-human body. As well – this is perhaps the more important point in reference to the fin-de-siècle Gothic – the disorders of the female body were inextricably linked to the female reproduction system, so that female sexuality emerged as both causal and symptomatic of female abhumaneness. (Elaine Showalter, in Hurley, 1996, p. 120)

This abhumaness of the female body prevents understanding; there is no other solution but to demonize it. Thus, the male protagonists, Kulop (Married to Barbalan, 1981) and Tunggal (The Banana Heart Princess, 1990) are dumbfounded by the “boundlessness” (Cavallaro, 2002, p. 204) of their wives. Amidst the overwhelming supernatural occurrences, Kulop and Tunggal struggle to find meaning but in the face of abjection they are helpless; meanings collapses and so does the self (Hurley, 1996, p. 62). In this state of vulnerability, Kulop and Tunggal struggling to take control, must then demonstrate their masculinity by slaying their wives. In figure 12,
both of the Barbalan women are lifeless on the floor, their rotten guts attract the flies. The striking red coloured background represents blood and death of these malicious female Others.

Similarly Tunggal notices his health deterioration is connected with his wife’s bizarre behaviour, he quickly hatches a plan. When the truth is revealed, the fact that his wife is a Banana Heart Princess, a spirit who is addicted to his blood, Tunggal slashes his wife who is in the form of a banana tree during the day. The illustration (figure 13) is quite brutal; Tunggal’s face shows extreme aggression; his eyes are intense; he appears to be shouting angrily when he strikes, and the veins on his arm are visible showing that he is holding the machete firmly. One thing is for sure, all of his actions point to one intention: to kill.

Figure 13: The Banana Heart Princess (1995, p.24)
Julia Kristeva offers a perspective on why the husbands are eager to remove their monstrous wives; they are unpredictable, something abject that “must be ‘radically excluded’” (Kristeva, in Hills, 2005, pp. 57-58). Oblivious to reality before, Kulop and Tunggal must regain their masculinity by performing violence:

Simone De Beauvoir has commented that the human male’s “transcendence” of nature is symbolized by his ability to hunt and kill, just as the human female’s identification with nature, her role as a symbol of immanence, is expressed by her central involvement in that life-giving but involuntary birth process which perpetuates the species. Thus, superiority – or authority – “has been accorded in humanity not to the sex that brings forth but to that which kills. (De Beauvoir, in Gilbert & Gubar, 1979)

Thus, Kulop and Tunggal must have harboured another reason in ending the lives of their female Others. These female Others do not even see a glimpse of a second chance because in the Series “women’s bodies are valued for their procreative possibilities”(Lorber & Moore, 2007, p. 43). Thus, the Barbalan and the Banana Heart Princess need to die because they cannot procreate. In a report of Bruneians’ lifecycles, Putzi states that traditional Brunei has a culture that:

expects couples to have many children, and consequently, large families. A Bruneian family considers children extremely important and takes good care of them. Society tends to look down upon childless women, irrespective of whether their condition is voluntary or not. Women most commonly bear children for reason of societal pressure. (Putzi, 2008a, p. 79)

In traditional Bruneian society men who had many children were seen as powerful. A man’s superiority is strengthened by the presence of children (Press, 2010, p. 7). The very reason Kulop takes a second wife is to achieve that superiority (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 11). However, much to his dismay, both of his wives are devoid of these natural capabilities. Similarly with Tunggal,
instead of reinforcing his status, the presence of his wife emasculated him (Ahmad, 1995, p. 15). To the threatened husbands it is time to retaliate; “throughout the Gothic, husbands’ beliefs in their own entitlement lead to wives’ physical and psychological destruction as they fail to merge their own identities entirely with their husbands” (Masse, 1990, p. 696). In the end, there is no other solution except death to unnatural and barren wives.

As opposed to the infertile female Others, Si Ranggau (1983), The Giant’s Curse (2010) and The Mermaid’s Tears (1988) have the common female figures, who are able to procreate yet they are abandoned by their husbands. Through a Western Feminist view, they are simply reduced to a mere reproduction machine (Creed, 2004, p. 273).

The position of mothers is indeed very significant in both Western literary and Bruneian cultural tradition. A cross-cultural gaze enables the identification of differences between cultures but also, most importantly the commonalities that are present in both cultures. At this juncture, it is important to reiterate Bhabha’s notion from the previous chapters that colonized cultures are hybrids. Bruneian traditional culture already existed with its own contradictions became more intricate with the influence of different layers of colonization and the pressure of globalization. Women did play an active social and economic part in traditional Bruneian communities, but at the same time there is an inherent contradicting discourse. Therefore, it is necessary to acknowledge that women exist in this multi-faceted condition.

