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# Memories of World War II: Oral History of Brunei Darussalam (Dec. 1941-June 1942)

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# *Memories of World War II: Oral History of Brunei Darussalam (Dec. 1941-June 1942)*

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*Frank Dhont, Janet E. Marles, and Maslin Jukim*

## **Abstract:**

Oral history sources add specificity and personal depth to traditional historical narratives commonly based on written sources. These interviews complement the historical context particularly where written sources are sparse or unable to provide a complete picture of an era. This paper specifically addresses the contribution of the oral history project conducted by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim and Frank Dhont in Brunei Darussalam and Northern Borneo. Working with graduate students from Universiti Brunei Darussalam across diverse language groups the video project created an archival database of first person interviews of witnesses to the Japanese Occupation of Brunei Darussalam during World War Two.

**Keywords:** *Japanese Occupation, Brunei Darussalam, Borneo, World War Two, oral history sources and archival data creation, video interviews, intergenerational collaborative practice and multidisciplinary research.*

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# *Memories of World War II: Oral History of Brunei Darussalam (Dec. 1941-June 1942)*

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*Frank Dhont, Janet E. Marles, and Maslin Jukim*

## **INTRODUCTION**

This working paper describes the research project *Stories through Memories/Kisah-kisah dalam Kenangan*, which enriches the narrative of history through the memories of survivors who witnessed the tumultuous events of World War Two in Brunei Darussalam (Dec 1941 - June 1945). Initiated by Dr. Janet E. Marles and later joined by Dr. Maslin Jukim and Dr Frank Dhont we discuss here the direction and methodology of the research, which from its outset had a multidisciplinary focus essential for ensuring the success of the project. We argue that there is a place for this form of collaborative research in areas where conventional written sources and traditional history narratives fail to fully portray the circumstances and validity of ordinary peoples' experiences. Further, details and data discovered by the *Stories through Memories* project act not as a replacement for traditional history rather they highlight complementary yet different elements allowing for a nuanced and diverse view of World War Two in Brunei Darussalam to emerge.

We first outline the conventional historical view of the era and reveal the narrative threads currently available to educators and researchers. This is followed by a discussion of the mechanics of the project using the framework of oral history research as well as historical narrative. Conceptualization of the research, the research approach and various technical and local aspects specific to this research will also be addressed. Further, we outline the positive impact this research offered the young generation of Bruneians who worked on the project as well as its potential value as an archive for future generations of Bruneians. Highlighting preliminary findings and this research's contribution to the history of Brunei Darussalam in World War Two, we shall then demonstrate how this work has broadened and contributed to Bruneian history.

## Research context and prevailing historical narratives

Bruneian secondary students study the history of Brunei as part of their curriculum with the Textbook, *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967, revised edition* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Education, 2013). What they learn from this required text about the Japanese occupation of Brunei from the Japanese perspective is that “The Japanese Occupation brought about the development of a national consciousness in Brunei”.<sup>1</sup> They also learn “Japan fought against the colonial rulers in Southeast Asia”.<sup>2</sup> This text also provides historical facts. Japan attacked Brunei on 16 December 1941 with 10,000 soldiers at Kuala Belait with the resident British attempting to thwart the use of the oilfields in Seria. Brunei town was next to fall on 22 December 1941 with the Japanese proclaiming to the captured British that Japan wanted to liberate Asia from European dominance.

The textbook explains that some Bruneians were happy with the arrival of the Japanese and saw an opportunity to gain influence and prominent political roles. Yet, during the three and half years the Japanese occupied the region they brought fear and neglect to Brunei. The Japanese administration and governing policies were intrusive and caused hardship and suffering to the local people leading to their resentment of Japanese rule which in turn triggered nationalist feelings and a desire for independence. The Japanese amalgamated Brunei, Labuan and the Northeastern sections of Sarawak under one prefecture called Miri-Shu. The British were supplanted as the top layer of administration with the Japanese permitting some local functionaries as well as Sultan Sir Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Waddien to remain in place.<sup>3</sup>

The textbook goes further to teach that economically the Japanese managed to obtain a large part of the oil resources. Yet they had no genuine control inland or in regional areas such as Tantaya (Tentaya), for instance, where Sultan Sir Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Waddien fled for refuge towards the end of the war. The local population resented the Japanese military police (Kempeitai) as they were notoriously cruel; torturing many. Culturally the Japanese implemented

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1 Textbook, *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967, revised edition* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Education, 2013), 127.

2 Textbook, *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967, revised edition* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Education, 2013), 130.

3 This whole paragraph sums up the narrative presented in Textbook, *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967, revised edition* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Education, 2013), 130-132.

their own value system and taught the Japanese language and culture. They created youth organizations such as the Brunei Malay Organization. Allied bombing began on 16 November 1944 forcing the Japanese to retreat and on 10 June 1945 Australian forces liberated Brunei with the support of the American Navy and Airforce. It took the Australians three days to capture Brunei Town with most Japanese fleeing. Brunei Town itself was very heavily damaged because of the Japanese occupation and the bombing preceding the liberation. The textbook again claims the Japanese occupation “laid the foundation for the growth of national consciousness among the Malays in Brunei”, provided some training and created an awareness to govern oneself in Brunei.<sup>4</sup> After the Japanese defeat several Bruneians were jailed for collaboration but the textbook states that these “actually provided the leadership for those in Brunei with nationalist feelings”.<sup>5</sup>

What *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967* outlines for the casual reader are general policies, dates and places. These are indeed essential as basic stepping-stones for a broader understanding of the era. Some general assumptions are also made on what the Japanese occupation meant for Brunei and what the goal of the Japanese was. We also learn that the Japanese were cruel and tortured many people. This secondary school history textbook is brief and does not explain fully the details of this episode of Bruneian history so we now turn to more academic historical sources for further reference. Following is a summary drawn from *Sejarah Brunei menjelang Kemerdekaan*,<sup>6</sup> which provides more precision and detail on the period of Japanese occupation of Brunei.

