

## The Brunei Malay Dilemma: Historical and Contemporary Challenges in Census Identity

Dg. Junaidah Awang Jambol<sup>1</sup>, Mohamad Ikhrum Mohd Ridzuan<sup>1</sup>, Noor Syakirah Zakaria<sup>1</sup>, Nurulasyikin Hassan<sup>2</sup>, Nur Auni Ugong<sup>3</sup>, Mohd Waliuddin Mohd Razali<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, University of Malaysia Sabah, UMS Road, 88400 Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, <sup>2</sup>Sultan Idris Education University, Faculty of Human Sciences, 35900 Tanjong Malim, Perak Darul Ridzuan, <sup>3</sup>Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti of Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan, Sarawak, <sup>4</sup>Faculty Economics & Business, Universiti of Malaysia Sarawak, 94300 Kota Samarahan Sarawak.

Corresponding Author Email: ikhrum@ums.edu.my

To Link this Article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i12/24421> DOI:10.6007/IJARBSS/v14-i12/24421

Published Date: 28 December 2024

### Abstract

This article examines the controversy surrounding the identification of the Brunei Malay community in Sabah after the independence of Sabah. In this context, the discussion focuses on how the position of the Brunei Malay community changed in the census records of Sabahans before and after Sabah's independence. Based on the initial record of the implementation of the population census in North Borneo by the British North Borneo Chartered Company (BNBC) and the British colonial government from 1891 to 1960, this distinction in racial categorization is evident. From the first record of the population census in North Borneo in 1891 until the last record of the population census issued by the British colonial government, it was discovered that the Brunei Malay community stood alone as a "native." However, the recording in terms of the categorization of *bumiputera* in the Sabah census has undergone significant and inconsistent changes since Sabah's independence. Comparing census reports of the population before and after Sabah's independence revealed that the classification of Brunei Malays as the only *bumiputera* in the population census has changed to *bumiputera lain-lain* (others) category after Sabah's independence. Although the Brunei Malay community is the largest minority in Sabah, their political, economic, and social aspects are not regressive. Therefore, this article will attempt to explore and trace the polemic, issues, and challenges in promoting the change in the position of Brunei Malays to become a native *bumiputera* entity, as per the previous record so that they are no longer included in the other *bumiputera* category in the Sabah population census record.

**Keywords:** Issues, Identification, Brunei Malay, Population Census, Sabah

**Introduction**

The Brunei Malay community is a long-standing community that established itself in Sabah. The identification of the Brunei Malay Community in Sabah is frequently linked to the early days of the Brunei Sultanate, which revealed a lengthy historiographical process between Sabah and Brunei Darussalam. From the beginning of North Borneo's history, the involvement and dominance of the Brunei Sultanate over the territory of Sabah have been undeniable, and this has been strengthened by the Sultanate of Brunei's acquisition of the entire Borneo archipelago up to the Philippine Islands. However, the empire's superiority was short-lived due to internal and external problems faced by the Brunei government (Dg. Junaidah & Baszley Bee, 2021: 40; Nicholas Tarling, 1971: 213). BNBC was able to establish a uniform form of administration when it succeeded in acquiring all land ownership in North Borneo from the Brunei Sultanate and Sulu Sultanate (Dg. Junaidah et.al, 2022: 3). To facilitate the implementation of economic development planning in North Borneo, BNBC published for the first time in 1891 a population census report aimed at documenting the races present in North Borneo. The document was published as Official Gazette 1891 or Government Notification Number 39 (Toru Ueda, 2006: 65; Jayum A Jayan, 2003: 16-19). This census activity had been ongoing, and a report would be published every ten years between 1891 and 1941. However, the census was suspended during the Japanese occupation and resumed in 1946, after the British colonial government had defeated Japan and taken control of North Borneo. The census report was then resumed until 1963 when Sabah achieved independence.