Reading the female Others of the Series through the Feminist and Gothic views justifies the existence of the Series in a contemporary period, at the same time emphasizing the importance of the female Others. Why are they important? Although often cast out, they nevertheless passionately carry out their roles as Others, proving they are very opposite of dull characters. They are animated and lively but at the same time pose a dark side. Although, the female Others are short lived in the Series, their brief existence is still a significant trigger for character transformation and narrative tension. Aguirre states that:

[A] literature which makes the human relationship with the Other its main preoccupation will tend to place the woman of feeling at the centre of its stories: for in a very literal sense it recognizes woman as a centre, a
vessel wherein we may discern the presence of the Other. (Aguirre, 1990, p. 100)

Women in the Series should not be taken for granted. Adriano argues that when “this Lady of Darkness arrives. Her very being defies gender boundaries, for She is aggressive [...] She invades, inhibits, attempts to affect change, which often occurs in spite of the man’s conscious will” (Adriano, 1993, p. 6).

Although often figures of rejection, the female Others of the Series are captivating “something about her transcends time and place” (Adriano, 1993, p. 2), they are the life of the Series, “the phantom lady is essentially man’s most vital spirit [...] the haunting demonness’s numosity – is a sign of her bipolarity: she is both feared and loved [...] both animate and enervate, inspire as muse yet threaten to destroy” (Adriano, 1993, p. 2). Despite of these dual qualities, one thing is certain, the female Others of the Series are here to stay: an interesting view which is shared with traditional Bruneian elders, a discussion that will ensue later on in this chapter.

Re-analyzing Married to Barbalan (1981): past and current images of the Barbalan and the reclaiming of patriarchy

As a frequently communicated form of ghostly narrative, female spirits are the most feared in Brunei’s society (Yunos, 2006). Supernatural stories told by late night motorists always feature an encounter with a frightful but beautiful woman. The story is always the same: with shrieking laughter and a malevolent attitude the beautiful woman will shockingly change into a repulsive-looking woman wearing a white bloody robe (Tingkong, 2009, p. 68; Yunos, 2006). This lady of darkness has the ability to transform, disappear and fly from trees to tree (Forth, 2008, p. 79).

Considering its persistence and its survival as a published form, the most popular story told in Bruneian society is that of the Barbalan. The Barbalan is a notorious trickster who takes the form of a blood-thirsty flying head at night and an ordinary woman during the day. It is believed that Barbalan is a form of punishment foisted upon women who are studying black magic and have broken one of the ritual’s rules. For example, in order to gain black magic powers, the women are forbidden to eat meat for forty days, but if this rule is broken, they will turn into Barbalan creatures (Comden, 2015, p. 86; Hall, 2015).
In the past, the Barbalan enacted the role of the docile and obedient wife to safeguard her true nature. The publication of *Married to Barbalan* (1981) under the Series of Brunei’s Folklore somehow validates the influence of this dangerous nocturnal figure in Bruneian narrative. This traditional folklore is about a young traveller called Kulop who decides to settle in a village because of the villagers’ gracious characters. As he becomes increasingly fond of the villagers, Kulop forgets his place of origin (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 9). Soon, he marries a girl from the village. They lead a happy but childless life. Kulop desires children, and he voices to his wife a wish to remarry. His wife agrees and even recommends that he marry her cousin in hopes of keeping their families’ ties even closer. Unlike other polygamous marriages, Kulop’s is different. The tale implies it is because of Kulop’s just character that his wives are always on good terms with each other and that theirs “were quite different” (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 11).

True to type, the Barbalan women in *Married to Barbalan* (1981) disguise themselves as submissive wives who understand the outdoors as the men’s domains while women have a domain that is strictly indoors (Farrer, 1975). They abide to this norm and create an intricate illusion that is designed solely to gratify their husband. But, there is one issue that agitates Kulop in this otherwise perfect marriage; both his wives’ forbid him to eat lime (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 13). Ultimately this proves to be the downfall of the Barbalan women.

As a fisherman, Kulop goes out to sea at night and returns home at dawn. Whilst at sea, he loves to snack on his favourite dish: fried fish with lime. However, his wives prevent him from eating lime as it against their customs. His persistent requests are always rejected. One day, unable to resist his craving any longer, Kulop secretly brings lime on his fishing trip. His excitement turns into fear when he sees the lime juice change his fried fish into a human hand (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 14). Now, he realizes the terrifying fact that his wives might be Barbalan women who feast on humans. It is this climax that destroys the so-called indestructible illusion of the Barbalan women and restores Kulop’s patriarchal powers.