The economic blockade the Allies enforced during the Japanese administration paralyzed the Bruneian economy. Prior to this the British had not defended the region well; considering it not worth defending. The Japanese appropriation was very swift. Sultan Sir Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Waddien, while based in Kampung Sumbiling submits the declaration of surrender to General Tawaguchi after the Japanese captured Brunei town on 22 December 1941. Immediately Ibrahim bin Jaafar was appointed head of the administration under governor Takamura of Miri-Shu (Miri Province). Japan implemented a program to align the culture of the

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4 Textbook, *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967, revised edition* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Education, 2013), 135.

5 This whole text is drawn from Textbook, *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967, revised edition* (Singapore: Marshall Cavendish Education, 2013), 132-135.

6 Sabihah Osman, Muhamad Hadi Abdullah and Sabullah Haji Hakip, *Sejarah Brunei menjelang Kemerdekaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka, 1995).



area with the Motherland and attempted to improve the local economy. Japan stimulated agriculture but forced farmers to sell or hand over a part of their crops. Sultan Sir Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Waddien joined in the actual planting of crops as part of the Japanese campaign to grow more food. Japan's intentions are labeled 'good' but the pressure of war causes problems. The lack of supplies caused a black market to arise.<sup>7</sup> The Japanese reduced wages for workers, which caused some to quit. An example is given of airplane workers in Berakas who earned wages of 50 cents or 1 dollar a month. Japan initially has the support of people for their efforts but when it becomes clear that Japan does not want to give independence to Brunei disappointment sets in. The Japanese occupation fails economically but socially the Japanese instruct Bruneian children to be Japanese. They teach Bruneian children to love Japan as their homeland. The best students are sent to Japan to study further the Japanese language and culture.<sup>8</sup>

Health care fails under the Japanese as supplies become limited. In Berakas local people are forced to work on an airstrip. Many Javanese workers suffer building mooring posts in Muara. Japan ends up influencing the socio-economic situation in Brunei. Japan fails as the economy remains poor and Japan cannot remedy this. Food and clothes become very scarce. Sultan Sir Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Waddien escapes to Tantaya leaving a desolate Brunei behind. Allied bombing starts on 16 November 1944 and on 10 June 1945 the Australians land.<sup>9</sup>

This source written by Sabihah Osman, Muhamad Hadi Abdullah and Sabullah Hj. Hakip is indeed far more extensive than the textbook *History of Brunei Darussalam, 1800-1967* used in schools as it explains in greater detail Japanese policies and activities in the region. Again we see the attention paid to dates, places and policies further we see more interpretation of the various policies the Japanese undertook and understand the Japanese were harsh toward the population and general hardships such as scarcity of supplies occurred in Brunei. Yet we find almost nothing related to the population itself. Commonly the role of the elite class is discussed but the ordinary

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7 Sabihah Osman, Muhamad Hadi Abdullah and Sabullah Haji Hakip, *Sejarah Brunei menjelang Kemerdekaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa danPustaka, 1995), 99.

8 This whole paragraph is based on Sabihah Osman, Muhamad Hadi Abdullah and Sabullah Haji Hakip, *Sejarah Brunei menjelang Kemerdekaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa danPustaka, 1995), 94-103.

9 This whole paragraph is again drawn exclusively from Sabihah Osman, Muhamad Hadi Abdullah and Sabullah Haji Hakip, *Sejarah Brunei menjelang Kemerdekaan* (Kuala Lumpur: Dewan Bahasa danPustaka, 1995), 103-106.

person who lived through the occupation cannot be heard in these texts. What happened to the ordinary men and women who were trying to get through this ordeal of occupation?

From Japanese sources there are some clues to the transformation that took place in Brunei during occupation, which provide the actual plan for how British Borneo was transformed and governed administratively.<sup>10</sup> Historical records of the Japanese era vaguely state some dates regarding the elite class and the circumstances surrounding Sultan Sir Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Waddien.<sup>11</sup> One of the most prominent Historians of Brunei, B.A. Hussainmiya from the University of Brunei Darussalam, wrote very openly that there is little research on this era because of the lack of historical records.<sup>12</sup> Sultan Sir Ahmad Tajuddin Akhazul Khairi Waddien was left in place as well as several Bruneian administrators from the elite class during the occupation.<sup>13</sup> Japanese who had been in Brunei prior to the occupation were given functions. Encik Suzuki is an example of a long time resident in Brunei before the war who became an Assistant Resident in Belait during Japanese rule.<sup>14</sup>

The Japanese occupation mostly concentrated in coastal areas and around river settlements.<sup>15</sup> They largely adopted a policy of laissez-faire or nonintervention, however their administration did implement policies although there are limited details of these available through official sources.<sup>16</sup> In 1943 the Japanese also created the Kita Borneo Romukyokai (North Borneo Labour Business Society) that brought in 12,000 people from Java and several hundred from China to work all over British Borneo.<sup>17</sup> A number of these forced labourers constructed, a 120 mile oil pipeline from Seria to Muara.<sup>18</sup>

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10 Ikukiho Hata, ed., *Nanpō Gunsei no Kikō Kanbu Gunseikan Ichiran* (Tokyo: Nanpō Gunseishi Kenkyū Fōramu, 1998), 42-45.

11 See for instance B.A. Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III and Britain, The Making of Brunei Darussalam* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995)

12 B.A. Hussainmiya, *Resuscitating Nationalism: Brunei under the Japanese Military Administration (1941-1945)*, 273.

13 Geoffrey C. Gunn, "The Wartime Legacy," in *Language, Power and Ideology in Brunei Darussalam* (Athens, Ohio University Center for International Studies Monographs number 99, 1997), 96.

14 Pengiran Haji Mohamed Yusuf Pengiran Haji Abdul Rahim, *Barat-Timur dan Bom Atom* (Brunei: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2014), 28.

15 Geoffrey C. Gunn, "The Wartime Legacy," in *Language, Power and Ideology in Brunei Darussalam* (Athens, Ohio University Center for International Studies Monographs number 99, 1997), 96.