**Methodology Research**

This qualitative research examines the identification polemic of the Brunei Malay community in Sabah: post-independence issues and challenges. This research will focus on changing the position of the Brunei Malay community in the census records of Sabahans before and after Sabah's independence. This racial categorization can be seen in this context based on the initial record of the British North Borneo Chartered Company (BNBC) and the British colonial population census in North Borneo from 1891 to 1960. This study used primary sources such as the archive files of the Population Census of North Borneo, 1891–1931, and the North Borneo Report on the Census of Population, 1951–1960, besides referencing data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia, Sabah, 1960–2020. In addition, the researchers also used secondary and oral sources to support the data found in the study. In this study, three informants were selected based on their position, knowledge, and experience in relation to issues involving the identification of Brunei Malays. Among those interviewed were Muhammad Amri Idris, Director of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, Sabah State, Datuk Hj. Yusoff Bin Datuk Seri Panglima Hj. Mohd. Kassim, former President of the Brunei Sabah Malay Association, and Datuk Hj. Mohd. Ariffin Mohd. Arif, President of Persatuan Melayu Brunei Sabah (PMBS) and also ministers of Sabah.

**Research Findings***Identification Polemic of Brunei Malay Community*

Since 2015, Persatuan Melayu Brunei Sabah (PMBS) has been engaged in a protracted debate and controversy regarding the alteration of the position of the Brunei Malay community in the population census report following Sabah's independence. However, this struggle did not find a resolution. This was not only due to the lack of support from stakeholders but also due to the Brunei Malay community's lack of knowledge regarding the change in Sabah's census record before and after Sabah's independence. Consequently, the number of Bruneian

Malays classified as a minority has been grouped with other minority groups within *bumiputera lain-lain* category (Maizatul Izzah & Dg. Junaidah, 2022: 31-34).

During the implementation of the first population census in Sabah by the British North Borneo Chartered Company (BNBC) in 1891, the Brunei Malay community was classified as the indigenous people of Sabah and given its own category. This can be demonstrated using Table 1's initial report of the population census from 1891 to 1931.

Table 1

*Sabah Population Census Based on Population Ethnicity Between 1891-1931*

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>1891</b>	<b>1901</b>	<b>1911</b>	<b>1921</b>	<b>1931</b>
Kadazan	t.d	33,456	90,267	104,865	110,483
Murut	34,166	12,230	27,226	30,355	24,444
Bajau	11,150	10,885	24,228	33,070	34,099
Melayu	1,488	1,138	6,305	5,931	5,792
Sulu	3,733	6,373	5,503	6,637	5,766
Orang Sungai	t.d	4,784	9,168	7,422	6,999
<b>Brunei</b>	<b>3,546</b>	<b>6,767</b>	<b>9,537</b>	<b>11,753</b>	<b>14,051</b>
Bisaya	t.d	6,784	4,878	7,092	7,061
Tidong	t.d	t.d	1,777	1,847	2,315
Cina	7,156	12,282	27,801	39,256	50,056
Indonesia	2,232	3,960	5,510	11,223	10,014
Lain-lain	3,591	5,868	2,529	3,801	6,396
<b>Total</b>	<b>67,062</b>	<b>104,527</b>	<b>214,729</b>	<b>263,252</b>	<b>277,476</b>

Source : Population Census North Borneo, 1891-1931; Mohamad Jefri bin Haji Sabli, 2007:39; Saat Haji Awang Samit & Jumilah @ Jamilah Jaaffar, 2006: 683; Sabihah Osman & Ahmad Syukri Epat, 2007: 389-418

According to Table 1, Brunei Malays continued to be classified as the 'Brunei' race, which stood alone under the native category. This demonstrates that the Brunei Malays were once recognised as separate natives in North Borneo by BNBC, despite being a minority in Sabah. This North Borneo census report was published by BNBC every ten years until the most recent census in 1931. North Borneo was conquered by the Japanese in 1942, following the outbreak of the Second World War in Southeast Asia. Consequently, the census was not conducted again until 1945. Nevertheless, in 1946, when the British Colonial took over North Borneo, the British government resumed its census report in 1951 (Maizatul Izzah & Dg. Junaidah, 2022: 31).