Now, that his patriarchal authority is recovered, Kulop is intent on uncovering his wives’ true nature, and therefore, concocts a plan. He goes home as usual and his wives warmly welcome him as always (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 17). He observes them carefully, but, he cannot find any flaws as they are very clever in handling their roles. The next night, Kulop prepares for his supposed fishing trip. He can see from his wives’ expressions that they are happy that he is leaving (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 19). An hour passes; Kulop rows his boat to land and heads home: he sees
his wives’ bodies lying on the bed, headless. His fears are confirmed: his wives are Barbalan women (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 21). It is at this moment that the folktale depicts a drastic role change. It is Kulop now who is executing the role of a master schemer. The next night, he tells his wives to pack his coffee in a glass bottle instead of in a kettle like they usually do. At first, his wives refuse his request, but he insists strongly and makes the wives submit. Kulop then pretends to go off to sea. He breaks the glass bottle into tiny pieces and goes home (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 23).

As soon as Kulop arrives home, he places the pieces of the broken glass on to the headless necks of his wives (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 25). This is a significant scene in the story; as the broken glass symbolizes the end of his marriage and his last act regarding his wives is a violent one, serving as a reminder that this is a patriarchal society.

Kulop then rushes back to his boat and furiously rows back to his own village, which he reaches a few days later. Meanwhile, after a night of mischief, the Barbalan women hurry home as dawn is breaking and they fear Kulop might reach home before them. When they try to reattach their heads to their bodies, the sharp pieces of glass hurt them (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 27). Still dwelling in a delusion that they have Kulop under their control, they keep on trying despite the pain. They cry and scream, afraid that their husband might come and witness this incident. Hopeless, they have no choice but to wait for Kulop’s return.

Morning has passed and night approaches, but Kulop is nowhere in sight. The Barbalan women realize that this must be the doing of their husband. The feeling of revenge overwhelms them, and they fly in search of Kulop. They search in vain from one village to the next but still cannot find him (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 29). Feeling tired and crushed, the Barbalan women go back to their home only to see their decayed bodies. Predetermined from the beginning, they are unable to survive without their bodies and die a horrible death (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 31).

The folktale of the Barbalan women and their flying heads has counterparts in other parts of Southeast Asia:

In Thailand, *phi krasue* is said to be just a head with flowing entrails floating in mid-air. A similar spirit can be found in Cambodia (*ap*), Laos (*kasu*), and Malaysia (*penanggalan*). In Indonesia, local “witches” known as
leaks are said to be capable of the same transformation, and in the Philippines, rubbing manananggal oil on one’s body is meant to cause the torso to grow bat-like wings and separate from its lower half. Filipino aswangs (a very extensive supernatural category to which manananggal belongs) are said to be capable of sprouting long tongue-like protrusions from their mouths that allow them to suck unborn babies out of their mothers’ wombs. (Ancuta, 2014, pp. 212-213)

The Huli Jing of Chinese folklore usually take the form of a seductive woman with the intention of sucking the life-force of men (Guiley, 2005, p. 158). The Wailing Woman of Mexico uses her voice to attract men: those unfortunate enough usually end up drowning or lost in the jungle (Barakat, 1969). All these ‘women’ are master manipulators.

Nor is Married to Barbalan (1981) a simple folktale that disappears through time. It evolves and adapts in a modern Bruneian setting, a contemporary oral narrative features, the Barbalan women as either a midwife (Hall, 2015; Tam, 2012), a seamstress (gatekeeper32, 2014) or a friendly sales woman who sells beauty products and products for pregnant women such as massage oil (Egai, 2012). Here, her choice of selling products implicitly shows that her targeted customers, or better yet, her targeted preys are; pregnant women just as they are for the Barbalan wives, who unable to procreate, make pregnant mother and little babies their favourite victims. This cannibalistic palate draws a similarity to the infamous Russian Baba Yaga (Zipes, 2013, p. viii).

Gothic Feminism helps to uncover hidden themes or causes that trigger the Series in the first place. In considering female Others, it is necessary to examine male Others as well. Once this examination is carried out, an important pattern starts to appear: female Others actually exist alongside male Others. When women characters die or suffer, men do too and when women are expected to procreate, men shares similar expectations from the community. Therefore, the utilization of Western Feminism leads to the recognition that men and women in Bruneian culture had complementary roles as reflected and expressed from the Series. As argued in previous chapters, traditional Bruneian societies valued solidarity and collaboration. When analysed closely the families in Si Ranggau (1983), The Giant’s Curse (2010) and The Mermaid’s
Tears (1988) are isolated from the bigger community. Traditional Bruneian societies frowned upon individualism. Both male and female should conform to community expectations to create stability, respect nature and meet one another’s needs. It is when they lose point of connection to the wider community that unfortunate events occur. This again points back to earlier on the teachings of traditional Bruneian elders and how they were active cultural producers.