16 Geoffrey C. Gunn, "The Wartime Legacy," in *Language, Power and Ideology in Brunei Darussalam* (Athens, Ohio University Center for International Studies Monographs number 99, 1997), 96.

17 Bob Reece, *Masa Jepun: Sarawak Under the Japanese 1941-1945* (Kuala Lumpur: Ampang Press, 1998), 150.

18 Bob Reece, *Masa Jepun: Sarawak Under the Japanese 1941-1945* (Kuala Lumpur: Ampang Press, 1998), 148.

Other sources from archives chart the economic evolution that occurred. From the estimates of revenue and expenditure for 1941 we retrieve data on the economy of Brunei based on the preceding years, before the Second World War. The British government planned to raise 1.4 million Malayan Dollars in total revenue in 1941 through five classes of revenue.<sup>19</sup> From the data we learn that approximately 61% was projected to come from Revenue from Government Property in the form of Land Revenue and Oil Royalties as well as Interests. An additional revenue class was derived from Duties, Taxes and Licenses, which would have accounted for around 34% of the government revenue for 1941 with customs being by far the largest category in this class. 95% of the Bruneian government's projected revenue for 1941 would be derived from these two classes.

Under expenditure we can see where the government planned to spend its income. 25 categories are itemized accounting for the total of 1.4 million Malayan Dollar for 1941.<sup>20</sup> Public works would cost approximately 32%, Reserve funds accounted for 20%, Miscellaneous Services another 7% but then followed Medical and Health services accounted for 5% of the budget. The other costs were for the various services with Land and District offices, Agriculture, Police and Prisons and Education the major ones accounting for approximately 4-3% of the budget each. Here we observe a country investing in public infrastructure, creating a reserve fund, but also beginning to invest in health services, education and public order.

Additionally, from annual reports we observe the population in Brunei was steadily rising in the three decades from 1921 to 1952. Figures increase from 25,451 in 1921, 30,135 in 1931 to 40,657 in 1947 and approximately 55,000 in 1952.<sup>21</sup> The data also indicates a huge jump in the number of ethnic Chinese in Brunei before and after the war. In 1931 there were 8.9% Chinese and 0.3% other non-Indigenous people recorded, while in 1947 20.4% were Chinese with 2.9% other non-Indigenous people present.<sup>22</sup> This effectively reduced the share of Indigenous people

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19 National Archives: Co 717/145/6 State of Brunei, *Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 1941* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1940), 9.

20 National Archives: Co 717/145/6 State of Brunei, *Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure for the year 1941* (Singapore: Government Printing Office, 1940), 16.

21 State of Brunei, *Annual Report 1961-1962* (Kuala Belait: Brunei Press, 1964), 8-9.

22 State of Brunei, *Annual Report 1961-1962* (Kuala Belait: Brunei Press, 1964), 8.

from 88.8% in 1931 to 76.7% in 1947. That demographic trend continued and in 1960 only 70.6% of the Bruneian population were Indigenous with 26.0% Chinese and 3.4% others.<sup>23</sup>

In 1951 the Revised Estimated revenue for 1950 was already almost 17 million Straits Dollars and the Revised Estimated Expenditure only 8 Million.<sup>24</sup> It would grow exponentially. As late as 1961 Revenue for Brunei amounted to 118 Million Straits Dollars of which taxes amounted to 37% of total revenue and Interests and Revenue from Government Property 30% and 26%.<sup>25</sup> Basically indicating that the British pre-war policy of creating a reserve fund started to produce results in forming an additional revenue stream on top of the familiar pre-war streams. The expenditure for 1961 amounted to about 47 Million Straits Dollars.<sup>26</sup> Most money was by then spent on Public works, Education, Medical and Health, Water supplies, Electricity and the Police service.<sup>27</sup>

The data reveals a remarkable picture of development and good management that yielded an increase in facilities for a growing population as well as a Treasury with more and more revenue generated from funds and investments. Records reveal that 15 years after the Second World War, the destruction and damage wrought on the country is largely erased both physically and economically as the country has recovered from the war. Also from this data we glean some details regarding the circumstances that occurred in Brunei under Japanese policy. We know that economically the Japanese occupation devastated Brunei. We know Brunei recovered but we do not know what happened to the individual people and how they experienced and dealt with the Japanese Occupation. Or how the trauma of the war and the memories of the people who lived through it may still resonate decades later.

It is to answer these questions that the project *Stories through Memories* forms such a valuable historical source. The stories fuse together with the larger historical textual narrative and fill in the gaps where personal knowledge and the experiences of the ordinary person on the ground enrich our understanding of the era. Yet the stories do more than just form an archival text.

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23 State of Brunei, *Annual Report 1961-1962* (Kuala Belait: Brunei Press, 1964), 8.

24 State of Brunei, *Estimates of Revenue and Expenditure 1951* as cited in B.A. Hussainmiya, *Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddin III and Britain, The Making of Brunei Darussalam* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1995), 51.

25 State of Brunei, *Annual Report 1961-1962* (Kuala Belait: Brunei Press, 1964), 18.

26 State of Brunei, *Annual Report 1961-1962* (Kuala Belait: Brunei Press, 1964), 24.

27 State of Brunei, *Annual Report 1961-1962* (Kuala Belait: Brunei Press, 1964), 19-20.

Complementing the general narrative of history in the textbooks the stories were video recorded to highlight the very real personal connection of the ordinary Bruneian with his or her heritage, with his or her own grandmother or grandfather as you will. The barren story of academic historical work, the cold economic-statistical data or the concise description to be memorized now provide a whole new emphasis complemented by the narratives that can be experienced and listened to via the videos of the project or read as transcripts in Malay and English.

