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Article

Social Categorization and Religiously Framed State-Making in Brunei: From Criminalizing Supernatural Healers to the Rise of Bureaucratized Exorcism

Dominik M. Müller

This paper has been presented at the workshop “Social Categorization and Religiously Framed State-Making in Southeast Asia, organized by the author together with Matthew Walton and Kevin W. Fogg at the Asian Studies Centre, St Antony’s College, University of Oxford on June 4–5, 2018. It is a shortened and modified version of an article that has been published in May 2018 by the Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs, 37(1): 141–183, entitled: “Hybrid Pathways to Orthodoxy in Brunei Darussalam: Bureaucratized Exorcism, Scientization and the Mainstreaming of Deviant-Declared Practices.” The full article is available at: <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jsaa/article/view/1105/1112>.

The Special Issue, entitled “The Bureaucratization of Islam in Southeast Asia: Transdisciplinary Perspectives”, guest-edited by Dominik M. Müller and Kerstin Steiner, contains further MSB Studies-related articles, including: “Company Rules: Sharia and its Transgressions in the Malay-Muslim Corporate Workplace” (Patricia Sloane-White), “Negotiating Statist Islam: Fatwa and State Policy in Singapore” (Afif Pasuni), and “Branding Islam: Islam, Law, and Bureaucracies in Southeast Asia” (Kerstin Steiner). The issue is available at: <https://journals.sub.uni-hamburg.de/giga/jsaa/article/view/1100/1107>

Introduction¹

The cultural and political position of Islam in Brunei is commonly described as conservative and orthodox. Portrayals of Brunei as a vanguard of “Islamization” have become increasingly prominent following international media reports in 2014 according to which “the Sultan” had “suddenly” decided to “implement the Sharia” (sic.). Since the 1980s, the government has undeniably formalized an increasingly restrictive state-brand of Islam and zealously aims to transform its citizenry into obedient subjects adhering to state-defined doctrines. However, generalized narratives of growing Islamization and orthodoxy explain little about the complex realities, social meanings and discursive embeddedness of Brunei’s Islamization policies, and how actors position themselves towards and within these processes and thus engage in everyday forms of the (un-)making and re-making of religiously framed state power.

Elsewhere, I have conceptualized the bureaucratization of Islam (BoI) as a social phenomenon that transcends its organizational boundaries, as categorical schemes of Islam diffuse into society and become appropriated (and potentially transformed) by social actors and institutions (Müller 2017). In settings such as Brunei, where governments have empowered Islamic institutions to influence Muslim discourse, the BoI often penetrates deeply into public discourse and everyday life in society. Therefore, the BoI is not simply a formalization, expansion and diversification of Islamic institutions, or a government attempt to control religious actors and neutralize opposition. It also affects socio-cultural transformations and subject formations,

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exceptional openness of the Ministry of Religious Affairs, the MIB Supreme Council’s Secretariat, and Darusysyifa’ Warrafahah, each of whom helped me with my research and gave me access to documents and data, while tolerating, as we spoke about explicitly, that my interpretations will likely differ from some of their positions. Most names other than public figures are pseudonyms, and some circumstantial information has been changed to protect identities.

although it does not determine them. The BoI furthermore goes along with a *bureaucratization of knowledge* and related processes of systematizing and reflecting, which Eickelman calls an “objectification of Muslim consciousness,” resulting in “a significant reimagining of religious and political identities.”² Accordingly, the BoI implies distinct epistemic modes of understanding and organizing the world. These fuse with other registers and transnational flows, alongside discursive frames of the nation state, and give rise to new cultural forms and social meanings of Islam.

The BoI is entrenched in the empowerment of “state forms of classification” and their “social frameworks of perceptions,” “understanding, “appreciation” and “memory” (Bourdieu 1994:13), which are inscribed to varying extents into the spheres of habitus. The state’s *classificatory power* is therefore not simply produced by state actors (in the term’s conventional sense), but *co-produced and contested in society* (Müller 2017), while the boundaries between state- and non-state spheres are blurring. In this sense, in certain contexts non-state actors become state-actors as well. Accordingly, symbolic power, of which state power and state-imposed social classification are manifestations, “presupposes, on the part of those who submit to it, a form of complicity which is neither passive submission nor a free adherence to it” (Bourdieu 1991:50–1). Social actors within and beyond the bureaucracy position themselves in diverse ways: they do not simply internalize state-classification to a “taken-for-granted” and “commonsensical” level (Handelman & Shamgar-Handelman 1991:294), or circumvent, pragmatically adapt, subversively resist, or cautiously navigate between “public” and “hidden transcripts” (Scott 1990), although

² Following this concept, Islam “has implicitly been systematized ... in the popular imagination, making it self-contained and facilitating innovation. Questions such as ‘What is my religion?’, ‘Why is it important to my life?’, and ‘How do my beliefs guide my conduct?’ have become foregrounded in the lives of large numbers of believers ... These transformations also mean that ‘authentic’ religious

all of this likely occurs and affects individual subject formations. Of most relevance here, they also *ascribe their own meanings* to hegemonic discourses and *creatively re-signify them*, which is only partly conditioned by existing power-knowledge regimes. Actors may submit to symbolic state power and participate in its social production simultaneously inform some of its contents in originally unanticipated ways. This paper illustrates such creative state-making with the example of an Islamic healing center that incorporates the symbolic language and categorical schemes of state power in Brunei. It specializes in exorcism, which had long been the domain of Malay supernatural specialists whose once-normalized practices have become bureaucratically categorized as *deviant*; growing segments of the population have internalized this position as commonsensical Islamic. In this context, the BoI affects cultural changes and everyday normativities, but it also informs agency and creative realizations of the state.