Table 2

*Composition of the Indigenous Population in North Borneo in 1951*

<b>Community</b>	<b>Total (thousand)</b>
Dusun	116,889
Kwijau	978
Murut	18,724
Bajau	41,421
Illanun	3,307
Orang Sungei	13,697
<b>Brunei dan Kedayan</b>	<b>22,312</b>
Bisaya	7,866
Sulu	7,866
Tidong	3,481
Sino – native	6,468
Jumlah	243,009

Source: L.W. Jones, 1962: 51, Sabah State Archives Reserve

Based on Table 2, it was determined that the British Colonial placed Bruneian Malays in the category of separate natives, but grouped them with the Kedayans in the 1951 population census. However, in 1960, two distinct administrators issued two distinct types of censuses. The British Colonial government issued a census in 1960; subsequently, the Sabah state government re-aligned the population census in 1960 via the Department of Statistics Malaysia and conducted another census of Sabahans in 1963. The differences between the two censuses can be seen in tables 3 and 4.

Table 3

*Composition of the Indigenous Population in North Borneo in 1960*

<b>Community</b>	<b>Total (thousand)</b>
Dusun dan Kwijau	145, 229
Murut	22,138
Bajau	55,779
Illanun	3,391
Orang Sungei	15,112
<b>Brunei and Kedayan</b>	<b>31,231</b>
Bisaya	10,053
Sulu	11,080
Tidong	4,417
Sino-native	7,438
Jumlah	306,498

Source: L.W. Jones, 1962: 51, Sabah State Archives Reserve

Table 4

*Community Population in Sabah in 1960*

Community	Total (thousand)
Dusun	145,229
Murut	22,138
Bajau	59,710
<b>Indigenous lain-lain (a)</b>	<b>79,421</b>
Chinese	104,542
European (b)	1,896
Lain-lain	41,485
Jumlah	454,421

Source: 1960 Census Records, Sabah Statistics Department Record

Based on Tables 3 and 4, there was a discrepancy in the categorization of Brunei Malays in the 1960 population census conducted by the British Colonial who still classified 'Brunei and Kedayan' races as the only group of *bumiputera* in the Sabah census report. However, following Sabah's independence, the Department of Statistics Malaysia issued a second population census report in 1960, classifying Brunei Malay as "Indigenous lain-lain". There is a reference in the 1960 population census record that explains the (a) and (b) categories of races shown in Table 4. Brunei, Kedayan, Sungei, and Bisaya are listed as indigenous races, while labels (b) represent Eurasians.

#### **Change in the Position of the Post-Independence Brunei Malays**

The participation and merger of Sabah, Sarawak, Malaya, and Singapore in 1963's formation of Malaysia resulted in Sabah achieving independence and successfully forming its own government. The Sabah Statistics Department continued to collect data for the population census in Sabah despite the ongoing process of restructuring and redefining the functions and responsibilities of government agencies under the new Sabah administration (Kenneth R. Hall and John K. Whitsmore, 1976: 228). In this context, the Sabah State Department of Statistics Malaysia was not exempt from the process of racial realignment in Sabah until the changes had a significant impact on the indigenous races which were considered the most prevalent minorities, particularly the Brunei Malay community. Tables 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 display the list of races in Sabah's population census record, which frequently changes with each census.