### **Oral history**

Limited availability of traditional historical data has made the use of oral sources quite common for research on World War Two. To be clear, some of the written sources outlined above from the historical and economic data are also a direct result of an interview with an informant. The predominant narrative described above by Sabihah Osman, Muhamad Hadi Abdullah and Sabullah Haji Hakip in their book *Sejarah Brunei menjelang Kemerdekaan* specifies 20 out of 57 references are based on personal interview.<sup>28</sup> Yet there is a perceived illusiveness in oral history; a concern for how these sources can be consulted again. Also as Thomson reminds us traditional documentary and archival sources are ‘no less selective and biased’ than oral interviews.<sup>29</sup> Further Thomson asserts:

Oral history interviews provide opportunities to explore particular aspects of historical experience, which are rarely recorded, such as personal relationships, domestic life, and the nature of clandestine organisations. They offer rich evidence about the subjective or personal meanings of past events: what it felt like to get married, to be under fire, to face death in a concentration camp. Oral historians are unique in being able to question their informants, to ask the questions that might not have been imagined in the past and to evoke recollections and understandings that were previously silenced or ignored.<sup>30</sup>

Normally historians reference only interviews they personally conducted. Stories through Memories, once completed, will make its data available for future generations of researchers. Providing a valuable resource for sociologist, linguists, feminists, historians, documentarians,

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28 Sabihah Osman, Muhamad Hadi Abdullah and Sabullah Haji Hakip, *Sejarah Brunei menjelang Kemerdekaan*, 94-109.

29 Alistair Thomson, “Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History,” *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* no.21 (1999): 84.

30 Alistair Thomson, “Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History,” *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* no.21 (1999): 83-4.

anthropologists and others interested in the events of World War Two or Borneo studies. Oral history increasingly contributes to history writing and the *Stories through Memories* project is not alone in addressing the problem of future historians who, as time progresses, will no longer have the luxury of interviewing witnesses from the war era. By creating an oral history archive the project ensures that future researchers and historians can effectively refer back to the original source and entrenches oral history's valuable role in mainstream historical studies.

To convey the importance of oral history as a discipline and the increasing recognition it is receiving from researchers Thomson identifies four paradigm transitions that have occurred over seven decades describing them as 'revolutions in theory and practice':<sup>31</sup>

The postwar renaissance of memory as a source for 'people's history'; the development, from the late 1970s, of 'post-positivist' approaches to memory and subjectivity; a transformation in perceptions about the role of the oral historian as interviewer and analyst from the Late 1980s; and the digital revolution of the late 1990s and early 2000s.<sup>32</sup>

Early oral historians developed their own handbook guidelines to assess the reliability of oral memory and following social psychologists and anthropologists they showed how to determine the bias and fabrication of memory, the significance of retrospection and the effects of the interviewer upon remembering. From sociology they adopted methods of representative sampling, and from documentary history they brought rules for checking the reliability and internal consistency of their wares. These guidelines provided useful signposts for reading memories and for combining them with other historical sources to find out what happened in the past.<sup>33</sup>

Later oral historians incorporated lessons from communication studies and feminist researchers to argue:

The interview is a relationship embedded with in particular cultural practices and informed by culturally specific systems and relations of communication. In other words, there is no single "right way" to do an interview and the "commonsense" approach to interviewing members of a white, male

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31 Alistair Thomson "Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 34, no. 1 (2007): 49.

32 Alistair Thomson "2007 Four Paradigm Transformations in Oral History," *The Oral History Review* 34, no. 1 (2007): 49.

33 Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* no.21 (1999): 84.

political elite may be entirely inappropriate in other cultural contexts.<sup>34</sup>

A slightly different discipline but also important is oral tradition.<sup>35</sup> Here the stories are transmitted over longer periods of time and are increasingly probed as sources by traditional historical research. The work undertaken in *Stories through Memories* uses, where possible, first hand narratives. It is important to be aware that the oral history narratives from *Stories through Memories* require an awareness of the academic theories of narrative literature and folklore.<sup>36</sup> Precisely this aspect of oral history narratives makes the cooperation of this project so special as Dr. Maslin Jukim is an expert in folklore, Dr. Janet E. Marles has done extensive work on narrative and media and historian Dr. Frank Dhont has based part of his research work on oral history research.<sup>37</sup>

### **Background and methodology**

*Stories through Memories* originated from Universiti Brunei Darussalam research grants of 2013 to 2016 and focuses, where possible, on interviews with Bruneians who witnessed the Japanese occupation of Brunei (1941-1945). One primary objective of this research is to explore the historical period during World War Two and ensure young generations of Bruneians understand life as it was lived in Brunei during the Japanese occupation. From the interviews we learn not only the experience of ordinary Bruneians during the Japanese administration but we also gain a glimpse into how life was lived before 1941, prior to the invasion of the Japanese Imperial Army. We obtain insights into: what traditions and values were upheld, how food was acquired and processed, how people worked and traveled, how they related to one another, and the clothing and shoes they wore.

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34 Alistair Thomson, "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History," *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* no.21 (1999): 82.

35 For instance see Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition as History* (Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press: 1985).

36 Alessandro Portelli, "What makes Oral History Different" in Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson (ed.), *The Oral History Reader* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), 66.

37 See Maslin Jukim "Folklor Brunei sebagai Entiti Folklor," Pangsura, *Jurnal Pengkajian dan Penelitian Sastra Asia Tenggara*, Year 34, Volume 18 (2013): 75-90; Janet E. Marles "Simulating Memory: a technique of memory and narrative in interactive digital media," *Continuum, Journal of Media and Cultural Studies, Special Issue on New Media and Memory* 29, no. 4 (2015): 534-548; Frank Dhont, "A Case of Romusha in Yogyakarta." In *Social Justice and Rule of Law: Addressing the Growth of a Pluralist Indonesian Democracy*, edited by Thomas J. Connors, et.al. (Semarang: Diponegoro University Publisher, 2011).

The central methodology is video recording interviews followed by an extensive process of transcribing and translating the recorded interviews from the speaker's mother tongue into Malay and English. Most interviewees were aged between 10 years and 24 years during the war period. Now over eighty years of age these octogenarian survivors live today, as in earlier times, mostly with their extended family.

