

Sayap Garuda in Sarawak and Sabah after the Second World War until the 1950s

Suffian bin Mansor

Department of History, Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia

Corresponding Author: smansor@ukm.edu.my

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14710/ihis.v3i2.6086>

Abstract

Interaction among the islands in the Malay archipelago in early period was through trade, culture and brotherhood. This relationship persisted despite Western powers trying to set-up Western-style of political boundaries to justify their territorial claims in the archipelago. This is also the case between British dominions in Borneo namely Sarawak and Sabah with the Dutch domination in Indonesia. It was revealed that this past relationship was feared by the colonial powers after World War II. This is because of the liberation movement and anti-colonial movement in Indonesia. Meanwhile, Indonesia's independence movement worried the British who had just colonized Sarawak and Sabah. Both regions were also experiencing political changes that began to counter British rule in Sarawak and Sabah. Although the opposition differed between the two territories, their original purpose was to free themselves from British occupation. Of particular concern to the British was the nationalist movement in Indonesia which was feared to influence political movements in Sarawak and Sabah. This is clearly demonstrated by the presence of several active Indonesian organizations in Sarawak and the existence of political movements in Sabah that supported Sukarno and Hatta. The British tried to stop the Indonesian influence from working in these two territories. The purpose of this article is to look at aspects of cultural space that have long been involved in political movements in Sarawak and Sabah. This article uses a content analysis approach using primary sources from London and secondary materials from libraries in Malaysia. From this point of view, we can make a clear finding that friendship and brotherhood are strong in the archipelago despite the fact that Western powers are trying to separate them.

Received:

11 October 2019

Accepted:

5 December 2019

Keywords: Sarawak; Sabah; Indonesia; British; Anti-Cession; Borneo.

Introduction

The Malay World has had a long history before the arrival of foreign influence into the region. Many scholars had confirmed the existence of the Malay community groups that inhabit the islands and mainland Southeast Asia. Although there are islands that separate them from each other, there is a connection. This relationship is based on brotherhood, economic and security interests, and unity as a political entity. This article therefore seeks to look at the relationship between the Sarawak and Sabah territories with Indonesia. The focus was on post-World War II until the mid-1950s.

However, this relationship is reflected in the aspects of political movements and nationalism in these two regions. Before going further, it would be better to discuss about the location and the background of Sarawak and Sabah.

The subject being studied is about the two regions of the Malaysia's state today, namely Sarawak and Sabah. Both states are located north of Borneo Island. For this reason, both states made Malaysia to have a border with Indonesia. This is because the Indonesian province of Kalimantan bordered the two regions. This border allowed Sarawak and Sabah to have land route with Indonesia whether legal or none legal access. In fact, the brotherhood between Sarawak and Sabah and the Borneo region is close. Prior to the intervention of Western powers on Borneo Island there was sultanate in the region. The Sambas Sultanate had close relationship with the people of Sarawak based on cultural and linguistic similarities in Sarawak. In fact, the origin of the Iban population in Sarawak is from the Kapuas in Borneo. The same situation happened to the people in Tawau and Sebatik Island which they had family and friends relations. This relationship is the main subject of discussion in this article.

Method

This study uses historical methods related with content analysis. This method provides a new and authentic historical discovery. This is because the focus of this research is on analyzing primary and secondary sources. These materials are available from various repository record departments. The original source of the material was a British government document obtained from the National Archives of London. Some of these documents contain correspondence and government reports on the situation in her colonial province of Borneo. These files from London are coded with the Colonial Office (CO) and Foreign Colonial Office (FCO).

While secondary materials are mostly available at libraries in Kuala Lumpur and Bangi. The three of these libraries are at the Tun Seri Lanang Library, the ATMA Library (National University of Malaysia) and the University of Malaya Main Library. These secondary materials consist of a variety of books on the history of Sarawak, Sabah, Malaya and Indonesia. Sources of articles and chapters in the book are also used because there are several articles and chapters in the book that are relevant to the study on preparation of this article.