Table 5

*Sabah Population Census Record in 1970*

<b>Community</b>	<b>Total (thousand)</b>
Kadazan	184,512
Murut	31,299
Bajau	18,365
<b>Indigenous lain-lain</b>	<b>125,631</b>
Cina	139,509
Indonesia	39,526
Lain-lain	37,151
Jumlah keseluruhan	575,993

Table 6

*Record of the Population Census in Sabah in 1980*

<b>Community</b>	<b>Total (thousand)</b>
<b>Pribumi</b>	<b>792,043</b>
Cina	155,304
India	5,293
Lain-lain	3,072
Jumlah keseluruhan	955,712

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia for the state of Sabah, 1970 & 1980

Table 7

*Record of the Population Census in Sabah in 1990*

<b>Community</b>	<b>Total (thousand)</b>
Melayu	106,740
Dusun	216,910
Kadazan	104,924
Bajau	203,457
Murut	50,255
<b>Bumiputera lain-lain</b>	<b>255,555</b>
Cina	200,056
Indonesia	139,403
Lain-lain	32,210
Bukan warganegara Malaysia	425,175
Jumlah keseluruhan	1,734,685

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia for the state of Sabah 1991: 7-12

Table 8

*Census Records of the Population in 2000*

Community	Total (thousand)
Melayu	294,833
Kadazan / Dusun	458,768
Bajau	330,996
Murut	80,872
<b>Bumiputera lain-lain</b>	<b>374,388</b>
Cina	254,528
Lain-lain	120,894
Bukan warganegara Malaysia	552,967
Jumlah keseluruhan	2,468,246

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia for the state of Sabah, 2000: 16-18

Table 9

*Sabah Community Census Record in 2010*

Community	Total (thousand)
Melayu	178,029
Kadazan / Dusun	555,647
Bajau	436,672
Murut	100,631
<b>Bumiputera lain - lain</b>	<b>640,964</b>
Cina	284,049
India	7,171
Lain-lain	47,052
Bukan warganegara Malaysia	867,190
Jumlah keseluruhan	3,117,405

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia for the state of Sabah, 2017: 15-21

Table 10

*Population Community Census Records in 2020*

Community	Total (thousand)
Melayu	307,494
Kadazan/Dusun	660,777
Murut	106,468
<b>Bumiputera lain-lain</b>	<b>673, 233</b>
Cina	248, 920
India	5,962
Lain-lain	39,989
Bukan warganegara Malaysia	810,443
Jumlah keseluruhan	3, 821,663

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia for the state of Sabah, 2020: 98-102

The research revealed that the indigenous status used to classify Brunei Malays in the 1960s began to be replaced by the term "*bumiputera lain-lain*" in the 1990s. Today, 'natives' are referred to as indigenous, which refers to *bumiputera* Sabah. In this regard, not only should these natives be protected in terms of social factors such as lifestyle, customs, and fundamental rights, but they should also be granted land ownership rights (Sabah Statistics Yearbook, 2017: 75). According to the Western perspective, this indigenous term should be applied to the indigenous people who have sought to contribute their energy to the economic and political development of North Borneo.

However, the term *native* was eventually replaced by the term *indigenous* when referring to the indigenous population of North Borneo. After the colonial British took control of North Borneo in 1946, this term became widely used. However, the term's usage had gradually evolved as government administrators altered the classification of North Borneo's races based on their respective political perspectives. As evidence, the term *peribumi* had been used since Sabah's independence. After the end of the colonial period, the indigenous term was replaced with *peribumi* term in an effort to enhance and preserve the Malay language. However, the term "*peribumi*" was later changed to "*bumiputera*" in the mid-1990s, and the term is still used in Sabah's discourse and political language today.

### Issues and Challenges

The principal issue relating to the modification of the list of categories of population census reports in post-independence Sabah can be evaluated through the population census processing method carried out by the administrators as a benchmark for determining the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of the population. The objective is to make it easier for administrators to monitor population and housing trends in order to plan national development. After Sabah's independence through the formation of Malaysia, Sabah's census reports were adjusted again according to the federation and provision stipulated in the Census Act 1960 (revised 1969).