Another key intention of this research is to secure a wide cross-section of Bruneian experiences. During the war period ethnic communities were remote and isolated. There were few roads. Traveling more than a small distance was limited to boat access and the major rivers were the highways. With boat transport, the predominant form of transport, regions and localities were even more distinct and unique than they are today. Ethnic groups were largely isolated and confined to their own districts. Consequently, people from inland and inaccessible areas experienced the Japanese occupation quite differently from those located in coastal regions or those near the larger townships like Bandar. To date we have conducted 38 interviews throughout the four regions of Brunei: Belait; Tutong; Muara Bandar; and Temburong. We have interviewed men and women from the Malay, Kedaayan, Iban, Murut, Dusun, and Chinese ethnic groups.

Added to this unique archive of Bruneian stories are the memories of the Allied troops, primarily Australian men, who served in Borneo in the mid 1940's. In June 2015 during the commemoration of the 70th Anniversary of the Borneo campaigns of World War Two led by Australian forces we were able to video record interviews with two Australian World War Two veterans who landed at Muara on 10th June 1945; Mr. Jack Olsson OAM, and Mr. Brian Wearne.

Following Morrissey's experience interviewing US presidents our interviews are 'flexible and mutable' and acknowledge the formula for successful oral history recording: forethought and preparation, establishment of rapport and intimacy with interviewees, listening carefully, asking only open-ended questions, not interrupting, allowing the interviewee pauses and silences, avoiding jargon and probing, and, where possible, minimising the presence of the recording equipment.<sup>38</sup>

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38 Morrissey, Charles T. cited in Thomson, Alistair. "Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History", *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* No.21. [1999] p.82.



A preliminary interview establishes contact between the family and the interview team as well as ensuring the health and willingness of the interviewee to have their story recorded. To establish a good rapport we usually begin with family members' extended relatives, or neighbours of our team. In this way it is easier to establish connection with uncles, aunts, grandfathers, grandmothers, and so on. Mindful of the strangeness of our request and the intrusion this may cause to the interviewee and their family we schedule interviews at times and places that suit the participants. In Brunei Friday and Sunday are good days for conducting interviews with elderly Bruneians in their home environment surrounded by their close relatives, which ensures they feel more comfortable with the imposition of an interview team. Friday and Sundays are both public holidays and culturally both days are spent fulfilling family obligations such as attending wedding ceremonies.

For this research approach to be successful the culture and tradition of the Bruneians must also be understood and respected. Bruneians are likely to say 'I am sorry I don't know much...' when actually they know quite a lot. In these circumstances the interviewers should have the knowledge and skill to gently break through their reticence. Bruneians are generally very cautious and tend to reject invitations to speak to avoid conflict. Our octogenarian Bruneian's reluctance to speak stems from two traumatic upheavals during their lives, first this generation witnessed the hardship of the Japanese occupation of Brunei from 1941-1945 and some are still fearful to speak openly about this period in their lives. Secondly, as adults in the early 1960's, they lived through the turbulence of the Rebellion incident. Our choice of starting the interviews with family members was critical for the success of the research and ensured the explanation of ideals and also the spread of knowledge about the project to the interviewee's relatives, neighbours, friends, and so on.

Another challenge of video recording oral history interviews is the intimidating appearance of the technical video equipment. Some interviewees were daunted by the presence of the recording equipment and became self-conscious and too shy to speak. In such cases a family-psychological approach played an important role. The team worked with the help of family members to build up the interviewee's confidence and willingness to be a participant in the project. Strategies for relaxing the interviewee were used sometimes by discussing other subjects and setting up the equipment elsewhere. With these efforts and the help of the family members the video recordings of the interviews were largely smooth and successful.

In some cases once the family have observed our interview process additional family members chose to come forward to be interviewed for the project. Some interviewees responded positively to the project and understood the importance of creating an archive for future generations. Many provided us with copies of their own personal photographs from the period. Others asked for a second interview, as the first interview had stimulated their recall and they had further details to convey to us.<sup>39</sup>

### **Intergenerational understanding**

Following the initial interviews conducted by Dr Janet E. Marles, graduate students from the Universiti Brunei Darussalam (UBD) were engaged with the project according to their technical and language skills. Selected students were taught to operate a high definition video camera and also the production techniques and work-flow for interview-based documentary production. Maintaining high quality vision and audio for the interviews requires additional time and effort by the team in video-capture and editing, however the overwhelmingly positive response from audiences at showcasing exhibitions indicates this has been time well spent.<sup>40</sup>

The videos position the interviewee usually in their home environment. As the interviewee describes events we, the audience, observe their body language, their physical and emotional reactions as they recall their stories. The pauses, the nuance, the tone, the hesitance, the excitement, the humour and the horror are visualised bringing us closer to the story-teller and their lived experience. This elevates the interviews above the written transcript and reduces the ‘mediating role of the interviewer’ as described by Sipe in Thomson.<sup>41</sup>

Graduate students established initial contact with interviewees within their ethnic group.<sup>42</sup> As mentioned above, their extended family networks provided unique access and gave breadth and diversity to the selection of interviewees. The students conducted preliminary interviews and

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39 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI10\_SERA;BI12\_MANG; MI29\_LABU.

40 Four exhibitions to date – Universiti Brunei Darussalam April 2014, Bandar Seri Begawan June 2015, Touring Exhibition to three regional areas of Brunei Darussalam; Temburong, Belait, Tutong November 2015. See for instance:<http://mediapermata.com.bn/index.php/2015/06/kisah-kenangan-persahabatan-70-tahun/or> <http://borneobulletin.com.bn/a-glimpse-into-past-with-stories-through-memories/>.

41 Alistair Thomson, “Fifty Years On: An International Perspective on Oral History,” *Oral History Association of Australia Journal* no.21 (1999): 88.

42 Dusun, Malay, Iban, Kadiyan, Murut, Chinese (Hokkien, Mandarin).

established consent for video recording. Using their ‘mother tongue’ was essential for some interviews and also for transcription and translation of the recorded interviews.