Free Relationships

Before the formation of the Sarawak and Sabah modern boundary, this northern Borneo region had close links with the islands in the Malay archipelago. This relationship began with the existing of people in both regions. The story of Datuk Merpati tells, how Datuk Merpati's arrival from across the country that was welcomed by the locals at Santubong, Sarawak. The origin of which Datuk Merpati is associated with three places namely Java, Sumatra and Johor. These three places indicated the connection between Sarawak and the outside world. Meanwhile, Datuk Kuali and Datu Kuli as the local chiefs in Santubong received a good reception from Datuk Merpati's family (Ghani, 1989, p. 73). The story of Datuk Merpati is an important

reference on the Sarawak Malay community's origins. It is associated with the relay lines in Kuching Malays especially the (Leight, 1998). A similar situation occurred in the relationship of the Malays and Dayaks in Saribas in the presence of Datu Gudam (some call him as a Abang Gudam). Originally from Pagaruyung, Sumatra he had traveled to Saribas, Sarawak (Said, 2013, p. 108). He helped Temenggung Abdul Kadir get his daughter from becoming the Sultan of Brunei's wife. He later married Dayang Chi, the daughter of Temenggung Abdul Kadir and settled in Saribas. According to Datu Sanib Said, Datu Gudam became the ruler of Saribas and his descendants subsequently inherited the kerajaan (Sandin, 1969, p. 235).

Regarding the kerajaan (kingdoms) that once appeared in Sarawak, Prapanca wrote in the book *Negarakertagama* which mentioned the existence of several kingdoms in northern Borneo. The kingdoms mentioned are Sawaku, Kalka, Samadong, Saribas and Melano (Yamin, 1974, pp. 61-62). From the toponymy aspect of the names mentioned here are similarities to some names in Sarawak today such as Kalka is Kalaka, Samadong is Samarahan, Sawaku is associated with Sarawak and Melano is related to Melanau people in Sarawak. Even in Lundu there is the name Tanjung Melano. Whether it refer Melano as a race or a place but clearly shows a link between Sarawak with other regions in the Malay World.

While the study in Sabah found the importance of trade relations between Sabah and the Malay World. It is said that there was a port known as Chu-po in Sabah in the 3rd century (Ramli, 2012, p. 74). But more important is the role of Bukit Tengkorang in Sabah. The pottery industry that existed in the area helped trade in the pre-historic era. Meanwhile, the discovery of a Moko-type bronze drum on Pulau Bangi confirms the relation between the Hindu Buddhist kingdom in Java with northern Sabah. The influence of Hindu Buddhism on northern Borneo can also be seen by the discovery of various Buddhist objects in Santubong, Sarawak. Meanwhile, the discovery of the Ganesha statue in Limbang, Sarawak provides information on religious interaction with the Hindu-Buddhism kingdom in Indonesia.

Relations between the northern provinces of Borneo continued until the arrival of western powers. The Dutch and the British influence began to establish their power by dividing the provinces in the Malay world to their economic interests through the Anglo-Dutch treaty in 1824. While in the north of Borneo individuals Brookes became the government in Sarawak (Baring-Gould, 2007, p. 80). While in Sabah the the Chartered Company (CC) dominated and rule the region (Tregonning, 2007, p. 34). Meanwhile, the Dutch began to colonise each of the Indonesian islands. During this period of colonization there were still links between these territories. This relationship is clearly seen in terms of the migration of Java and Boyan workers to Sarawak (Ho, 2003, p. 57). In Sarawak, the influences from Java is clearly seen in terms of food as well as language. Whereas the Brooke government also imported some educate'smen from Sumatra like Malim Pahlawan and Abu Bakar as administrators and teachers in the Brooke government. In fact, Shawal bin Abdul Hamid the teacher of wife of Rajah Charles Brooke came from Bangkahulu, Sumatera (Sulaiman, 2004, p. 33). The intellectuals of Sumatra with local Malay had played importance role in formation of

the Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Sarawak (PKMS) in 1939. One of them was the government employees came from Palembang i.e. Johari Anang (FCO141 / 12340, List of members of MNUS).