Before discussing the Series’ stability model of the role of men and women, it is important to recall traditional Bruneian women’s roles and contribution in past society through history and the Series.

Rearticulating Traditional Bruneian Women

In 2012, The Brunei Times published an article titled “Brunei women third highest paid in the world”. Datin Paduka Hjh Adina Othman, the Deputy Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports mentioned in her speech at the APEC Women and The Economy Forum, St Petersburg, Russia that Bruneian women enjoy equal rights and that they rank 20th in the world in terms of economic participation (Kamit, 2012, Bandar Seri Begawan). This reflects a distinctly Bruneian trait and a long-standing cultural heritage whereby women are seen as an integral part of their communities, participating in business and trade, building and manufacture, working with men rather than occupying a separate domestic sphere. The social history of gender in Brunei may therefore be distinguished from that of many other cultural traditions.

In the sixteenth century, at a time when Europeans believed they were infiltrated by witches, a time when England and Scotland experienced an increase in witch executions (Kors & Peters, 2001, p. 17; McGuire, 2009, p. 1) and when girls and women in Neo-Confucian China acquiesced to a foot-binding tradition (Blake, 2000, p. 429), traditional Bruneian women were recognized as active members of society. In 1521 AD, an Italian voyager, Antonio Pigafetta wrote: “When the tide rises, the women go in boats through the city selling provisions and necessities...” (Pigafetta, in Zin, 2010, Bandar Seri Begawan). Brunei’s traditional water village was beautified by the existence of these ‘padian’, business women who were experts in manoeuvring their boats (figure 1). For 500 years, Padians, were efficient in multi-tasking. Besides being sales women, they acted as the middleperson between customers and suppliers and they also took up jobs as temporary domestic helpers (Zin, 2010, Bandar Seri Begawan).
Besides contributing economically, traditional Bruneian women were also involved in preserving cultural practices particularly in relation to traditional woven fabrics (Jong Sarat). Weaving originated in the water village and was, and is a skill mastered by women (Wahsalfelah, p. 5). This complex traditional cloth weaving requires great patience and dedication. Due to its laborious production, expensive materials and intricate designs, Bruneian traditional woven fabrics are reserved only for auspicious occasions such as royal ceremonies and wedding
ceremonies. The current existence of traditional cloth weaving is owed to skilful traditional women. In an effort to spread and maintain this knowledge of, the Bruneian Government established the Brunei Arts and Handicrafts Centre in 1975. There, the cloth weaving section is under the guidance of the chief instructress ("Brunei Darussalam: Tenunan (Cloth Weaving)", 1994). In a further attempt to preserve traditional woven fabrics, they are now wedding souvenirs and gifts to tourists.

Figure 3: Traditional Bruneian woman seen cloth weaving (Image taken from Museum of Malay Technology, 15/2/2014)

Figure 4: Traditional Bruneian woman seen cloth weaving (Image taken from Museum of Malay Technology, 15/2/2014)
Overall, there is insufficient historical information about traditional Bruneian women. However, it is not an unsolvable problem. As a published work of traditional oral folklore, the Series offers invaluable insights into their lives. Women’s roles were not merely confined to being wives and mothers. They were resourceful and skilful individuals, and this is clearly reflected in the Series.

A notable activity of traditional Bruneian women was roof-making. The Museum of Malay Technology describes the history of traditional roof-making:

Thatched roof of a traditional Brunei Malay house was traditionally made of nipah fronds (Nipah fruitcans) where the palm grew in abundance along Brunei River banks in the past. Before the coming of wood shingles and later metal roofing brought by Chinese craftsmen, roof maintenance and supply were exclusively provided by Kampong Padaun (“roof-making” village), now no longer exist in Kampong Ayer. Roof-making was normally done by women while the task of gathering nipah leaves was done by men. (The Museum of Malay Technology)

Figure 5: Traditional Bruneian woman making roof out of palm leaves (Image taken from Museum of Malay Technology, 15/2/2014)
This description shows cooperation and teamwork between men and women. The first illustration of *The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988) demonstrates this mutual collaboration. In figure 6, the wife is seen mending and patching a fishing net while the husband is inspecting his rowing plank. Figure 7 shows that husband and wife are working together to gather bamboo sticks.