Classificatory Power in the MIB State

Brunei has been conceptualized by its government as a non-secular “Islamic State” and “Malay Islamic Monarchy” (*Melayu Islam Beraja*) since Independence in 1984. It never established a parliamentary democracy. Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah *embodies* state power more than any other Southeast Asian leader: he is the prime minister, minister of finance, of defence, of foreign affairs and trade, holds absolute executive powers, and is “head of the official religion,” i.e. Islam. Constitutionally, he “can do no wrong in either his personal or any official capacity.” The sultan enjoys enormous popularity and, as Bourdieu noted on states more (maybe too) generally, *personally* serves as the country’s “(central) bank of symbolic capital.”³ This popularity is not just fostered, choreographed and demanded by state-

tradition and identity are foregrounded,” but also “questioned, and constructed rather than taken for granted” (Eickelman 2015:605).

³ He strikingly resembles the “President” acting as the Mauss’ian “sorcerer” in Bourdieu’s (1994:11–12) essay on “structure and genesis in the bureaucratic field, also pertaining to the “monopoly over nomination”.

controlled institutions and media, it is also an undeniable (in a double-sense) social fact that contributes to upholding the political *status quo*. Another stabilizing factor is the oil-funded high living standards. The Sultan is widely considered to personally provide Brunei's welfare state as a "caring monarch," a discursively naturalized term that is normative for public speech. Poems and patriotic songs, e.g. those played in state-media during the sultan's three week-long birthday celebrations, similarly emphasize his benevolence and artistically reproduce the caring monarch motif.⁴ With compelling arguments: There is no personal income tax, a pension for all citizens from the age of 60, and largely free education and medical services.



FIGURE 1: Sultan Hassanal Bolkiah's 71st Birthday Celebrations (*Hari Keputeraan ke-71*), July 15, 2017. Bandar Seri Begawan. Picture by Dominik M. Müller ©

The "hierarchical reciprocal relationship between the ruler and his subjects" (Siti Norkhalbi 2005:247) is also framed as representing a "traditional Malay" principle according to which *the ruler must be just, the people must be loyal*. Despite standing above the law, the Sultan is not perceived as an arbitrary ruler or dictator by any significant societal grouping. With his promotion of the rule of law and accountability, his rule comes closer to what

⁴ These activities also include patriotic competitions by artists, graffiti sprayers, poets, musicians and dancers, who create spaces of agency for themselves, simultaneously enabled and restricted by the event's royal/patriotic/state-controlled context (as I describe in forthcoming work on

Turner (2015) calls soft-authoritarianism in the Singaporean context.

Institutionalizing a National Ideology: Melayu Islam Beraja (MIB)

The government seeks to instill a "national ideology" called *Melayu Islam Beraja* (MIB) in the population's minds and behavior. MIB privileges Malay supremacy, *Islam* (as interpreted by the state, no other Islam), and the monarchy. As a bureaucratic categorical scheme, MIB is at the heart of the state's attempted exercise of classificatory power. Officially, MIB has been in place since the first Sultan converted to Islam in 1368. In the Declaration of Independence, the Sultan proclaimed Brunei "*shall be forever a ... Malay, Muslim Monarchy upon the teachings of (Sunni) Islam.*" MIB became institutionalized, and Brunei-specific notions of *Melayu*, Islam, and the monarchy became translated into the language of bureaucracy. In 1986, an MIB Concept Committee was established, transformed in 1990 into the MIB Supreme Council. Since 1991/2, MIB classes are compulsory in schools and universities.

The MIB Supreme Council is defining, systematizing and propagating MIB. It prepares curricula, teaching materials, and publications. Its Secretariat constantly reminds citizens of their obligations towards the MIB State (*Negara MIB*). One of its leaders, Muhammad Hadi Muhammad Melayong (2013), argues that MIB's "values ... are innate for every Bruneian," a descriptive claim and normative expectation. In a former Minister of Education's words: "Every individual is responsible for practicing, appreciating, and strengthening the concept of MIB" (Dewan Majlis 2014:473). The government insists on exclusively defining MIB (its "interpretation must be protected"). MIB propagation underwent various changes. It is presently taught in a *more interactive* and *activating* manner, resembling transnational

the Royal Birthday). This can also be considered everyday forms of, to varying extents religiously framed, *state-making*, which are embedded in wider discursive arenas of locally unique Brunei-specific state-making.

pedagogical trends. Learners should become “multipliers.” The Council tries to “maximize” quantified “success rates.” Another new trend is to encourage “critical thinking”—about how to strengthen MIB. The Council pursues “five-year working plans” and distinguishes eight propagation fields and target groups. By “educationally empowering” these groups to themselves empower MIB, the authorities seek to *make* the BoI transcend its institutional boundaries: MIB should not simply be state-dictated and obeyed, but society should actively strengthen it and thus co-produce the state’s classificatory power. As the Council also integrates other institutions and companies under a “multi-agency approach,” boundaries between state, society and the market blur in many ways and the MIB-State takes a paramount interest in fostering a state-in-society understanding of good citizenship.