Meanwhile, the Bugis community trading activities in the 19th century led them to choose Sabah as their visiting place, and some of them settle down. (Sakke, 2012, p. 27). For example, Pua Ado or La Toampong's real name Andi Bukku, had served as Penghulu (local chief) of Tawau with appointment of the CC (Sakke, 2012, p. 28). The labor shortage in Sabah opens up opportunities for labour in the Dutch colonial territories to migrants and work with Western and Japanese companies. They consist of Tidung, Bugis, Banjar and Java (Sakke, 2012, p. 29). During the Japanese occupation, Ahmad Zaidi Adruce, a Sarawakian student, was sent to Buitenzorg College (Bogor Veterinary College) in Bogor (Leigh, 1988, p. 28-29). There he met A. M. Azahari, a student from Brunei (Said, 2010, p. 95).

After the Second World War

After the end of World War II, the situation in Southeast Asia changed. Western powers began to return to Southeast Asia to continue their rule. However, many of people in Southeast Asia began to oppose the return of their colonial master. Some of the regions in Southeast Asia was granted the independence. The Philippines was granted independence by the United States. The situation was similar to Myanmar when the British granted the country's independence. However, the people of Vietnam waged war on France. Whereas in Malaya occurred opposition to the Malayan Union (Adam, 2009, p. 85). In Indonesia, Sukarno declared independence from the Netherlands on 17 August 1945 (Dahm, 1988, p. 148). However, these efforts were opposed by the Dutch and led to a war between both sides. While in Sarawak and Sabah, the Brooke and CC governments gave both territories to the British. In other words, these two territories were officially became British colonies. In Sarawak the British occupation of Sarawak gained resistance from the locals known as anti-cession movement. While in Sabah, the atmosphere was different, its inhabitants have shown no tangible resistance to the British presence to colonise Sabah.

In contrast to the atmosphere of the revolution and the independence movement in Southeast Asia, brought the awkward position of the British to colonise Sarawak and Sabah. The British felt that the movement that took place in Indonesia would spread in Sarawak and Sabah to fight alongside with the Indonesian for the independence struggle. What was more interesting is that Ahmad Zaidi Adruce had studied in Indonesia and had joined the Indonesian national army against the Dutch. He was assigned to Kalimantan, Indonesia (Said, 2010, p. 95). During his struggle with Indonesian nationalists, he was very anti-colonial. This situation had worried the British in Borneo. What was even more interesting is that Indonesia's influence was closely monitored by the British in both countries. To discuss the influence of the Indonesian's nationalism in both states, it would start with situation in Sarawak.

Sarawak

British position is quite critical because in Sarawak Malays together with some Iban leaders against cession of Sarawak to the British. The Malays movement through various organizations such as PKMS, Barisan Pemuda Sarawak (BPS), United Sarawak National Association (USNA), Angkatan Semangat Anak Sarawak (ASAS), Persatuan Bumiputera Sarawak (PBS), Persatuan Melayu Miri (PMM), Persatuan Melayu Limbang (PML), Angkatan Bintang-Astana Sarawak (ABAS) and others. These organizations appear throughout Sarawak including Singapore i.e. USNA. The Iban people under Philip Jitam formed the Sarawak Dayak Association (SDA) to oppose the cession. Indonesian involvement in this movement could be seen with participation of Johari Anang and Sharkawi Bin Haji Osman (FCO141.12340 List of members of MNUS). The anti-cession movement had several activities such as boycott the a day of declaration of cession, unwelcome the presence of British governors who visited the villages of Kuching, sent letters of protest to the British government and held a demonstration protest against Sarawak's cession to the British. In addition, they visited several areas in Sarawak to explain the cession that threatened Sarawak's sovereignty. Although British reports show that they do not view this as serious but the movement is being monitored by the British.