This census collection report will be published every ten years. Nonetheless, this data collection activity is conducted annually to update the number of total population and the number of houses in Sabah. There are a number of conditions that have been set to carry out



census days. For example, the census days must not fall during the holiday season, the Hajj season, the day of the general release, the monsoon season, or any other occasions that could result in population movement. Commissioners, Deputy Commissioners, Assistant Commissioners, District Superintendents, Supervisors, and House Enumerators are the various census officers involved. To standardize the process, before Census Day, census officers from the department of statistics will create a uniform breakdown according to area based on state borders, districts, towns, residences, and locations. There are three phases of the Population and Housing Census: pre, during, and post-census.

Typically, during the pre-processing, census officers usually supervise a counting block containing an estimated 80 to 120 houses per block. For reference, the census officer will create a map of the district and the area of the counting block. Then, they will prepare a list of residences in accordance with the standardisation, a questionnaire, and a target population size. A total of 108 questions, including age, ethnicity, religion, gender, nationality, occupation, place of residence, household, household appliances, status, level of education, and economic activities, will be prepared for the population survey. However, a common problem in this census process occurs when a few communities in the west coast region of Sabah, particularly villages, do not know their ethnicity and are confused about it. This is one of the difficulties census officers face in the field (Muhammad Amri Idris, 2022). This situation arises as a result of the assimilation of culture through intermarriage in their families, ultimately resulting in a shift in racial identity. In addition, this change in racial identity occurs when they have adapted to the lifestyle and culture of other races, who are also the indigenous people of a region until they become part of the indigenous population. According to Mr Juri's interview, he is a Bajau, as indicated on his Birth Certificate, but his father is Dusun. As a result of his father's marriage to a Bajau, his race changed from Dusun to Bajau. This is because Kampung Kindu, Tuaran is the ancestral home of the Bajau community. In this context, Mr Juri's family has undergone assimilation with other races in terms of language, culture, and customs (Juri, 2022).

Technically, during the process of implementing the population census, the State Census Implementation Committee will coordinate with various government agencies to determine racial categorization for the census report. The Sabah State Statistics Department makes frequent references to the Interpretation (Definition of Native Ordinance) State of Sabah 1952 and the Sabah National Registration Department. A native of Sabah is defined as a citizen who is the child or grandchildren of one of Sabah's indigenous races. The individual must have been born on or after Malaysia Day in Sabah, or his/her father must have resided in Sabah at the time of birth (Rafidah @ Malissa Binti Salleh et.al, 2019: 9-18).

There are approximately 33 ethnic groups in Sabah, but only four are listed in the census as separate races: Malay, Kadazan or Dusun, Bajau, and Murut. Other *bumiputera* categories included a total of 29 races, including Brunei Malay, Kedayan, Sungai, Kedayan, Rungus, Bisaya, and many others. According to the explanation of the Director of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, the inclusion of Brunei Malays under *bumiputera lain-lain* category is due to the small number of communities or minorities in the state of Sabah, as compared to the Bajau, Kadazan, Dusun, and Murut communities, which have a greater number of people who are classified as belonging to the majority community. This is evident from the census reports from 1970 to 2020.

However, the main concern raised by the Brunei Malay community relates to the inconsistency between the classification of races in the Sabah census report before and after independence. For instance, it is evident in the census report of the population in North Borneo from 1921 to 1960, under the rule of the British North Borneo Company (BNBC) and British colonial. In this context, it was discovered that after Sabah's independence, the Department of Statistics Malaysia reissued the population and housing census in the state of Sabah in 1970 in an effort to standardise the census throughout Malaysia. As shown in tables 10 and 11, the categorization of races in the census report has been modified.