FIGURE 2: Secretariat of the MIB Supreme Council, Located at the University of Brunei Darussalam’s Campus, Gadong. Picture by Dominik M. Müller ©

The Council’s outreach includes e.g. lectures, courses, briefings, exhibitions, camps, competitions and media propagation. Bruneians are intensely exposed to MIB discourse and its normative expectations for public and private behavior. They are not only subject to control and disciplining, but also to the MIB discourse’s everyday didactics and *meaning-production*. Even those who circumvent or deliberately resist the state’s pedagogical aspirations can rarely evade being affected by its symbolic power and classificatory practices. For Bruneians below 40, the MIB-educated generation, being MIB

citizens and being expected to present themselves as such in certain spaces has become inscribed, to varying extents, into their habitus. This is often accompanied by equally habitualized hidden transcripts, negotiations and insecurities, also among MIB propagators. Nevertheless, MIB deeply affects their lifeworlds.

The Firewall of MIB and its Supernatural Counterforces

As the Bruneian scholar Asiyah az-Zahra Ahmad Kumpoh (2011:39) put it, somewhat paradoxically, in post-colonial Brunei the “status of religious tolerance ... remained unchanged,” but there have been “cultural changes where activities ... which did not conform to Islamic teaching could no longer be tolerated.” This may be a logical contradiction for the uninitiated (“tolerance unchanged” vs. “can no longer be tolerated”), but for many Bruneians it is not. It sums up two locally powerful themes: 1) feeling misrepresented by foreigners as intolerant/radical, whereas in reality, Bruneian Islam would be “moderate” and oriented towards “harmonious” relations with everybody; and 2) the banning of supernatural traditions that long have been central to everyday life. The latter, in the now hegemonic logic, is not a question of freedom of religious practice and thus (potentially) tolerable, but of protecting the very essence of Islam and Muslim souls.

In 2015, the Sultan famously called MIB a “firewall” against unwanted elements of globalization invading Brunei. The itself globalized metaphor’s underlying idea points to a long-standing view contrasting Brunei *Darussalam* (*Abode of Peace*) with a “zone of disorder” (Braighlinn 1992:51, 57) abroad. Undesired “external” elements are not just alternative readings of Islam, militant ideologies, non-Muslim missionaries, and “immoral” or “Westernized” behaviors, they also pertain to “widely accepted symbolism(s)” of the supernatural, which are deeply rooted in the Malay “cultural vocabulary” (a term borrowed from Herzfeld 1992:57). One “no longer tolerable” tradition that Asiyah az-Zahra Ahmad

Kumpoh (2011:50) mentions are “[c]elebrations at spirit shrines” (Müller 2017). The Islamic bureaucracy conceptualizes the state as a protector of Muslim souls: It is *obliged* and accountable towards God to realize the principle of *enjoining good and forbidding wrong*. Nowadays, the Malay mainstream similarly views many banned traditions as deviant and/or outdated. This view was fostered by state-Islamic education, but also takes inspiration from bottom-up trends. Other deviant-declared practices are certain Malay customs (*adat*) e.g. in wedding ceremonies, dances, dress, and some royal regalia. A government *khutbah* sermon recently told Muslims not to shake hands with members of the opposite sex who are not their spouses or certain relatives (*mahram*), an instruction that many, including state elites, ignored, and which is not enforced. In other fields, the bureaucracy takes action: A striking example is supernatural specialists/healers (*bomoh*). Their status has changed from “an indispensable figure in a Malay village” whose existence was largely “taken for granted” (Mohd Taib 1988:157) to a shadowy criminal figure who engages in *syirik* (sin) and *khurafat* (superstition, but the translation is misleading). Although the social institution of *bomoh* has long been widely accepted, under the MIB State’s claim to classificatory power, it can, *officially* and *under that term*, no longer be tolerated, resulting in far-reaching changes in everyday lifeworlds. *Bomoh* as a social institution, and certain individuals in particular have always been surrounded by ambivalence, due to their fascinating but suspicious access to invisible worlds (Peletz 1993:155). This ambivalence has been restructured and revalorized vis-à-vis policies that aim to govern individual practices/beliefs, and in ways that focus on the negative side of things. Thus, this transformation pushed forward by “state actors” engaging in social categorization is not a historical rupture *per se*, although the changes are dramatic.

Social Imaginaries and Bureaucratized Representations of Black Magic

Notwithstanding these normative shifts, beliefs in the omnipresence of sorcery remain integral

to social imaginaries and ontological realities. Ministry of Religious Affairs (MoRA) officers showed me two exhibitions of confiscated magic objects: All had been “cleaned, as officer Khairul explained. Yet, sounds had come from the room after dark, nobody would enter it at night. He also narrated how a MoRA scholar had tested a talisman for “academic” purposes: “it worked, he was unable to cut his skin.”