The British feared this movement would gain support from Indonesia's independence movement. This was because the British also involved in helping the Dutch to take control Indonesian independence movement in Indonesia. As the Dutch became weak after World War II, efforts to monitor its colonies in Southeast Asia were led by AFNEI (Allied Forces Netherlands East Indies) led by Sir Phillip Christison of the British army. Although the British tried to show their neutrality in this regard, AFNEI's battle with the Indonesian people in Surabaya on October 27, 1945 (Peace, 2015, p. 25-26) was triggered. This AFNEI military battle continues in a series of military campaign such as the Battle of Ambarawa. The Battle of Ambarawa clearly indicated that British military involvement helped the Dutch fight against Indonesia (Aman, 2015, p. 27). This is being feared by the British that the Indonesian's independence struggle would cross the border of Sarawak and Sabah. Meanwhile, the movement against the Dutch in Kalimantan had intensified with the emergence of Barisan Pemberontakan Indonesia Kalimantan Barat (BPIKB), Persatuan Rakyat Indonesia (PRI), Gerakan Rakyat Merdeka (Geram) dan Pemberontakan Borneo Barat (PBB). Owing to the close border between Sarawak and Kalimantan, Indonesia's revolutionary movement in Borneo was eased to obtain weapons and refuge against the Dutch invasion. There are a lot of suspicious individuals which the British identified had reached Sarawak. Among them are Zainudin Abas and Abang Yusuf bin Abdullah. Zainudin Abas is a member of the PBB, and the PBB is also the organization involved in the murthering of a Dutch official in Bengkayang. Meanwhile, Abang Yusuf bin Abdullah was involved in buying weapons in Sarawak. Both figures were arrested and sent back to Indonesia. The British also suspected that PKMS and ASAS had negotiated with Indonesia on Orchard Road, Singapore.

In addition to the movements of individuals who were hostile to the British, there were also British concerns over Indonesians living in Sarawak. The people of Indonesia

are active in society movements. They set up various organizations for various purposes. These organizations were Kesatuan Rakyat Indonesia Sarawak (KRIS), Persatuan Penoreh Getah Indonesia dan Warga Negara Indonesia (Mansor, 2013, pp. 358-359). Out of these three movements KRIS became the main focus of the British's concern. KRIS is seen had the aim to make Sarawak part of Indonesia (CO537 / 3764, Monthly Political Intelligence Report for November 1948). What worries the British is that many KRIS members are from the Sarawak Fire Department. Owing to this, the British worried the KRIS would sabotage government agencies (CO537 / 3764, Political Intelligence Report, 31 July 1948). KRIS was also suspected to have linked to the Anti-cession movement. It was reported that an attempt was made to eliminate British officials with the help from KRIS in 1950 (CO537 / 6085, Sarawak and Brunei).

This report also showed the British fear and anger after the assassination of Governor Duncan Stewart in late 1949 (Reece, 1993, p. 276). The British officials began to suspect the anti-cession movement would become violence's movement. British authorities found items associated with Indonesia such as the Indonesian flag, red and white badges and pictures of Sukarno. For this reason, KRIS leaders are being monitored and suspected of being dangerous. One of these leaders was Sastro. He was alleged to have tried to liaise with the Sultan of Brunei to make uprising in Sarawak. He was later traced, then arrested and taken back to Indonesia. Another leader of KRIS Panglima Jaya suspected relations with the Malays to supply arms. He was also arrested and sent back to Indonesia (CO537 / 6085, Sarawak and Brunei).

Meanwhile, two other organizations are associated with Indonesia, Persatuan Penoreh Getah Indonesia and Warga Negara Indonesia are also overseen by the British government. Persatuan Penoreh Getah Indonesia planned to register as a trade union. It also sought to open its membership to the locals (CO537 / 6085, Sarawak and Brunei: Monthly Political Intelligence Report for October 1950). Meanwhile, Warga Negara based in Lutong, Sarawak was suspected to have linked with communist movements (CO537 / 6085, Sarawak and Brunei: Monthly Political Intelligence Report for August 1950). However, these two organizations did not lead to any further investigation by the British. This is because the two organizations do not show such radical actions as KRIS.