Figure 6: *The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988, p.4)

Figure 7: *The Tale of Tortoise Island* (1986, p.10)
In the tale of *The Mosquito King* (1981), it is evident that jobs in traditional Brunei were not gender specific. The tale begins with a mother asking her two daughters to collect palm leaves for their roof (A. M. P. Damit, 1981, p. 7). Another seemingly male occupation, agriculture, is taken up by Dang Ayang, a character from *The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost* (1990). The tale opens with an introduction to Dang Ayang (figure 8), “Once upon a time, there was a woman who lived in a house near a hill and a forest. She lived alone. She had a farm of winter melons, rice and other vegetables. Her name was Dang Ayang” (Rahman, 1990, p. 1). Dang Ayang’s independence indicates that traditional Bruneian culture was a non-discriminatory culture. The fact that traditional Bruneian women were business women, agriculturalists and skilled in cloth weaving, clearly show that they played active roles and contributed to their communities significantly.

![Figure 8: The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990)](image)

![Figure 9: Traditional Bruneian woman seen pressing sugarcane](image)

(Image taken from Museum of Malay Technology, 15/2/2014)
The *Series* present the differences in status of traditional Bruneian women. There are three instances in the *Series*, where women are presented as single mothers in *Si Ranggau* (1983), *The Giant’s Curse* (2010) and *The Mosquito King* (1981). Unmarried women such as Dang Ayang and single mothers are not viewed negatively in the *Series*. The way they are presented reflects that single mothers, widowed or unmarried women did exist in traditional Brunei and that they were still accepted as part of the communities. It is rather remarkable for a traditional society to exemplify a non-biased treatment of both men and women. Traditional Bruneian women enjoyed the liberty to work and hone their skills in various areas, unlike their Western counterpart, where single, widowed or older women could lead to witchcraft persecution (Hester, 1996, p. 290; Kors & Peters, 2001, pp. 18-19).

**Respect as a Definition of Goodness**

Traditional Bruneian culture was one of balance in terms of the give and take within the community and within the family. Inherent in the tales of *Series* are the warnings of opposing reciprocal social roles and social isolation. Throughout the *Series* there are no representations of strict gender hierarchical status. It is the individual contribution to society that is the most valued. In fact, traditional Bruneians defined goodness through this.
As discussed in the previous chapters, respect is the most important quality in a person rather than honesty. This is vividly shown in tales such as *The Mosquito King* (1981). Rokiah lies to the Mosquito King whilst he understands that she does that out of respect and consequently judges her to be of noble character who has the good of others in her heart (A. M. P. Damit, 1981, p. 15). The Mosquito King rewards her with a treasure box (A. M. P. Damit, 1981, p. 17) whilst her blunt and honest sister Aminah is punished with a box filled with poisonous snakes (A. M. P. Damit, 1981, p. 31).

A similar traditional cultural value can be seen transmitted in *Eldest and Youngest* (1983). Youngest lies to the Fish and he clearly knows that Youngest is lying, yet, he is considered as a friend and is returned safely above the sea with a bag of diamonds and pearls (Tengah, 1983, p. 13). Eldest’s frankness, on the other hand, is deemed undesirable, which explains his death in the end (Tengah, 1983, p. 31).

Another tale that promotes respect is *Origin of Rice* (1989). Tugal lies to the elderly Queen out of respect, in which she understands and laughs, out of amusement (A. M. B. P. Damit, 1989, p. 19). Due to his respectful behaviour, the Queen teaches him how to grow, harvest and cook paddy (A. M. B. P. Damit, 1989, p. 21). She even allows him to steal two paddy grains to bring back to the human world (A. M. B. P. Damit, 1989, p. 25).

Therefore, goodness and badness is not measured against gender but against the value of each individual’s behaviour to the community. The *Series* portrays that men are valued through their strengths in hunting, shown through characters of the husband before transforming into Si Ranggau (*Si Ranggau*, 1983), Father Itho (*Vengeance of the Forest Spirit*, n.d.), Awang Basar (*The Giant’s Curse*, 2010). The men’s ability in fishing is shown through the characters of Kulop (*Married to Barbalan*, 1981), the mermaid’s husband (*The Mermaid’s Tears*, 1988) and Pak Kadok (*The Stove Spirit*, 2008). Agriculture is also an area where men is expected to be in, as shown by the characters of the men in Radin’s family (*Radin’s Poisonous Well*, n.d.), and Tunggal who manages his agricultural farm (*The Banana Heart Princess*, 1995).

Women in the *Series*, on the other hand, are valued for their capacity to have children which can be seen through the characters of Si Ranggau’s wife (*Si Ranggau*, 1983), the fisherman’s wife before turning into a mermaid (*The Mermaid’s Tears*, 1988), the Elf Princess (*The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost*, 1990), the Stove Spirit (*The Stove Spirit*, 2008) and Dayang Mayang
Sari (*The Giant’s Curse*, 2010). Besides this, as mentioned earlier, traditional Bruneian communities valued working women who operate in both the social and the domestic sphere. Although men and women are valued through their different strengths, they are highly encouraged to collaborate and show partnership which is aimed to maintain a harmonious community.