Table 11

*Record of Racial Categorization by Population in North Borneo from 1921-1960 (Before Independence)*

Community	Total Number				Percentage of Indigenous Population			
	1921	1931	1951	1960	1921	1931	1951	1960
Dusun	103,378	105,944	116,889	145,229	50.9	51.6	48.1	47.4
Kwijau	1,478	4,539	978		0.7	2.2	0.4	
Murut	30,355	24,444	18,724	22,138	14.9	11.9	7.7	7.2
Bajau	31,348	31,640	41,421	55,779	15.5	17.1	18.2	18.2
Illanun	1,722	2,459	3,307	3,931	0.8	1.2	1.4	1.3
Orang Sungei	7,422	6,999	13,697	15,112	3.4	5.6	4.9	4.9
<b>Brunei &amp; Kedayan</b>	<b>11,753</b>	<b>14,051</b>	<b>22,312</b>	<b>31,321</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>9.2</b>	<b>10.2</b>	<b>10.2</b>
Bisaya	7,092	7,061	7,866	10,053	3.5	3.2	3.3	3.3
Sulu	6,637	5,766	7,866	11,080	2.8	3.2	3.6	3.6
Tidong	1,847	2,315	3,481	4,417	1.1	1.4	1.5	1.5
Sino Native	Not classified		6,468	7,438			2.7	2.4
<b>ALL INDIGENOUS</b>	<b>203,041</b>	<b>205,218</b>	<b>243,009</b>	<b>306,498</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: L.W. Jones, *North Borneo, Report on The Census of Population Taken on 10<sup>th</sup> August 1960*, U.S Government Printing Office, 1962. page. 51.

Table 12

Comparison of Record of racial categorization according to Sabah Population Census from 1990-2020

Race	1970	Race	1990	Race	2000	Race	2010	Kaum	2020
Kadazan	184,512	Melayu	106,740	Melayu	294,833			Melayu	307,494
Murut	31,299	Dusun	216,910	Kadazan / Dusun	458,768	Melayu	178,029	Kadazan/Dusun	660,777
Bajau	18,365	Kadazan	104,924	Bajau	330,996	Kadazan / Dusun	555,647	Murut	106,468
<b>Indigenus lain-lain</b>	<b>125,631</b>	Bajau	203,457	Murut	80,872	Bajau	436,672	<b>Bumiputera lain-lain</b>	<b>673,233</b>
Cina	139,509	Murut	50,255	<b>Bumiputera lain-lain</b>	<b>374,388</b>	Murut	100,631	Cina	248,920
Indonesia	39,526	<b>Bumiputera lain-lain</b>	<b>255,555</b>	Cina	254,528	<b>Bumiputera lain-lain</b>	<b>640,964</b>	India	5,962
Lain-lain	37,151	Cina	200,056	Lain – lain	120,894	Cina	284,049	Lain-lain	39,989
Jumlah keseluruhan	575,993	Indonesia	139,403	Bukan warganegara Malaysia	552,967	India	7,171	Bukan warganegara Malaysia	810,443
		Lain-lain	32,210	Jumlah keseluruhan	2,468,246	Lain - lain	47,052	Jumlah keseluruhan	3,821,663
		Bukan warganegara Malaysia	425,175			Bukan warganegara Malaysia	867,190		
		Jumlah keseluruhan	1,734,685			Jumlah keseluruhan	3,117,405		

Source: Department of Statistics Malaysia, Sabah.

According to tables 11 and 12, there are significant differences in the racial classification of the Sabah population census. In this regard, the change in racial classification in the population census has made it difficult not only for researchers but also for the races listed in *bumiputera lain-lain* group to determine the most recent number of their races in Sabah. Typically, the Brunei Malay community is considered the largest minority group in Sabah. However, the question is whether or not this race remains a minority in the present context. Given the need for the retention of concrete data on the most recent number of races classified in *bumiputera lain-lain* group in Sabah, this issue has brought up some questions as the ethnic diversity found in Sabah is a valuable treasure that must be highlighted and preserved for future generations.

In this regard, Persatuan Melayu Brunei Sabah (PMBS) has made various efforts to maintain the *bumiputera* identity of the Brunei Malay community of Sabah, including writing an official letter to the authorities in order to obtain answers and clarifications on the status of Brunei Malays in Sabah and their categorization in *bumiputera lain-lain* (Datuk Hj. Yussof, 2022).

