Chapter 10
Belonging and Unbelonging in Kampong Ayer, Brunei Darussalam

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Abstract This chapter examines Kampong Ayer from a human geography perspective and the social construction of space over time. Kampong Ayer was and is a historically and culturally significant place in Brunei Darussalam. However, years of resettlement programmes, episodic fire destruction, and movements of people in and out of the area have resulted in significant reorientations. The chapter pays close attention to the ways in which increased migration over the last 30 years has played a role in reshaping everyday senses of belonging for the residents of Kampong Ayer.

Keywords Brunei Darussalam · Kampong Ayer · Migration · Belonging · Place · Space

10.1 Introduction

In the 1970s, Michel Foucault reflected on the largely neglected place of 'space' in the social sciences: 'Space was treated as the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile. Time, on the contrary, was richness, fecundity, life, dialectic' (Foucault 1980: 70). Over the last few decades, however, the study of space has gained increasing purchase. Having said this, our current era of globalisation has shifted the frames

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of space/place, a shift profound enough for enthusiastic advocates of a globalised borderless world to claim the 'end of geography' (Omhae 1990; O'Brien 1992). They view the compression of space–time brought about by economic integration and technological advancements as sufficient enough to render distance and geopolitical borders as almost inconsequential. Many geographers, on the other hand, have challenged the validity of such claims (Deudney 1997; Yeung 1998; Dalby 1999; Andreas 2003; Morgan 2004; Kalm 2008). Indeed, the consequences of economic globalisation and its impact on social inequality and migration have arguably made the study of space and place more important.

This brings us to the study of this chapter, namely Kampong Ayer in Brunei Darussalam (Figs. 10.1 and 10.2). Located at the mouth of the Brunei River, it is a place of great historical and cultural significance in the life of the country. For centuries, Bruneian people have lived in Kampong Ayer—a collection of over 30 stilted water villages—and their cultural roots are entwined with the river that flows through the heart of Brunei. It is part of the country's social fabric, with many of the practices and rituals that developed in Kampong Ayer having continued even as its residents moved on to land. Yet much of the study of Kampong Ayer has focused on its history rather than the ways it is conceived as space and place, especially among newer residents and their relationship with the state. It has faced various challenges to its character and identity over the years. From 1952 onwards, the Brunei government pursued resettlement programmes to shift the population inland (Rozan 2008). Modernisation and population growth placed increasing pressure on Kampong Ayer with numerous fires gutting interlinked households and communities and, in some cases, entire villages being destroyed. Patterns of international migration also brought changes to the character and demographics of Kampong Ayer. All of which have influenced the symbolic and material place it holds in the social imaginaries of Bruneians. This chapter investigates continuity and change in Kampong Ayer and further considers the implications of migration and the disjuncture between the reality of everyday life there and the ways it is imagined by Bruneians. This allows the chapter to delve into the ways place changes people and how people change place.

10.2 Methodology

Data for this chapter derive from a triangulated series of unstructured individual and group interviews. They were carried out by the three lead authors from a purposive sample of three groups to gauge a varied set of lived experiences: Indonesian migrants who have moved into Kampong Ayer; local residents who still live in Kampong Ayer; and local residents who have migrated out of Kampong Ayer. The first group consists of five Indonesians who live in Kampong Ayer with ages ranging from 22 to 45 years; second, three local residents who reside in Kampong Ayer; and lastly, five former local residents of Kampong Ayer with ages ranging from 23 to 25 years. The different backgrounds of the three groups provide a set of contending narratives to analyse the various ways residents construct a sense of place in the contested spaces of lived