Opened in 2007, a theme room called “Objects Leading to the Deviation from the True Doctrine” became the MoRA’s most popular exhibition. The purpose was pedagogical, to explain “what is prohibited, what you cannot do, and cannot sell.” Khairul added, “20 years ago, Islamic education was not as strong as now.” In particular, some elders would still trust *bomohs* and practice deviant traditions, although this would gradually change since the 1990s. Some exhibited objects had been used for protection from other people’s magic, for business profits, love magic, or to become temporarily invisible or invincible. There were protective bottles with mystical symbols, numbers and Arabic letters that “offenders” place above doors, and cooking/eating bowls with inscribed chants, kept in restaurants to enhance revenues.

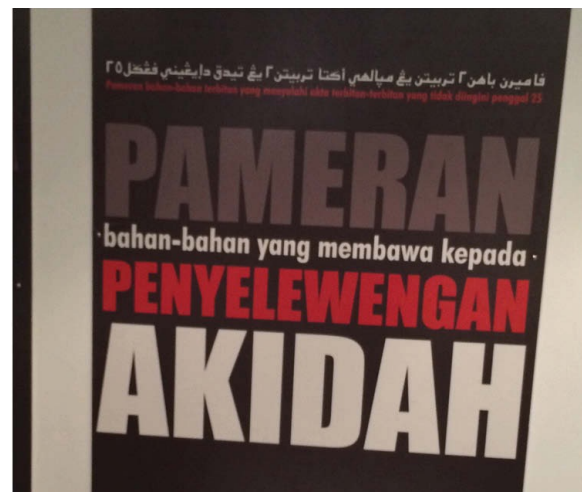


FIGURE 3: “Exhibition of Objects Leading to the Deviation from the True Doctrine (*akidah*)”. Ministry of Religious Affairs. Picture by Dominik M. Müller ©



FIGURE 4: Confiscated Objects Assumedly Used for Magic Practices, on Exhibition for Educational Purposes. Ministry of Religious Affairs, Bandar Seri Begawan. Picture by Dominik M. Müller ©.

Some restaurant owners had been elderly Malays “who still believe in such methods.” Khairul himself had investigated such a case. Elders would stop once they were “strongly exposed” to the “right information.” Other objects are protective rings, often found in a suspicious mix, e.g. wrapped in yellow cloth indicating “worshipping.” When objects are confiscated at post offices or borders, they are sent to the MoRA for investigation. Some are “harmless,” others are “used for special purposes, although owners themselves often don’t exactly know what.” Usually no legal action is taken but they remain confiscated. At the second exhibition of objects confiscated within the country, officers showed me pictures of a graveyard where photographs of a target person of sorcery had been buried, wrapped in underwear. They regularly find pictures. An officer joked, “we confiscate so many, we sometimes know the people on them, possibly it’s one of us!” This concerns many Bruneians: An MIB officer told me how friends recommended him not to use a photograph on Facebook, it could be used by enemies.



FIGURE 5: A Picture that Went Viral in Brunei in 2015, Reportedly Used to Harm a Civil Servant Named Hassan through Black Magic, Confiscated by Religious Authorities. Source: Social Media.

Arif, a Doctrine Control officer argued “theoretically *bomoh* practice can be good if it is not against Islam.” If a hospital is far away, a *good bomoh*, who, he added, should rather be called *orang pandai*, might provide helpful herbs. But even well-intentioned *orang pandai* would often unintendedly engage spirits/demons. There is no consensus what defines the difference between *bomoh* and *orang pandai* and whether they are *necessarily* “deviant.” The trend is to categorically view *bomoh* as deviant and *orang pandai* more undecidedly with mixed suspicion and admiration. *Bomoh* do not call themselves *bomoh* anymore, as the term has

acquired a de-legitimizing stigma. Some are called *Cikgu/Ustaz* (teacher), albeit in one case in 2017, a healer called himself *Yang Keramat Agong* (“holding superior powers”). Arif estimated “hundreds” of remaining *bomoh*, “70-80% foreigners,” mainly Indonesians. Local *bomoh* were mostly elders (“*kampung* people”), who learned “from generation to generation” and whose often-unintended deviance was mainly about interacting with *jin*. No next generation would follow them any longer. For many students, exchanging supernatural stories is part of their daily life, and in addition more subtle state-influences, some directly refer to state-power. Ramlee shared with me a “first hand story,” of which he was convinced, about a certain Prince having a room for his dagger collection that was haunted. A *keris* “stood in the room” haunted by several spirits, causing troubled family relations. The Prince, following the narration, called an Indonesian “good *bomoh*” who “cleaned” the room, performed prayers and brought away the *keris*, refusing any payment. Ramlee added that some believed the Prince himself has “powers”: “he can walk up walls, like Spiderman!” Ramlee also shared a story, known by other interlocutors, that the sultan’s late father, Omar Ali Saufuddin had supernatural powers “like other Sultans before” and could control the rain by twisting his moustache. The main institution responsible for “controlling” religious deviance is the MoRA’s Doctrine Control Unit. It organizes surveillance, temporal arrests, “faith rehabilitation,” and maintains a 24-hour hotline. 38 *bomoh* were arrested in 2004, 55 in 2005. Later statistics list smaller numbers. In 2001, first calls proposed *bomohs* “should register” (*Borneo Bulletin* 2001). Soon afterwards, the state’s stance became less ambivalent.