However, there has been no response from the authorities on this matter. In addition, the PMBS president will reexamine the issue and discuss it with the Supreme Council in order to determine what actions the PMBS should take to bring attention to it. The association will also communicate with the Malaysian Department of Statistics, the Sabah State Cultural Board, and the Ministry of Higher Education regarding issues pertaining to the identification of Brunei Malays in Sabah (Ariffin, 2022).

In addition, there is an explanation from the Malaysian Department of Statistics regarding the issue of Brunei Malay identification in Sabah. However, this explanation should be viewed in light of the racially diverse history of the state of Sabah. In this regard, even if *bumiputera* who are classified as "minorities" are not eligible to stand alone in the state census, this should be reassessed, not only to recognise the genealogy of the particular *bumiputera* community who have lived in Sabah for a long time, but also to recognise their shared history and contributions to the development of Sabah during the pre-independence era. It is essential to reevaluate this aspect not only to ensure that future generations are aware of the existence and diversity of these minorities, but also to ensure that their status as *bumiputera* in Sabah is consistently maintained. Therefore, it would be less appropriate if the minority community in Sabah, particularly those with *bumiputera* status such as the Brunei Malay community, is categorised as *bumiputera lain-lain* solely on the basis of minority status, whereas the situation is different for *bumiputera* with majority status who are given a distinct categorization in the population census record. All *bumiputera* communities in Sabah should be accorded the same rights and position in the population census record so that there is no confusion in the future regarding the *bumiputera* status of races classified as "natives."

Thus, it is less significant if the existence of *bumiputera lain-lain* classifications in Sabah's census record is to produce a neat and uniform table with a large number of digits. In reality, the objective is also to reduce the amount of paper used for printing. If this perspective persists, it is feared that it will have a significant impact on the future existence and compatibility of ethnic minorities with *bumiputera* Sabah status. This is because the existence of the minority is contingent upon the introduction of *bumiputera lain-lain*, and it is feared that not only the next generation but also the minorities themselves, will be unable to determine the exact number of their respective races.

In this regard, the Malaysian Department of Statistics has explained that the initiative to make Brunei Malays its own race in the population census report is beyond their control. In order to create a single race that can stand alone in the population census report, the race must have a majority, as is the case with the Bajau, Kadazan or Dusun, Murut, and Malay communities. Therefore, it is difficult to place a minority-status *bumiputera* community in a single composition with the rest of the majority race (Muhammad Amri Idris, 2022)

## **Conclusion**

The Brunei Malay Dilemma investigation provides significant insights into the historical and contemporary challenges faced by the Brunei Malay community in relation to the census in Sabah. From 1891 until Sabah's independence in 1963, the North Borneo censuses recognised the Brunei Malays as a separate native group. They were placed in a separate native category, reflecting their historical importance and unique identity. However, after independence, their classification changed to "bumiputera lain -lain" (others), which disadvantaged their status,

although the community remains the largest minority group in Sabah. Due to a lack of knowledge of the impact of these census changes and inadequate support from stakeholders, the Brunei Malay community faces difficulties in advocating for their recognition and rights, which hampers their efforts to regain their status as a separate bumiputera entity. Furthermore, the inconsistent application of racial categories over the years complicates the understanding of demographic data and makes it difficult to accurately assess the actual population size of Brunei Malays. Cultural assimilation and intermarriage also contribute to confusion about ethnic identity, complicating the census process and community self-identification. To address these issues, authorities should consider reassessing the racial categorisation of the Brunei Malay community in future census reports to recognise their historical status. Furthermore, it is essential to raise awareness among the community about their rights and the importance of census classifications so that they can advocate for their recognition. Engaging various stakeholders, including government agencies and community leaders, will be critical to support the push of the Brunei Malay community for a census that is reflective of their historical and cultural identity. To ensure accurate representation of the Brunei Malay community in future population data, it is critical to continuously monitor demographic changes and raise awareness among the population on census issues. Initiatives to document and preserve their cultural heritage can also strengthen their identity in Sabah's diverse society. A collaborative approach that respects their historical identity and ensures accurate representation in the census is necessary to address the challenges faced by the Brunei Malay community.