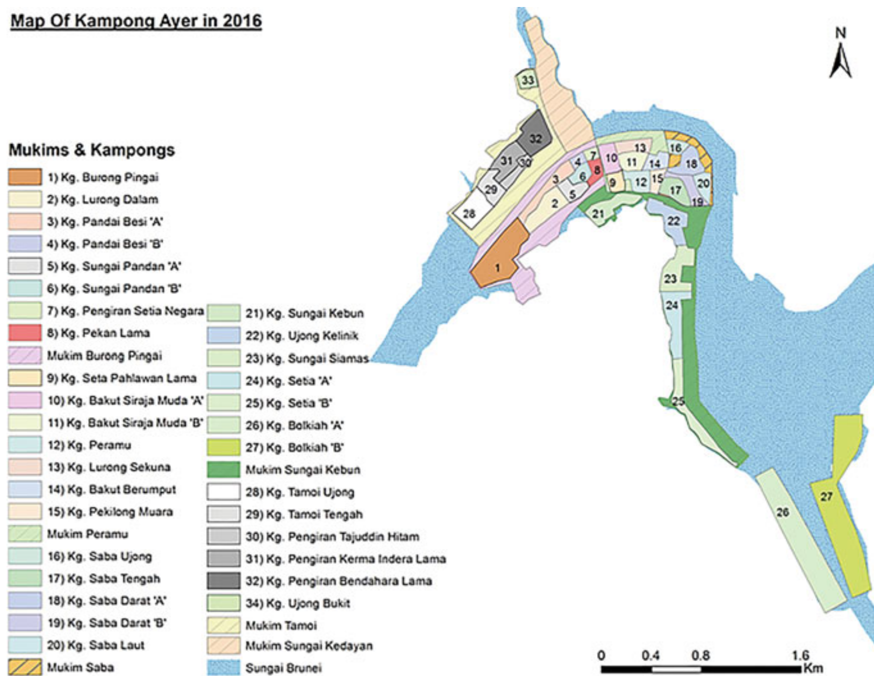

Fig. 10.1 Map showing the scale and subdivisions of contemporary Kampong Ayer. *Source* Courtesy of Shafi Noor Islam (2021: 168)

mobility in and out of Kampong Ayer. The analysis of these narratives is informed by thematic conceptions of space and identity highlighted in the next section.

10.3 Conceptualising Space and Identity

Various scholars argue that globalisation's compression of time–space significantly deterritorialises geographical space and our emotional bonds to it (Virilio 1986; Deleuze and Guattari 1987; Bauman 2000). It becomes all too easy to conflate spatial reach with social depth (Morgan 2004). Others prefer to underscore the ways existing patterns of territory and inequity have reconfigured rather than dissolved from the impact of globalisation (Dalby 1999; Stiglitz 2002; Elden 2005; Murray and Overton 2015). Technologies and the velocity of financial capital may have altered the space–time relationship and socioeconomic activity, but they have also simultaneously generated new forms of inequality and substantially widened the wealth gap within and between countries. As Doreen Massey (1994) cautions, in a globalising world characterised by inequality and a sense of anomie, place provides security and assurance: a point of orientation in a rapidly changing and disorientating

Fig. 10.2 [*Top*] Kampong Ayer seen from Bandar Seri Begawan; [*bottom*] looking back up the Brunei River with Bandar Seri Begawan in the distance. *Source* Courtesy of Paul J. Carnegie

world. Indeed, some have gone as far as to argue that the power of places remains a predominant factor in identity creation (Massey 1995; Rose 1995).

Moreover, for Henri Lefebvre (1991) space and place are not apolitical. Space and place not only reflect but are constitutive of power relations. The production of space is infused with political agendas propagated by the state and dominant culture. Lefebvre further argues that the exercise of domination over place normalises sociospatial relations and reinforces unequal power relations. Space is not 'the dead, the fixed, the undialectical, the immobile', but it is dynamic and subject to contestation, competition and negotiation (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). It is an arena where politics and structures of meaning play out. As such, rootedness or belonging in a particular place is a form of agency where individuals assert degrees of control over spaces by constructing images that reflect their particular realities (Rodman 2003). Their imagined communities and imagined geographies of place and space evoke strong emotions and bonds especially in times of uncertainty. As Olivia Harris

(1996: 11) emphasises, in response to uncertainty, social groups 'defend continuity, and their rights to claim and express particular links with the past'.

In this sense, places have unique realities, full of meanings, experiences and memories, both individual and shared and of various scales. These symbolic assemblages, discourses and representations create a distinctive character that distinguishes one place from another. According to Susan Mayhew (2015: 448), the distinctiveness of a place can create emotional attachment for its residents: a 'sense of place'. Yet migratory patterns generated by a globalised division of labour and ever more variegated production and supply chains make 'sense of place' a complex thing to discern. Heightened mobility and migratory deracination transform understandings of 'sense of place'. For Massey (1994), there is little utility in viewing 'sense of place' in a singular, parochial perspective. Mobility and migration infuse degrees of cultural multiplicity into sites that are no longer isolated from other places. However, this simultaneously begins to circumvent and unravel the imaginaries nurtured and cultivated by local populaces. The migration in and onto space introduces new disruptive elements into particular spaces and intensifies the very negotiations over what that space means. Such patterns fold into ideas of identity and what Erving Goffman (1959) terms the dramaturgy of everyday life. For Goffman, individuals form conceptions of self through performance and social interaction with their surroundings. Indeed, identity is a negotiation in our interactions with the 'other'. Although individuals are active agents in this process it is bounded by societal forces and pressures. Individuals must rely on others to complete their idea of 'self' through reaffirmation of their identity—either positively or negatively. This can be reinforced through performative acting out of perceived identifications. If individuals are labelled in a way that directly contradicts their conception of themselves, they might act out differently as a way to disassociate from the label.