I interviewed Mas and his wife, who spied on a *bomoh*’s community for the MoRA as his “helpers.” Both have attractive private sector jobs and narrated their motivation as ethical: As the *bomoh* was cheating *and* spiritually harming his patients/disciples, spying was a “duty.” They fulfilled the expectation for good citizens to co-produce/strengthen the MIB state’s classificatory power as “multipliers” in society.

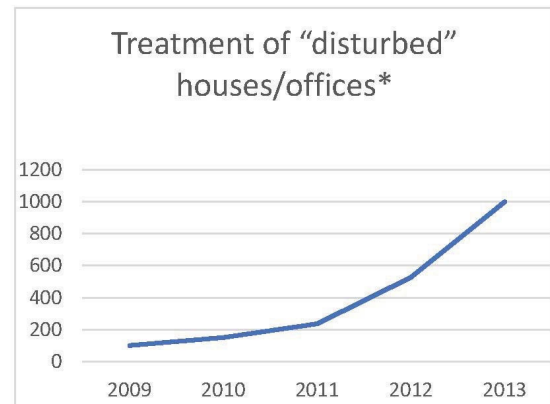
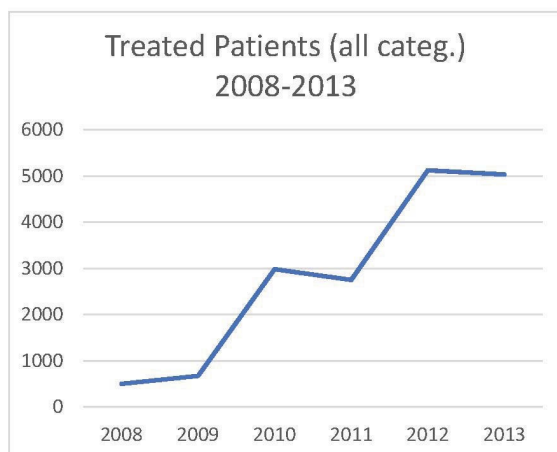
Bomoh cases are normally settled outside of courts, through warnings and “voluntary” re-education called counselling (*kaunseling*). In fact, the authorities focus on “education” and “mercy” much more than punishment. Yet, Arif lauded that the new Islamic penal code would place his work on more solid legal grounds: Muslims worshipping “any person, place, nature or any object, thing or animal in any manner” contrary to Islamic Law, or making “(a)n act or statement that shows faith to any object, thing or animal” possessing “power,” e.g. “the ability to bring good luck, increas(ing) wealth, grant(ing) wishes, heal(ing) diseases and others”, could be punished by imprisonment, fines and *kaunseling*. (Muslims claiming they “or any other person knows an event or a matter that is beyond human understanding, contradicting Islamic teachings: max. 10 years, caning, repentance; advertising black magic: max. 5 years; attempted murder max. 10 years, for further details see my original article).

Sharia-Compliant Healing, Water-Crystals and the Reconfiguration of “Deviant”-Declared Practices

Parallel to the socio-legal marginalization of *bomoh*, Brunei witnessed the rise of “Sharia-compliant” Islamic healing/exorcism. State-*ulama* have long conducted such practices officially and unofficially, but the most insightful example for my analytic purposes, and biggest trend, is Darusysyifa’ Warrafahah (DS), an institution locally established in 2007. Its model was the Malaysian Darusyifa’, founded by the late Haron Din, a former Islamic Studies professor and Spiritual Leader of the Islamic Party of Malaysia (Parti Islam Se-Malaysia, PAS). Haron Din was Malaysia’s most prominent expert of the invisible world: his books were bestsellers, and he was admired across political divides. Many Bruneians admired him too, including a small group who first met him at a dinner at the palace and developed the idea of establishing a branch. Haron Din repeatedly visited Brunei upon the Sultan’s invitation and was “cleared” to teach/speak about Islam-related matters. As one

of the founders, a former civil servant from the education sector, narrated, it took time before they were able to receive permission from the Registrar of Organisations (ROS). They finally set up DS, a “non-state” Islamic organization, usually impossible to establish and non-existent in Brunei. *De facto* Haron Din was its supreme teacher, but *pro forma* it is an independent organization. Its “governing committee” reports all activities to the ROS, and the organizational structure follows the ROS’s obligatory pattern and bureaucratic terminology.