**GENDER STABILITY MODEL SUPPORTED BY THE SERIES**

**Retribution to men and women who disrupt the complementary roles**

*The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988) is a story in which both male selfishness and female desire contribute to the alienation between husband and wife, a separation which is irreparable. The pregnant wife craves for seagrass fruit and asks for the husband to retrieve her some (Muhammad, 1988, p. 5). Unknowingly, it will be his forgetfulness and her impatience would be the cause of their separation. The husband, a fisherman by trade proudly says that he will get that easily for her (Muhammad, 1988, p. 5). However, he is clouded by the many fish he has caught and forgets his promise (Muhammad, 1988, p. 8). He promises a second time (Muhammad, 1988, p. 13) and a third (and final) time (Muhammad, 1988, p. 14). The next day he goes out to fish. As an omen of what is to come, he feels strange as he has not caught as much as the past three days. He then decides to look for the seagrass fruit. On his search for the fruit, he is surprised to see someone sitting on the ground. As he comes close, he is even more surprised to find that someone is his wife, avidly eating seagrass fruit with her legs stretched in front of her (Muhammad, 1988, p. 16). The husband asks his wife to go home with him, but she refuses. He then goes home and waits for a long time for his wife’s return. The tide is beginning to rise and he becomes worried. When he comes back, he still sees his wife sitting and eating seagrass fruit. Again, he asks her to come home. And again, she refuses (Muhammad, 1988, p. 18).

The story relays a sense of balance, just as the husband disregards his wife’s wishes in the beginning: the wife ignores his pleas in the end. The wife could not help but design her own doom as soon as she steps outside her home. She violates the society’s norm by assuming action in the sphere of men. Due to this unforgivable breach, she must be punished. The tide has risen. Suddenly, the wife’s legs change into a tail similar to that of a prawn (Muhammad, 1988, p. 20). This is the immediate consequence of her individualism and her independence. Accepting her
fate, she bids the husband goodbye as they are different beings now. The last line of the folklore mentions that every time the mermaid is caught by humans, she will shed a tear as she recalls her origin. Because of the husband’s disregard of the wife’s wish of a simple seagrass fruit, she is left to suffer as a lonely mermaid (Muhammad, 1988, p. 23).

The story then concludes with the description that each time the wife gets caught in a fisherman’s net, she will shed a tear, recalling her previous life, longing to be a part of her human community. Her legendary tear also symbolizes the failure of her husband to provide. Whilst she is punished by being trapped in the supernatural world, he is punished to remain in the human world by losing his wife and his unborn child through his own greed. The separation of the husband and wife in *The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988) could be seen as symbolic of the different spheres of men and women preferred in Bruneian traditional society.

*The Giant’s Curse* (2010) has a similar story line as *The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988) but without the ambiguities. The story begins with Dayang Mayang Sari telling her husband, Awang Basar of her craving for roasted deer meat. Realizing his wife must be pregnant, he exaggerates that he will get roasted elephant meat if she wishes (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 1). However, once he acquires the roasted deer meat, he eats it himself on his way home (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 5). Feeling extremely guilty, he lies to his wife saying he did not catch any. Dayang Mayang Sari says it is alright, although her disappointed face shows otherwise. In an attempt to reassure her, Awang Basar makes an oath that if he lies, he will be cursed to be as tall as the sky (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 9). Too exhausted from his long trip, Awang Basar falls into a deep sleep with his hunting gear still attached to his body. When Dayang Mayang Sari removes all his hunting gear, she sees pieces of roasted deer meat stuck between her husband’s teeth. She is overjoyed and collects the pieces of meat. Awang Basar awakes with a delicious dinner already prepared. He tells his wife that the taste of the roasted deer meat is familiar and asks her how she acquired it. Cheerfully, she replies that she gathered it from between his teeth. Ashamed at his own behaviour, he apologizes to his wife regretfully, but it is too late (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 13). The curse is upon him and his body is quickly transforming. Mortified at his own lies, he leaves without turning back (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 15).

At first glance, this tale seems to communicate the story of Awang Basar, but in reality, it is not his story, it is his wife’s: a story of the power of a properly human woman. This reflects Bruneians’ traditional ethos whereby the importance was stressed in conduct not in gender.
Unlike the wife in *The Mermaid’s Tears* (1988), Dayang Mayang Sari remains an obedient wife. Whilst bearing a child, she patiently waits for her husband’s return for two months (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 3), she is saddened by her husband’s lies but she loves him and is thankful for his safe return (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 11). It is important to mention here that she because of her kindness she is rewarded and finally satisfies her craving of roasted deer meat. The husband, on the other hand, faces a series of emotional turmoil: from a guilt-ridden individual to a husband who lies to his own wife. It is because of his arrogance that he utters a false oath which results in the confiscation of his human life force. Thus proving that he not worthy to be the spouse of a good woman. He is forever damned to be the cursed giant roaming the forest, now incapable to utter lies (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 23).