After each interview the students regularly express surprise at the content of the stories; that their elders endured such hardship, that they have never heard these stories before (from their elders or from their history books), that this research stretched them to explore further into the untold stories around them. They gain awareness for the stories themselves as well as a new appreciation for their elders who lived through the events of World War Two. When describing their awakening the students use words such as ‘gift’ and ‘eye opening’ and remain enthusiastic in pursuing the research and following up with future interviews.<sup>43</sup> All have had remarkable experiences. One example comes from Izzati Nordin a graduate student from UBD, she says:

I’ve studied history for almost five years and these stories are also new to me, these stories weren’t in the textbooks. This project has opened my eyes to what the people of Brunei have gone through and what more can be learned about the people of Brunei.<sup>44</sup>

Another example comes from UBD graduate student Chin Siew Yee (Sally). Sally identifies as Chinese, is fluent in Mandarin and English and also speaks some Malay yet her maternal grandmother Mayan Binti Umang is a Dusun from the Tutong District. Growing up with different languages and cultures grandmother and granddaughter were unable to speak together. Sally says:

I was never very close to my Grandmother and thanks to this research project I got to know my Grandma better on a different level... and this project taught us... the interviewers, to give better respect (to the elders) and a memory that we can keep for the next generations it’s a gift for us as well as a preservation.<sup>45</sup>

The awareness and respect for the life experiences of close family goes both ways. While sometimes a little daunted by the technology the elders who were interviewed are impressed by

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43 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BTS\_BI\_SI\_03;BTS\_BI\_SI\_04;BTS\_BI\_SI\_06.

44 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BTS\_BI\_SI\_03.

45 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BTS\_BI\_SI\_04.

their grandchildren's ability to manage the complex and technical equipment and intricate workflow employed by the project.

### **Work-flow**

The workflow for each interview is comprehensively standardized. A preliminary interview establishes contact, explains the overarching aims of the project, and obtains initial consent for video recording with the proposed interviewee. Once agreement has been reached a time is set to bring the team together for conducting the video recorded interview. Usually, three team members will attend the interview - the interviewer, the videographer and the translator, which typically takes place in the interviewee's home. The recording commonly takes one hour. Including set-up time and travel it is only possible to conduct a maximum of four interviews per day. The camera used is Sony® high definition camera, which gives a high quality image and is able to cope with low light interiors. A lapel microphone is used to provide the highest quality audio recording for the interviewee's voice. If possible a second camera records a B-roll. Still photographs are also taken for use in print media and promotions. Two consent forms are signed on conclusion of the interview. The interviewee (or their representative) keeps one copy and the other copy is filed with the project's administration.

As a token of our appreciation for their cooperation a framed portrait of the interviewee is given to the interviewee (or their family) along with a certificate of appreciation and a poster compilation used to publicise the 'Stories through Memories' exhibitions. Funding is only available to pay students for translations and videography and as a result it is not possible to pay our interviewees. This means we do lose some potential participants however it also ensures we are not recording people 'creating' stories for 'sale'. In this way we can be fairly certain the stories we collect are not invented for fame or fortune.

The recorded video files are duplicated and the catalogued files are stored in an online archive, which can be added to and accessed by all international members of the team. Each raw video interview is commonly between 15-20 gigabytes and approximately one hour in duration. The unedited raw interview is transcribed into the original spoken language (where possible) and then translated into English and Malay. Each raw one-hour video is edited into a three-minute condensed 'story video' with the interviewee speaking their mother tongue with English subtitles.

These three-minute videos have been shown to audiences in exhibitions throughout Brunei concurrently with ten themed videos that loosely follow the chronology of the war: Japanese Arrival; Work Changes; Songs and Schooling; Shortages; The Letter; Hard Times; Starvation; Bruneians Fleeing; Japanese Evacuating; Bruneians Returning Home. Additionally a ‘Behind the Scenes’ video highlights the experiences and challenges faced by the UBD students involved in the project and a short introductory compilation video imparts the essence of the project.

### **Linguistic challenges**

*Stories through Memories* has encountered a number of interesting linguistic challenges. One example is an interviewee who spoke Hokkien, Mandarin and Malay. This interviewee switched between these three languages as he spoke, even within the same sentence depending on who he was looking at while speaking.<sup>46</sup> If his eye caught a Chinese crew member he spoke Mandarin, as his glance moved to a Malay crew member he switched to Malay and in between he used many Hokkien references. This particular interview required three translations; one for Malay, another for Mandarin and yet another for Hokkien. We discovered that the young generation of Chinese in Brunei commonly speaks Mandarin, Malay and English but few speak Hokkien so this interview had to be translated by a Chinese student from Penang (Malaysia) where Hokkien is still widely spoken and understood.

Another example came from the interview with an elder from Kasat district who described their families’ need to use mosquito nets for clothing during the Japanese occupation. This interviewee used an old Bruneian term for ‘bug dirt’, which was not known to the younger Bruneian translator. When our Malay language expert checked the transcript he was able to correct it. As with all languages Bruneian Malay evolves over time and certain words used by the older generation lose their prominence and become unknown to the young generation of Malay speaking Bruneians.<sup>47</sup>

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46 *Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI20\_MANG.*

47 *Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI17\_KASA.*

## **Preliminary findings**

This paper began by stating the general conclusions historians have drawn from the war era and the summary that is taught to the children of Brunei through textbooks. An argument was made that the Stories through Memories interviews in many ways complement these formal history narratives, which highlight the Japanese versions and to an extent also the perspective of Bruneian Elites. Further, these texts describe policies implemented in Brunei during the Japanese administration but they do not inform the reader of what happened to the average Bruneian living under Japanese rule. The *Stories through Memories* interviews give voice to these as yet unheard experiences and shed light on the little-studied ordinary person. We know from several historical sources that the Japanese were cruel; they forced people to work; and confiscated large amounts of food, which caused tremendous hardships for all Bruneians. These issues can now be spelled out more systematically, more clearly, and in a more nuanced way using Stories through Memories' specific individual experiences as examples. Following are some of the preliminary findings of our research listed under category headings combined with knowledge gained from traditional historical sources.