Brunei’s DS offers a *standardized* one-year curriculum course on the “basics of Islamic healing, using Haron Din’s writings. Students learn purpose-specific Quranic verses, recitation patterns and “ethics.” Their Certificate entitles them to practice as volunteers at the center and/or privately. In 2014, 500 people were actively involved (in 2017, the number had grown to 700!), from diverse backgrounds, but all were necessarily Muslims. Patients also included non-Muslims, e.g. Chinese Bruneians, Filipino and Thai guest workers, and a Japanese manager who hired DS after spectacular “disturbances” in his company. The number of certified healers and treated patients/places grew annually.



FIGURES 6, 7 & 8: Numbers of Patients Treated, Healers Certified and Houses/Offices “Cleaned” by DS Annually in Brunei. Source: Courtesy of Darusysyifa’ Warrafahah.

DS categorizes three treatment fields: “Physical,” “spiritual,” and “disturbances.” Disturbances are caused by *jin* and/or sorcery, affect individuals or places, and may result in “possession” or “hysteria”. They may also be manifested by poisoning, a classical *bomoh* tool in Malay social imaginaries. Sometimes *jin* “accompany” people, some consciously own and feed them, until “in the end, the *jin* owns them.” *Jin* ownership can also be hereditary. During exorcism, Muslim *jin* would often leave the body “if they are told in Islamic terms, but not always!” Infidel *jin* are considered more challenging, but they can convert, which is utilized in exorcism strategies. One should avoid speaking with them (“they lie the whole time”), but if they want to convert, healers must assist. *Jin* speaking

through possessed patients happened “twice a week.” More frequent disturbances are not manifested by alien voices. “Often there is no clear identification of the cause: *jin*, *syaitan*, we don’t want to know, what counts is successful healing!”

When I visited the center one evening in 2014, all 10 treatment rooms were occupied. I witnessed a “disturbance” treatment: Maryam’s sister had tried to heal her “by copying DS without knowing the right method, then a *jin* became involved,” a healer explained. Black spots emerged on her skin, she went to DS. A female healer exorcized Maryam, who made long buzzing noises before throwing up when the *jin* assumedly left her body, a pattern the healer expected. I was told this is a dangerous moment. In its previous smaller building, spirits “sometimes jumped from one person to the next.” The situation improved after the DS clinic was enlarged, with partitions to provide enclosed treatment spaces, partly enabled by funding from the private sector, from which DS continues to receive donations. After the exorcism, Maryam received a mixture of herbal leaves and rice powder to shower with. Medicines can be purchased but are free for patients. In most other cabins, counselling took place for issues such as social/family problems, to be solved by Quranic rather than traditional *bomoh* means. Many patients visited *bomoh* before they came, a DS healer stated. Common advice is to pray the right prayers in the right way, remember Allah, and observe Islamic norms for social behavior.



FIGURE 9: A Certified Darusyifa’ Healer Treating a Woman Assumed to be “Disturbed.” Kampong Manggis. Picture by Dominik M. Müller ©

DS also exorcizes *state buildings*, e.g. the national hospital, university, and an Arabic school for girls (closed after mass-hysteria).⁵ DS’ first graduation ceremony was held at a Ministry of Defence building. In return, DS “cleaned” it. Disturbances had occurred, particularly after dawn: A soldier “heard somebody calling him, found a man at a table, asked why he had called him, suddenly the person was gone!” During the exorcism “a door opened and closed by itself, but not in the direction in which it would have been pushed by the wind, the other direction! Banners at the wall were shaking, a lamp stopped working.” After the exorcism the disturbances stopped. DS also cleaned the Friendship Bridge to Malaysia to secure its ceremonial opening. A worker had seen “an old Honda Accord” on the not-yet-opened bridge occupied by a man and

⁵ In 2010, a “mass hysteria” hit three schools during examinations time. Even “teachers” and “the school’s cook” were “possessed,” before DS ... solved it. It began when a “student cried after seeing a spirit.” A teacher commented “the spirit also made several demands. But the religious

expert ... told us not to meet the demands as it was the voice of Satan” (ibid.) The acting *Minister of Education* “advised the school authorities to clean the restrooms, believed to be the favorite spot for the spirits ...” (see my original article for references and further details)

child. While asking what they were doing there, “the car suddenly vanished.”

But DS’s engagement with state power goes beyond state-prescribed bureaucratic forms and cleaning jobs. When the first healers graduated, the sultan launched a DS event at the Convention Centre. His son Prince Malik became DS’ “patron.” Princes Sufri and Jefri, the sultan’s brothers, also visited DS events. These visits expressed royal endorsement and provided the locally most powerful form of symbolic capital. Photographs in DS annual reports documented this legitimation of the highest order. DS’s graduation reports share a similar structure: A full-page portrait of His Majesty on the first page, Prince Malik on the second. In 2013, the third page carried a text thanking Prince Malik and emphasizing popular “trust” in DS, adding that “the people” now turn away from *bomoh*. In the first report, a picture showed Harun Din standing next to the Sultan, the Crown Prince, and Prince Malik, symbolizing his royal acceptance. A picture of the State Mufti on the same page symbolized the Islamic bureaucracy’s equally crucial endorsement. In 2009 the Mufti, himself a book and fatwa author on Islamic healing, inaugurated the year’s course with a speech. Some course events were held on the MoRA’s premises, which underlines its proximity (“blurring boundaries”) to the state’s BoI. The DS leaders I spoke with stressed their contribution to MIB and the Sultan’s goal of Brunei as *Negara Zikir* (“a nation that always remembers *Allah*”) under his Vision 2035⁶. Through all these references to and cooperation with state power, DS stages conformity with the MIB State’s normative expectations for good citizenship, expressed through powerful symbolic codes in a specific cultural vocabulary. It is a *necessary condition* for its existence to co-produce the MIB State’s classificatory power, yet its leaders passionately believe in that project.