Sabah

In Sabah, resistance movements against cession of Sabah to the British did not take place. Instead, what happened was the rise of several nationalist organizations in Sabah. One of the organization was the Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Labuan (PKML). The organization was led by Tengku Noordin, Abu Bakar Ahmad and Zakaria Gun. The organization was founded on 16 June 1946. Its members are Labuan educated and the government's servant. The aim of the movement is to defend the interests of the natives and enhance their socio-economic development. However, the PKML movement was weakened by the British when Tengku Noordin was transferred to Jesselton. Tengku Noordin was Sumatra's born and had his education from Malaya (Joko, et al., 2018, p. 103). He is a strong proponent of the concept Melayu Raya or

Indonesia Raya. In addition, PKML a branch of the Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Malaya (PKMM) which supports the aspirations Melayu Raya. For the British, Tengku Noordin was dangerous to their position in Sabah. Tengku Noordin is suspected of trying establish PKML branches in several places in Sabah to achieve the dream of Melayu Raya (Joko, et al., 2018, p. 105). However, Tengku Noordin later founded the Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Jesselton (PKMJ). The establishment of the PKMJ had been welcomed by the people in Putatan, Kinarut, Bongawan, Keningau, Kota Belud and Kudat (Lokin, 2007, p. 164). The PKMJ also set up their branch in these places. However, in 1951, Governor Jesselton asked for the PKML and PKMJ to be dissolved. Zakaria Gunn was later transferred to Jesselton. Tengku while Noordin has been fired and sent back to Malaya (Joko, et al., 2018, p. 114).

In addition to the PKMJ, it also established an organization known as the Barisan Pemuda (BARIP). BARIP is an organization established and formed in Brunei in 1946 (Osman, 1995, p. 71). BARIP aimed to unite the Malays, and later it was extended its influence by established its branch in Sabah. The first branch of BARIP was established in Labuan under the leadership of Pengiran Ahmad and Soeharto. Soeharto was the leader of the Javanese community in Labuan. Another BARIP branch in Jesselton was founded by Raden Mohamad Sharif Ambek of Indonesia. He is better known as "Mandor Sharif" (Joko et al., 2016, pp. 96-97). Under the leadership of Mandor Sharif, BARIP Jesselton did not hesitate to wave the Indonesian and BARIP flags during the procession to celebrate their annual General Meeting on 17 January 1947 (Joko et al., 2012, p. 14). Most of these BARIP Jesselton members are from Indonesian laborers in the Lobou Estate. Indonesian workers were willing to fight on behalf of the Malays and Islam together with the local population. (Joko et al., 2018, p. 69-70) Even Mandor Sharif also played an important role in attracting people of Dusun Ranau into this association (Joko et al., 2016, p. 102).

What is interesting about this Lobou Estate is that it had entertainment activities such as *Bangsawan* (traditional Malay drama) and *Wayang Kulit* (shadow play) which performance over the weekend. Many Sabahans and Indonesian workers came to see the play and puppets. Usually the theme of the performance was based on the oppression and misery of life and the courage of defending the rights of the colonialists by inserting funny and humorous elements (Joko et al., 2012, p. 115). This showed that it can inspire Sabahans to defend their fate under British rule. Mandor Sharif also played a role in spreading Islam among the Dusun and from there he promoted the nationalistic spirit of the people of Dusun. However, the political movement was suppressed by the company. Pressure was made by blocking the promotion of workers on the estate. Some of his employees have been relocated elsewhere to break the unity of BARIP (John, 2016, p. 102).

At one point, BARIP tried to work with PKMJ and PKML for the interests of the Malays in Sabah. However, the BARIP in Jesselton is not in line with the PKMJ, and this had led to a breakdown in relations between the two organizations. This is because that BARIP not on favoured with PKMJ receiving the non-Malays as their members (Joko et al., 2018, p. 118). Only in Labuan the relationship between BARIP and PKML

was better. However, the British gradually transferred the BARIP leaders to weaken this movement. At the end, these society failed to fight for the fate of the people of Sabah.

Conclusion

Overall, the people in the Malay Archipelago had long relations with each other before coming of the Western imperialism in the Southeast Asia. This relation continued although the Western imperialism had spread their influence in the Malay Archipelago. This influence could be showed by the influence political movements of the Indonesian in British colonies, Borneo. The similarity of cultural and linguistic made the Indonesian's influence easier to associate with the local people in Sarawak and Sabah. While the desire to fight colonial rule in two of British colonies in Borneo had also been a factor in strengthening the influence of nationalism from Indonesia. This was indeed feared by the British colonialists. Every local and foreign political movement was monitored by the British.