### *Schooling, infrastructure and healthcare*

During the Japanese occupation investment in the wellbeing and development of Brunei took a significant downturn. The infrastructure of the country was neglected and medical care was lacking. The Japanese made a point of teaching Japanese language and culture but in essence they disrupted schooling for the majority of people. One of the first things the Japanese did was to close the existing schools and restrict schooling to Malay schools only.<sup>48</sup> Additionally, this interviewee says 'every afternoon after work you have to attend school where they teach Japanese'.<sup>49</sup> These findings are supported by the few Bruneians who left memoirs including Pengiran Haji Mohamed Yusuf Pengiran Haji Abdul Rahim's book *Barat-Timur dan Bom Atom*. Further he states in the Brunei Japanese run school 40 children studied for 3 months and the 5 best were sent for further

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48 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI01\_TILO.

49 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI01\_TILO; BI20\_MANG.

study.<sup>50</sup> Some were sent to Japan for schooling. The Japanese wanted people to go yet the problem was the children just didn't speak Japanese although there was this Japanese school.<sup>51</sup> Everybody in Brunei had to study Japanese and promotion and financial incentives were given to those who passed the tests.<sup>52</sup> Malnutrition was widespread, especially for the Indonesians like Romusha who had been brought to Brunei to work as forced labourers. These Indonesians grew increasingly sick because of the bad conditions that prevailed.<sup>53</sup> The white doctors were taken away and a Japanese person worked as doctor.<sup>54</sup> In Temburong for instance there was no healthcare at all except for one local person in Bangar Town. People generally had to use local traditional medicine.<sup>55</sup>

### *Work and economy*

The Japanese provided some people with work opportunities, which did not exist in Brunei before the occupation.<sup>56</sup> The Japanese recruited twelve thousand Javanese Indonesians as workers for the whole of British Borneo. These forced labourers did a multitude of jobs. They built the airfield in Berakas and worked in plantations growing vegetables.<sup>57</sup> The Japanese brought them to Brunei promising a lot (health care, education, work, leisure and fitness) but supplies were reduced and there was no food; starvation was widespread.<sup>58</sup> 800 starving Javanese gathered in Bandar when the Australians came to Brunei in June 1945.<sup>59</sup> In addition to the Indonesian labourers the Japanese recruited numerous locals also. The Japanese relied on the village headmen to collect local workers for road duty in a 'Forced Labour System'.<sup>60</sup>

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50 Pengiran Haji Mohamed Yusuf Pengiran Haji Abdul Rahim, *Barat-Timur dan Bom Atom* (Brunei: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2014), 30.

51 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No. BI01\_TILO; BI20\_MANG.

52 Pengiran Haji Mohamed Yusuf Pengiran Haji Abdul Rahim, *Barat-Timur dan Bom Atom* (Brunei: Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka Brunei, 2014), 29.

53 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No. BI19\_MUAR.

54 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No. BI02\_TUTO.

55 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No. BI35\_TEMB.

56 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No. BI01\_TILO.

57 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No. BI02\_TUTO.

58 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 149-150.

59 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 151.

60 Stephen R. Evans, *Sabah under the Rising Sun Government* (Kota Kinabalu, Opus Publications: 2007), 36.

The Japanese controlled the economy by restricting trade to certain approved products.<sup>61</sup> This often created shortages and a situation where the Bruneians had to rely on their own locally produced products such as Sago.<sup>62</sup> The Japanese introduced their own currency which was called ‘banana money’ by the locals.<sup>63</sup> Banana money was abundant but as the war progressed it lost its value quickly and would be totally useless after the war. In Beaufort, Sabah in June 1945 the Australians found 5 tons of worthless Japanese money that nobody wanted inside a wrecked train.<sup>64</sup> Some positive outcomes of the experience of war in Brunei was the self-reliance the Bruneians gained by making things again. Bruneians learned some skills from the Japanese.<sup>65</sup>

### *Food, clothing and livelihood*

The Japanese confiscated half the crops grown by the local people.<sup>66</sup> “In the first year we still had food and people were still Ok.”<sup>67</sup> Then people ate any sorts of food. We cooked potatoes or sago.<sup>68</sup> Most people ate Sago and cassava.<sup>69</sup> They began by mixing rice with yams.<sup>70</sup> Those people who grew their own food were less affected than those who did not have that option. What happened was simple: “you starved”.<sup>71</sup> In Miri over 3000 Chinese and Indonesians (Javanese mostly) died of starvation dying alongside the road.<sup>72</sup> The first year was still manageable but after a year

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61 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI01\_TILO.

62 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI01\_TILO.

63 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI01\_TILO.

64 Stephen R. Evans, *Sabah under the Rising Sun Government* (Kota Kinabalu, Opus Publications: 2007), 44.

65 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI01\_TILO.

66 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI01\_TILO.

67 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI02\_TUTO.

68 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI07\_RIMB.

69 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI01\_TILO.

70 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI02\_TUTO.

71 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI06\_TUTO.

72 Stephen R. Evans, *Sabah under the Rising Sun Government* (Kota Kinabalu, Opus Publications: 2007), 44.



clothing began to run out.<sup>73</sup> People used the bark of the Tamaran tree pounded into a type of fabric for clothes.<sup>74</sup> Or gunny sacks as clothes and mosquito nets.<sup>75</sup> Clothes were very hard to get.<sup>76</sup>

### *Bombing and flight*

Towards the end of the war the bombing and the food shortages caused people to leave Brunei town (from 1970 Brunei Town was renamed Bandar Seri Begawan in honour of the late Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III).<sup>77</sup> In 1941 at the beginning of the Japanese occupation the population in Brunei was 40.000, of these 6.000 were Chinese.<sup>78</sup> The population of Brunei Town itself during the war was 16.000 but bombing and food shortages caused the people to flee to numerous village kampongs with very few remaining behind.<sup>79</sup> The Allies bombed everything and all the houses and shops in Bandar were burned down.<sup>80</sup> The Japanese fled into the jungle in June 1945.<sup>81</sup> We watched from the Hills. They dropped leaflets to tell us when to leave.<sup>82</sup> During the Allied bombing Bruneians ran into the jungle. Airplanes flew over and bombed Bandar.<sup>83</sup> Bruneians rebuilt their houses from rubble left over from the bombing and lived in that.<sup>84</sup>

### *Incidents, collaborators and cruelties*

An Allied airplane crashed at Telahak and the Japanese tortured local people trying to find it.<sup>85</sup> Torture was carried out indiscriminately. If you were reported by a spy then that was enough

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73 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI02\_TUTO.