⁶ In another instance of appropriating powerful state symbols in legitimating their work, DS members told me how the Sultan once saw a possessed girl at a school in 2005, asking the *jin*: “Why do you possess her? Get out of this girl!” He was successful, “because he is the *khailfah*.” He has

But through the very act of establishing DS, they not only reproduce state power but also inform some of its meanings in ways that were neither originally planned nor expected by the architects of the government’s BoI. They created spaces of agency by *appropriating symbolic state power* for their own purposes.

Some certificate holders are *ex-bomoh*: “Some admit it openly,” but DS would not ask about “earlier mistakes,” following Haron Din’s advice not to expose sins. They believed that the role of *bomoh* was declining due to DS work, state education, and the MoRA’s *dakwah*. As one representative stated enthusiastically, “now there is an alternative!” There is clearly demand. An academic told me how his father had practiced traditional healing in the family before attending DS’s course to learn the proper way. Just like former *bomoh*, people like him can purify and re-legitimize their work vis-à-vis hegemonic power-knowledge structures and simultaneously protect their souls. The strong interest in the services previously provided by *bomoh*, now by DS, results from requirements that persist. Peletz (1993:150) described sorcery and consulting *bomohs* in Malaysia as “counterparts of formal social exchange” relating to personal vulnerabilities and “concerns with autonomy and social control.” Supernatural knowledge (*ilmu*) entails “power to influence other people and to maintain one’s autonomy in the face of countervailing forces invoked by others who aim to limit it,” particularly “in societies in which one never really knows what is in the minds of others.” In the MIB State, the normative parameters for handling such anxieties have shifted, resulting in a gap that DS, with its bureaucratically certified services, offers to fill.

MoRA officers stressed that “not everything labelled DS” was unproblematic; e.g. a *bomoh* had falsely claimed certification. Even certified healers would “not all practice the right way.”

powers, not only over humans, over everything, over all *makhluk* (creations) in his country.” They added: Some loggers tell trees, themselves *makhluk*, creations of Allah, they have the Sultan’s permission (compare Skeat 1900:194).

One had touched a woman claiming a *jinn* made him do it. Another “misused” a certificate he brought to *kaunseling* to prove his innocence. Some “turn to the wrong direction again.” Such transgressions indicate yet other modes of creating agency by appropriating powerful symbols of the state; namely by reference to DS’ state-approved bureaucratic certification and the authorizing powers it provides (in the age of “self-making-by-faking,” Comaroff & Comaroff 2016:xvii).

DS healing services for free. Patients “can donate if they wish” and “pay as much as they like.” *Bomoh* and *orang pandai* use the same wording. DS is funded by donations, but also sells products exposed to prayers (herbs, oil, honey). This, too, presents an uneven continuation of *bomoh* practices of praying into oil or water, although DS views these as entirely different: one realizes divine normativity through authentic verses, the other engages demonic forces, through lacking education or on purpose. DS’s bestselling item during in 2014 was prayed-upon water, stored in large boxes at its premises.



FIGURE 10: Pictures of Water-Crystals (“Before” and “After Having Been Exposed to Prayers”, and “*zam-zam* Water”) Placed at the Walls of DS’ Headquarters. Kampong Manggis. Picture by Dominik M. Müller ©



FIGURE 11: Healing Products (That Have Been Exposed to Prayers, *sudah dizikirkan*) on Sale at DS’ Headquarters. Kampong Manggis. Picture by Dominik M. Müller ©

DS leaders showed me a PowerPoint Presentation visualizing the powers of their healing water through microscopic photographs of water crystals. DS had sent frozen samples to a Japanese water photographer, M. Emoto (1943-2014). Emoto was internationally renowned among esoteric circles for his water experiments. In academia, his work is dismissed as pseudo-scientific, to which he once responded it was merely art. For my interlocutors, it possessed academic character. This added yet another cultural register and powerful vocabulary of legitimation, which is inherent to the BoI: the quest for scientific evidence in the construction of facts (Latour & Woolgar 1979), and its importance for convincing others. Samples included average water, water exposed to “4444 prayers” (*selawat tafriyyah*), to *zikir* prayers, and *zam-zam* water from Mecca. Emoto assumes water “has a memory” (acoustic/visual): Negative influences “break the micro-crystals” but water also “remembers” positive influences. Going beyond Emoto’s interpretive frame, the DS leaders stated “water is a creation of Allah” (*makhluk Allah*). And going beyond established

Sunni discourse, they explained water “can hear” and “has feelings.”