The British special branch had been able to gather and collected detailed information to see how Indonesia's influence can be rooted in these two regions. This is feared by the British. Thus various tactics were used by the British to stem the movement of this political spirit from being a threat to them. As a result, political movements in these two regions have been weakened. However, political movements in both regions are still new and at stage of beginning. For this reason, the British used all the tactics of suppressing this radical movement in various ways. Eventually the British succeeded in control and eliminated these movements from threatening their positions in Sarawak and Sabah.

References

- Adam, R. (2009). *Dato' Onn Jaafar: Pengasas kemerdekaan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Aman, A. (2015). *Sejarah Indonesia masa kemerdekaan 1945-1998*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Ombak.
- Baring-Gould, S. Bampfylde, C. A. (2007). *A history of Sarawak: Under its two white rajahs 1839-1908*. Kuala Lumpur: Synergy Media.
- CO537.6085, Political Intelligence-Sarawak, 1950.
- CO537/3764, Political Intelligence-Reports from Sarawak
- Dahm, B. (1988). *Sejarah Indonesia abad kedua puluh*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- FCO141/12340, Sarawak anti-Cession activities.
- Ghani, M. T. bin A. (1989). *Hikayat datuk merpati*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Ho, A. Y. (2003). *Old Kuching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

- Joko, E. P., Bee, B. B. B., Osman, S., Damit, S. A. (2016). *Pengislaman dalam kalangan ranau dusun (1940-1976)*. Kuala Lumpur: Institut Terjemahan & Buku Malaysia.
- Joko, E. P., Dollah, R. (2018) Kesedaran dan gerakan awal nasionalisme di Borneo Utara (Sabah) Malaysia: Parti Kebangsaan Melayu (PKM) dan Barisan Pemuda (BARIP). *Malaysia Dari Segi Sejarah*, 44: 98-122.
- Joko, E. P., Othman, Z., Damit, S. A. (2018). *Gerakan berpolitik bumiputera Islam di Sabah (1938-1963)*. Kota Bahru: Kedai Hitam Putih.
- Leight, M. B. (1988). *The rising moon: Political change in Sarawak*. Kuala Lumpur: Antara Book Company.
- Lokin, S. A. (2007). *Perubahan sosioekonomi dan pentadbiran: Masyarakat peribumi Sabah (1881-1963)*. Kota Kinabalu: Penerbit UMS, 2007.
- Mansor, S. (2013). Pemantauan Kerajaan British terhadap pengaruh nasionalisme Indonesia ke atas politik Sarawak, 1945-1951. In M. R. Othman, M. S. A. Ishak, M. Nordin, A. H. Haris. *Malaysia Indonesia: Romantika hubungan bangsa serumpun*. Kuala Lumpur: Fakulti Sastera dan Sains Sosial.
- Osman, S., Abdullah, M. H., Hakiq, H. (1995). *Sejarah Brunei menjelang kemerdekaan*. Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka.
- Ramli, Z., Rahman, N. H. S. N. A. (2012). *Zaman proto sejarah di Malaysia: Satu pengenalan*. Bangi: ATMA UKM,
- Reece, R. H. W. (1993). *The name of Brooke: The end of white Rajah Rule in Sarawak*, Kuching: Sarawak Literary Society.
- Said, S. (2010). *Malay politics in Sarawak, 1946-1966*, Kota Samarahan: Penerbit UNIMAS.
- Sakke, N., Dolah, R., Mapa, M. T. (2012). Penghijrahan dan perkembangan masyarakat Bugis Sabah. In A. Amat. *Bugis Sabah*. Kuala Lumpur: ITBM.
- Sandin, B. (1969). Origin of the Saribas Malays. *The Sarawak Museum Journal*, 17 (34-35 New Series): 3-35.
- Sulaiman, M. H. (2004). *Perjuangan anti-cession Sarawak*. Kuching: Persatuan Kebangsaan Melayu Sarawak.
- Tregonning, K. G. (2007). *Under chartered company rule: North Borneo 1881-1946*. Kuala Lumpur: Synergy Media.
- Yamin, Muhammad (1974). *Gajah Mada*. Jakarta: Balai Pustaka.