### **References**

- Abdul Latif bin Haji Ibrahim. (2006). Kampung Ayer di Borneo: Perspektif persamaan dan perbezaan. In Seminar Sejarah Borneo Ke-2. Pusat Sejarah Brunei, Kementerian Belia dan Kebudayaan.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (1960). Population census report 1960. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (1970). Population by community groups and sex of major towns and townships in Sabah. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (1980). Population by administrative district, ethnic group and sex. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (1991). Laporan am banci penduduk Malaysia 1991. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2000). Taburan penduduk mengikut kawasan pihak berkuasa tempatan dan mukim-banci penduduk dan perumahan Malaysia. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2017). Buku tahunan perangkaan Sabah: Statistics yearbook. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Department of Statistics Malaysia. (2020). Penemuan utama banci penduduk dan perumahan Malaysia. Kota Kinabalu, Sabah.
- Ngidang, D. (2005). Deconstruction and reconstruction of native customary land tenure in Sarawak. *Southeast Asian Studies*, 43(1), 47. <https://kyoto-seas.org/pdf/43/1/430103.pdf>
- Jayan, J. A. (2003). *Malaysian politics & government*. Shah Alam: Karisma Publications Sdn Bhd.

- Kassim, J. (n.d.). Sejarah penghijrahan dan penempatan suku Brunei di Sabah 1900-1941. Bangi: Kuala Lumpur.
- Jones, L. W. (1962). North Borneo report on the census of population taken on 10th August 1960. Kuching, Sarawak: Government Printing Office.
- Hall, K. R., & Whitsmore, J. K. (1976). Explorations in early Southeast Asian history: The origins of Southeast Asian statecraft. Cambridge University Press.
- Lee, Y. L. (1982). Sabah: Satu kajian geografi petempatan. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Sabli, M. J. (2007). Rekontruksi sejarah penghijrahan dan penempatan kaum suku Melayu Brunei di Papar. In Seminar Sejarah Borneo Ke-2. Population census North Borneo, 1891-1931. (n.d.). Sabah State Archive.
- Ariff, M. R. (2005). Petempatan Kampung Air di Pulau Borneo: Satu kajian perbandingan. Akademi Pengajian Brunei, Universiti Brunei Darussalam.
- Nicholl, R. (1990). European sources for the history of the Sultanate of Brunei in the sixteenth century. Brunei Darussalam: Museum Brunei.
- Rutter, O. (1922). British North Borneo: An account of its history, resources and native tribes. Constable & Co. Ltd.
- Jaafar, S. A. D. (2016). Masyarakat Brunei di Kampung Air Kudat: Sejarah dan petempatan. Kota Kinabalu: Muzium Sabah.
- Osman, S., & Epat, A. S. (2007). Hakikat sejarah dalam masyarakat Sabah. In Pemuliharaan sejarah dan tamadun Borneo. Brunei Darussalam: Pusat Sejarah Brunei.
- Singh, D. S. R. (2003). The making of Sabah 1865-1941: The dynamics of indigenous society. Kuala Lumpur: University Malaya.
- Tarling, N. (1971). Britain, the Brooke & Brunei. Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press. Buku tahunan perangkaan Sabah: Statistics yearbook (2017). Jabatan Perangkaan Malaysia, Negeri Sabah.
- Ueda, T. (2006). Pembinaan dan perkembangan konsep native di Borneo Utara pada zaman kolonial. Bangi: Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia.
- Idris, M. A. (2022, June 9). Interview by author. Director of the Department of Statistics Malaysia, Sabah.
- Juri. (2022, April 21). Interview by author. Kampung Kindu, Tuaran.