Emoto compared DS’s samples with others, e.g. exposed to rock music. He was fascinated, they told me. The pictures left little doubt: Prayed-upon water exhibited the “most beautiful” structures. Other samples had gradually less fine structures. Heavy metal-exposed water was the “worst, destroyed.” The crystals exposed to *zikir* prayers looked exceptional, but the *tafrijyah*-exposed water (by Haron Din) went even beyond that: “Emoto had never seen anything like that!” For DS, Emoto’s pictures and the PowerPoint presentation *visualized the invisible* and objectively proved their work’s effectiveness. The scientific character was also stressed at a DS symposium in 2013, attended by Emoto, Haron Din, and the State Mufti. Emoto presented a “working paper,” “The Science of Beautiful Water”. The program, mistakenly calling him “Prof.” described Emoto as a “scientific expert” (*pakar saintifik*) presenting “scientific findings.”

Pictures of water crystals decorated a wall in DS’s building. The cover of one graduation report also showed crystals. These, and the ideas attached to them, had become part of DS’s culture of self-presentation. DS’ sold its water for 70c. per bottle (“some people drink it every day”) as a medicine, and for protection from harm or disturbances, which, earlier would have been done e.g. through talismans, or water (or other natural products) prayed-upon by a *bomoh*.

Concluding Remarks: Hybrid Pathways to State-Imposed Orthodoxy

As a *socio-cultural phenomenon*, the BoI in Brunei is deeply informed by the MIB State’s discursive substrate and its political economy. Boundaries between state and society are in many ways *made* blurring through educational means, and by non-state actors themselves who appropriate the state’s powerful symbolic forms and bureaucratic schemes. Therefore, the BoI informs social and cultural transformations, as the state’s classificatory schemes diffuse into society and become actively embedded in everyday lifeworlds. Yet, the BoI does not simply

determine these transformations, as the case of DS and the creative agency involved illustrates. Such appropriations of (symbolic) state power do not simply reproduce it, but also often serve to ascribe new meanings to it and thus engage in their own modes of religiously framed state-making. The politics of self-declared orthodox purification become creatively re-embedded into both pre-existing cultural vocabularies and the discursive arena of the nation state, while simultaneously drawing upon transnational cultural flows from multiple sources. Some deviant-declared practices become reinvented within the symbolic parameters of the MIB State, alongside the more universal languages of bureaucracy, cultural globalization, modern nationalism, marketization, and scientization, statisticalization and technocratization (see e.g. Greenhalgh 2008), among various other hybridized registers. The reconfiguration at play here departs from, but goes beyond what Herzfeld (1992:35, see my original article for further discussion) calls “the organic part played by symbols in creating the new order out of the old”: The MIB State’s BoI, as a socio-cultural phenomenon, of which bureaucratized exorcism is one of many manifestations, here also integrates a vertiginous mixture of other influences, such as Japanese water-photography, the objectifying powers of PowerPoint, digital metaphors, future-oriented corporate governance, and transnational trends in pedagogy. Such accommodative reconfigurations should not be surprising, as they reflect a more general global condition. What makes the Bruneian case special, among other things, is how the MIB State, and “state actors” in the term’s expanded sense, seek to purify local culture through zealous Islamization policies, yet the pathways towards realizing this orthodoxy are remarkably hybrid. Such micro-level negotiations of state power, and of ascribing/deriving one’s own meanings from/to the state, tell a different story from the meta-narratives of state-driven Islamization that dominate portrayals of Brunei and often narrowly draw upon official policies, government declarations, and legal provisions. Bureaucratized thinking, speaking and planning

informs the quest for objectified evidence-making, as manifested in DS's case of water-photography or the MIB bureaucracy's statistical success rates, "visions and missions" and five-year-plans, among others. The systematization and reflection that Eickelman (2015) calls an "objectification of Muslim consciousness" form a necessary condition. In objectified modes of being Muslim, earlier practices and social institutions, such as the *bomoh*, are systematically re-examined vis-à-vis their (un)Islamicness. Yet, subsequent "abandonments" are *culturally productive* endeavors and should be analyzed as such, instead of reproducing their self-idealizing logics by describing them in their own terms. The alternative would be what Bourdieu et al. (1994:1) call "the risk of taking over (or being taken over by) a thought of the state, i.e. of applying to the state categories of thought produced and guaranteed by the state."

Simultaneously globalized and unique, the MIB State has its own "culture of world-making, truth making, knowledge-making, state-making, nation-making" in a world where actors engage in an "endless quest to recapture" what once had been "sovereign certainties of modernity, certainties that seem to be slipping away, widely mourned, irrecoverable" (Comaroff 2016:xiv). In this longing for certainties, the more impossible it gets to draw fixed boundaries, the more passionate (if not desperate) many actors try to (re-)install them. The BoI's quest for objectified evidence is integral to such searching for undisputable certainties. Yet, social actors within and beyond the state apparatus, themselves also construct, modify, and sometimes challenge the truths of states that claim sovereignty over their lives. Members of DS in this sense *participate* in such religiously framed state-, nation-, knowledge- and truth-making processes through creative techniques and seek to bring order into a world that they perceive as being fundamentally threatened by a dialectical interplay of visible and invisible disturbances.

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