**Gothic mode of punishment**

In order to sustain the stability of the community, there is an apparent Gothic mode of punishment occurring throughout the tales in the *Series*. The Gothic mode of punishment functions to create the tension between the human and the Other. Thereby, putting forth the idea that being human is desirable which automatically creates the opposite idea of the monstrous and the abhuman others as undesirable. The monstrous in the *Series* is defined by misleading people away from a focus on community towards a focus on the individual. The form of the monstrous is triggered by the destabilizing of the human form, complementary human gender roles and extended human communities. This Gothic disciplinary action is evident in the character of Si Ranggau, the Mermaid and the Giant. Due to their inability to perform their complementary roles within the family and within the community, their human life-forces are confiscated.

The presence of the Others in the *Series* is therefore needed and is indeed necessary to induce fear and increase the ambiguity of the (super)natural realm. This realm deserves respect, a subject that is repeatedly pointed out by traditional elders and is clearly expressed through the *Series*. It is also clear that the *Series* captures the human and the Other dynamic in many ways.

Firstly, ‘real’ women who can and do become pregnant are set against inadequate ‘women’ who fail to procreate. This could be seen through the characters of Si Ranggau’s wife and Dayang Mayang Sari who are displayed against the characters of Barbalan women and the Banana Heart Princess.
Secondly, real men who can and do provide are set against inadequate men who fail to achieve. The Series’ definition of real men can be deduced from the male characters in Radin’s family. Radin’s father is portrayed as a responsible, loving and patient person who takes good care of his sons after his wife’s passing (Hassan, 1994, p. 1). Radin and his male siblings also have favourable portrayals. They are not depicted as individuals but as a team (Hassan, 1994, p. 18), who consults each other on every matter (Hassan, 1994, p. 23). These respectful male characters resist those who are unable to provide such as Awang Basar. In The Giant’s Curse (2010), Awang Basar is described as conceited (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 1), greedy (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 7) and a liar (H. S. H. M. Ali, 2010, p. 9). Other male characters who do not achieve include the Mermaid’s husband and Si Ranggau.

Thirdly, the Series encapsulates the human and the Others as binaries through humans who forget the community preserving rules. They are in turned, are preyed on by monsters pretending to be humans. This is the case of Kulop and Tunggal. Kulop is punished through his marriage with Barbalan women for forgetting his own village (Saifudin, 1981b, p. 9). Similarly, Tunggal ignores his community’s advice and concerns about the woman he is about to marry (Ahmad, 1995, p. 13). Due to his heedlessness, he unwittingly marries a blood-thirsty Banana spirit who intends to drain all of his blood (Ahmad, 1995, p. 21).

Fourthly, humans are transformed into monsters or supernatural beings by meeting their own needs before those of the community’s. This can be observed from the characters of the Giant, the Mermaid and Si Ranggau. The Series reflects traditional Bruneian values whereby cooperation between individuals was highly regarded.

Through the Series, it is evident that elders understand the necessary separation of the human and the natural world. However, this understanding is different than Western society’s which “employs an anthropocentric worldview, regarding humankind as the central or most significant entities on the planet” (Krenger, 2016, p. 1). In the Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990), Dang Ayang warns the Elf Princess to leave when she sees the Kalindahau Ghost (Rahman, 1990, p. 13). The former understands that supernatural beings and the supernatural world are unpredictable, thus, leaving them alone means respect which acknowledges their world exists too. This similar recognition of the supernatural world and the understanding of the necessary division are shown in the Kayong People (1981). The Kayong people are known for their traditions of leaving the corpse of their family member in their house while the other
families temporary move to the next village (Saifudin, 1981a, p. 7). It is the customs of their people that the dead will come back to life temporarily at the night of its death. The Kayong people understand that separation from the supernatural world at that time is necessary, thus it is abided to and accepted.

The necessary separation between the human world and the supernatural world is also expressed through the characters of Si Ranggau, the Mermaid, the Stove Spirit and the Giant. All of them convey similar message in the end claiming the impossibility of merger between the human and the supernatural plane. It is not just the humans who are punished for violating the human and supernatural boundary. Monsters can be punished too. For example, the Barbalan women and the Banana Heart Princess are put to an end because of their manipulative disguises and their evil intentions toward human folks. The Kalindahau Ghost is punished because she kills a good woman and the Stove Spirit is returned to where she belonged because she is not human.