74 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI09\_TERA.

75 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI09\_TERA and BI11\_TEMB .

76 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI11\_TEMB.

77 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 52.

78 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 91.

79 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 52.

80 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI03\_MUAR.

81 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 147.

82 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI21\_TANJ.

83 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI19\_MUAR.

84 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File NoBI01\_TILO.

85 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI19\_MUAR;BI01\_TILO.

for torture based on no evidence at all.<sup>86</sup> The Japanese military police Kempeitai was hard.<sup>87</sup> There were Bruneians who worked for the Japanese and they went around slapping people.<sup>88</sup> Some Bruneians helped to torture others and these were put in jail after the war.<sup>89</sup> Others were hidden spies. ‘*Kaidan*’ were spies of our people for the Japanese.<sup>90</sup> The Japanese had a network of informants who would help the Japanese in finding out who was opposed to them.<sup>91</sup> If they had stayed one more year then many more would have died as they beat a lot of people.<sup>92</sup> Japanese sometimes took women.<sup>93</sup> There was a constant fear. One informant didn’t get married because her father worked for the Japanese and that gave a degree of protection.<sup>94</sup> Javanese people were starving on the streets they looked like skeletons.<sup>95</sup>

### *Resistance and revenge*

Thousands of Japanese were killed after the war in the interior.<sup>96</sup> It is often mentioned that they were killed by various means after the war.<sup>97</sup> People related various ways of revenge. One Dayak related how they tipped over the boat so the Japanese would drown.<sup>98</sup> The same story was heard in Temburong. The uphill tribes in the Limbang joined the Semut secret operation in resisting the Japanese and for them Brunei was easy to reach by river.<sup>99</sup> The Japanese moved from Limbang to

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86 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI12\_MANG.

87 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI19\_MUAR.

88 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI01\_TILO.

89 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 115.

90 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI11\_TEMB; BI05\_BANG.

91 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 68.

92 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI06\_TUTO.

93 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI10\_SERA.

94 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI03\_MUAR.

95 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 42.

96 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 144.

97 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI23\_TEMB.

98 T.S. Monks, *Brunei Days* (Sussex: The Book Guild, 1992), 143.

99 Tom Harrison, *World Within: A Borneo Story* (Oxford University Press: Singapore, Oxford, New York, 1986 (originally 1959 Cresset Press). 216.

Marudi.<sup>100</sup> These resistance troops were in contact with the Australian Army and were active in Merudi and Limbang harassing Japanese.<sup>101</sup> One source has it that not a single Murut in Sabah collaborated with the Japanese during the whole Japanese Occupation.<sup>102</sup> One interviewee referring to the “line of argument” used by the Japanese for the invasion of Asia (including Brunei) as liberating the locals from the European colonization said:

Well as hindsight, the Japanese came here this is what they’re saying later. That they’re going to liberate us in Brunei or all this part of the world in Southeast Asia. To liberate these countries from being a colony of British. But once they get rid of the British, why stay here for four years? That is one big question mark. If they really said that they want to liberate us, why stay for four years and why keep soldiers here for that period and frightening the inhabitants of the country. That’s one big question mark to me.<sup>103</sup>

## Conclusion

Our ‘Stories through Memories’ work to date has produced 38 interviews from across Brunei including people from all strata of society from the very rich to the very poor. Women as well as men from various ethnic backgrounds - all with one thing in common; a story to tell of what happened during the years of the Japanese Occupation of Brunei. The people came from the four districts of Brunei mostly Kampong Ayer, Berakas, Muara, Tutong, Belait, Kalanas and Temburong. This yielded an extraordinary diversity of voices and obliges the listener to be constantly aware of the element of individuality in history. Commonly, experiences were very localised and personal. While history texts offer just a few paragraphs of personal narrative the ‘Stories through Memories’ archive offers contrasting views from diverse narrators and the viewer relives that story with the witness as he or she is relating it on video. The following interview is yet again often completely or partially different, forcing the listener to contemplate, compare and analyse why this might be the case. One can see clearly how each story differs and as the stories build and intersect how important locality and ethnicity is to the remembered lived experience. The contextual differences in every Bruneian’s individual life circumstances make these events

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100 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam/ by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI09\_TERA.

101 Tom Harrison, *World Within: A Borneo Story* (Oxford University Press: Singapore, Oxford, New York, 1986 (originally 1959 Cresset Press).272-274.

102 Stephen R. Evans, *Sabah under the Rising Sun Government* (Kota Kinabalu, Opus Publications: 2007), 60.

103 Stories Through Memories Digital Resources / Section Brunei Darussalam / by Janet E. Marles, Maslin Jukim, Frank Dhont: File No.BI12\_MANG.

direct and personal. This is one of the most important aspects of this archive with its combined accumulation of 38 different narratives, all equally important and equally colourful, and all worthy of engagement and further study.

The paper has shown the value of ‘Stories through Memories’ as an archive and a historical source for future research in Brunei as well as a learning experience for young Bruneians who have become increasingly interested in learning about their roots. It is there that the value of the project lies. This growing data base of interviews forms the story of each and every one of Brunei’s generations that has lived to World War Two. The element of individuality makes this project so intense as with each story a new world opens up as yet another story through memory is related. It is a great achievement that 38 Bruneians are already recorded and put on record in such a digital archive as this will remain a testimony to Bruneian history of the endurance of their grandfathers and grandmothers.

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