While Goffman's formulation is useful, it gives little attention to cross-cultural interactions between migrants and original settlers. As Marta Rabikowska (2010) points out, normality is subjective across cultures; what is normal in one part of the world may not be so in another part of the world. It varies. Having said that, heightened migration has resulted in transplacement of population groups from one place to another with different norms, values and culture. It positions place and identity in a context whereby migration becomes an important determinant in the construction of the meaning of the place (Lawson 1999).

Culturally speaking, space can have specific connotations attached to it. It may be viewed as belonging to a certain culture or implying the inclusion of certain 'people' and excluding others. Indeed, in a cultural space, racialised bodies that are not accepted as part of the imagined community residing within that space often evoke a sense of unease among locals (Puwar 2006). A burden of doubt is invariably placed upon the outsider and transgressions are often exaggerated as evidence of unbelonging (Girard 1979). The mere presence of 'foreigners' can raise suspicion and disrupts the predictability of routine. Having said that, acceptance as 'normal' is often seen as an achievement for migrants. It implicitly means that they are included within invisible crowds and their presence no longer poses threats to the public

(Goffman 1971). Rabikowska (2010) further argues that migrants often perceive normalcy in a symbolic sense which signifies a stabilisation of their lives. To have that sense of normalcy implies that they have managed to succeed in forming a new version of normalcy that differs from their homeland but still manages to imitate by degree certain aspects of it. Achieving normalcy is a form of order-making after the uprooting of their lives from their homeland. From this perspective, migrant adaptation to new surroundings influences the way interactions are conducted and subsequently, identity formation.

10.4 Situating Kampong Ayer

Having outlined the conceptual underpinnings of the chapter's qualitative data analysis, the following section further situates our study by way of a brief history of Kampong Ayer. Situating the study historically allows us to trace the evolution and transformation of Kampong Ayer and consider more fully the implications of migrant–local interactions and what it means to belong in Bruneian society.

Kampong Ayer is commonly regarded as the cradle of Brunei civilisation. The longstanding existence of Kampong Ayer embodies collective memories of Brunei histories. Nonetheless, Kampong Ayer has undergone significant changes over the centuries. During the fifteenth century under the reign of Sultan Bolkiah, several historians suggest that Kampong Ayer was situated closer to the mouth of the Brunei Bay than its current location, as Robert Nicholl (1975: 85) notes, 'three miles from the coast along a river' (see also Chi et al. 1996: 117–123; Abdul Latif 2012: 21–68). The settlement's location reflected the kingdom of the time. Yet, as Brunei's regional influence waned, Kampong Ayer's position gradually receded. When James Brooke became rajah of Sarawak, Kampong Ayer was firmly situated on the bank of Bandar Seri Begawan. By the time the British residency developed a firm hold over Brunei under the protectorate system, Kampong Ayer was a shell of its former self. British authorities decided to resettle Kampong Ayer's population, and the policy began a downward spiral that gradually chipped away at the essence of the place. The then British resident, M.S.H. McArthur, claimed that its current condition and environment were unfit for habitation. He argued that the development of Brunei could not be undertaken without mass migration inland. This was disputed by the British-appointed health officer in 1921, who claimed that Bruneians were naturally 'riverine dweller[s]' and any effort to relocate them inland would be misguided (cited in Leake 1989: 42). Why did McArthur recommend relocation inland? One explanation could be British imperial rule's long history of 'pacification' and forcefully moving inhabitants from settlements deemed 'hotbeds' of 'suspicious activities'. Whatever the underlying motivations and interests in play, Kampong Ayer certainly began to lose political and cultural influence over Brunei. For most modern Bruneians, the idea of Brunei as Kampong Ayer and Kampong Ayer as Brunei seems like a distant legacy of the past. Interestingly, the policies of relocation instigated by the British were

continued under Sultan Omar Ali Saifuddien III (r. 1950–1967) who is seen by many as the 'architect of modern Brunei'.