There is also an apparent degree of leniency and support given to those who step outside the male and female roles with an exception that they are doing so to contribute for the good of the community. For example, the independent character of Dang Ayang from The Elf Princess and the Kalindahau Ghost (1990), who does agriculture as well as netting fishes in the river. With all these achievements, she is not arrogant: her good personality is shown when she is ready to help anyone, even someone who is not from the human world.

CONCLUSION

This chapter puts forth a new understanding of the women characters in the Series Western literary criticism of Feminism and the Gothic. However, this is not without risk, as these two interpretative paradigms are of Western origin, applying them would imply a revisit to the colonial. Arguably, recruiting these Western perspectives places our knowledge into the understanding of traditional Bruneian women characters of the Series within a cross-cultural perspective. Women as an inevitable ‘third element’, as Bhabha suggests, urges re-articulation and a re-investigation of how we perceive heritage and tradition in this globalized world. Western perspectives of Feminism and the Gothic here teach and offer something new, especially on how traditional Bruneian texts should be read and approached. The new interpretations of the Series through Feminism and the Gothic add more substance and provide
a platform for further research which will ultimately ensure the continuity of the Series in this modern world. It is important to note that Feminist Gothic readings on women of the Series trigger the emergence of the recognition that men and women had complementary roles in traditional Bruneian culture rather than strict hierarchical gender status. Reading through Gothic perspective is immensely useful for understanding the consequences of transgression by suggesting that the most important thing for Bruneians as expressed in the Series is humanity rather than gender.

This chapter highlights the lack of information about traditional Bruneian women’s contribution in Brunei modern historical books. This in itself does point attention to the role of women within the Series of Bruneian Folklore and raises the discussion that Bruneian women have long historical involvement in communities, they were present and are “playing extremely visible and important roles in society” (Putzi, 2008b, p. 77). The Series as an embodiment of past Bruneian culture authenticates traditional Bruneian women as active individuals who contributed actively in areas such as agriculture, economic and culture. This tradition of active women involvement in society can be seen in present-day Brunei as “women have an enviably high status in the Islamic nation of Brunei Darussalam [...] Bruneian women hold executive or professional positions in education, medicine, law, research, information technology, print and electronic media and the armed forces” (Putzi, 2008b, p. 48).
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CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

Brunei Darussalam is a country that has experienced layers of foreign influence and colonization. The threat to Bruneian traditions and culture is further intensified by the globalized world. Due to this external pressure, some Bruneians might find it a struggle to find our culture. But, this should not be the case because we still have the *Series of Bruneian Folklore*. It is a strong expression of Bruneian tradition and culture.

This project has been carried out when the *Series* is on the precipice of extinction. Yet, as this analysis demonstrates, the traditional culture of Brunei as it is captured in the *Series* is not as fragile as it appears. Its former mode as oral narrative existed for five centuries and its continued existence as children’s literature proves that it actively transmits substantial heritage values. Although the original oral form no longer exists in contemporary Brunei, the *Series* now embodies that earlier form so the traditions continue and adapt to the pressures of a different point in time. It is precisely this survival story that provided the trajectory of this thesis.

The completion of this thesis marks the changed status of the *Series*. The stories within it are no longer simply children’s literature, and they will never again be simple children’s stories. Throughout the thesis, the argument has been made that imbedded in the *Series* is cultural and historical knowledge that is often neglected. As a valuable source on culture and an important historical artefact, the *Series* demands respect and recognition.

One of the major findings in this thesis is that traditional Bruneian culture, as understood by the early Bruneian elders, was maintained throughout the centuries by each and every elderly generation. Such oral practices lent themselves well to the strengthening of a benevolent authority that could draw on the ambiguities and power of a supernatural realm to cement their position. A specifically Bruneian Gothic infuses the everyday lives of past and present Bruneians. Another worthy discovery in this study of the *Series* is that its exposure to many foreign influences has not destroyed its central value despite the recognition that it is a hybrid product. Its very hybridity, in fact, enables a reshaping and renewal of Western interpretations such as Postcolonialism, Feminism and the Gothic; such a renewal of the *Series* and the frameworks
through which it has been interpreted demonstrates its significance and relevance in the contemporary world literature and the everyday life of Bruneians.

In terms of future research, the Bruneian Gothic is now a field that needs to be developed further. For instance, the idea of the unheimlich in the Series should be addressed in more depth: does everything need to be treated as unheimlich in the Series?

Landscape analysis the Series is also a potential area of research that leads to the discussion of the importance of nature in Bruneian society, then and now. Comparative literature is another interesting path that could be pursued. For example, there are similar stories of the Barbalan women that exist in other parts of Southeast Asia: how did such stories travel across different cultures and long distances?

This project establishes the importance of the Series as a cultural and historical artefact and relocates it in the domain of international literature, it will never face the threat of disappearance ever again.