The Second World War further influenced developments with the Japanese driving the British out of Brunei. The geostrategic struggle over Borneo took its toll on the built environment of inland Brunei, but Kampong Ayer remained relatively unscathed. In the postwar period, Kampong Ayer's size grew. By 1971 it comprised 60% of the entire population of Bandar Seri Begawan despite government resettlement efforts in the 1950s (Mansurnoor 1997: 201–202). This revitalisation of its fortunes was in some ways linked to Brunei's changing political situation and Cold War exigencies. To elaborate, in an effort to shore up its political hegemony and counter communist threats, the British were adamant that Brunei and Singapore would not fall to insurgencies, especially during the Indonesia–Malaysia *Konfrontasi* period in the early to mid-1960s (Emmers 2003: 73). When the British indicated their intention to leave Brunei, it was met with opposition from Malaysia and ambivalence from the Brunei government itself. For Malaysia, if Brunei became independent, it would make its de jure claims over Brunei invalid and heighten calls for greater autonomy from Sarawak and Sabah; while on the Bruneian side, the impetus for liberation was tempered with caution over geopolitical threats once separated from British protection and support. However, by 1975, both Indonesia and Malaysia recognised Brunei's independence as a fait accompli. In a conciliatory gesture, both countries agreed to enlarge membership of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Although Brunei initially distanced itself from ASEAN and preferred to rely on its external association with the British, by 1979 the tides had turned. The British Conservative government of the time formally withdrew from the region and an agreement was reached between Brunei and the British. A Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed in 1979 in which the sultan would be granted full sovereignty of Brunei by the British. By way of compromise, the British would also provide a battalion (the Gurkha Rifles) for security purposes to the sultanate. In 1984 Brunei gained full independence and joined ASEAN.

Concurrently, Brunei had already begun to develop a state ideology in the 1960s to distinguish itself from other states in the region. According to Asbol bin Haji Mail (2012), monarchical rule based on religion and Malay cultural traditions is an inherent aspect of Brunei's political configuration. However, the development of a formal ideology in the form of Malay Islamic monarchy (*Melayu Islam Beraja*) only began to gain purchase after the suppression of the Brunei revolt (*pemberontakan Brunei*) by the British in 1962. Quelling of political unrest bolstered the monarchical system and legitimated the political formation of the nation-state along racial and religious lines (Mohd Jamil al-Sufri 1997; Naimah 2002; Emmers 2003: 70–72). Subsequently, Brunei elevated Kampong Ayer as a cultural space central to its national identity. Its narratives and myths would help forge an imagined community in which Bruneian identity was promoted. The role of Kampong Ayer as the cultural hearth was highlighted in the political discourses of Brunei at the time. It enjoyed a renaissance bolstered by modern infrastructural developments initiated by the government (Mansurnoor 1997).

Nonetheless, Kampong Ayer was not immune to the effects of globalisation and modernisation. By the 1980s, despite only Bruneians being able to own properties there, longstanding inhabitants were moving out in significant numbers while at the same time external migration into Brunei increased. Indonesian migrants in particular were attracted to the low-rental accommodation Kampong Ayer offered (Rozan 2008). House prices and economic activity in Kampong Ayer also started to decline. It was relatively isolated from the material benefits of the mainland and the availability of affordable cars provided further incentive to resettle. Moreover, the wooden stilts of the houses were ill-suited to bear the increasing electrical usage of the modernising population. Frequent incidents of fire and the development of affordable housing estates inland witnessed more and more residents leaving for the mainland. Despite these developments, the government has continued to promote Kampong Ayer as the cradle of Bruneian culture and identity.

10.5 Three Narratives on Place, Identity and Belonging in Kampong Ayer

Given its history, notions of place, identity and belonging are significant parts of Kampong Ayer's story. This section brings together perceptions and reflections of three different groups of respondents to articulate a triangulated and interior view of everyday lived experience in Kampong Ayer. From their personal accounts and the ways in which they have constructed meaning from their experience, a variety of thematic factors emerge that speak to the ways in which senses of place, identity and (un)belonging are imagined, contested, negotiated and transformed.

According to a local respondent who migrated out of Kampong Ayer, his experiences and recollections of the place were positive and largely reflected nostalgic sentiment and a strong sense of communal ties:

> The sense of community in Kampong Ayer is very strong. For example, any daily necessities such as salt, sugar, even gas tanks are shared among the neighbours. It is normal for the neighbours to come in and hang out with us. This is not just limited to any celebratory activities such as weddings and Hari Raya, but also in the everyday life of a resident in Kampong Ayer. However, that sense of community is even more pronounced during weddings or any celebrations in Kampong Ayer. Verandas are shared to accommodate visitors for the weddings. Essentially, ownership of any properties is very communal. Any deeds are reciprocated by the neighbours. For example, if you help me with this, I'll help you with that. In spite of anything that might occur, or whatever might occur, happiness and sadness are shared among the community. The burdens of loss are shared by the whole neighbourhood. This is because I consider my neighbours as my own blood, and they consider me as their blood. Any loss that might have been inflicted to them we feel that sense of loss also.
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> Objectively, living on land is more suitable for modern life; but I find that living in Kampong Ayer is in my body and my soul. Sometimes, late at night, I would wake up and just start thinking about my childhood in Kampong Ayer; just the crowd coming into your [house] and exchanging pleasantries. The sound of their voices overwhelmed by the sound of the engines of the [boats] running and the chatter of the people outside, the river crashing

> onto the wooden planks of the stilts: it almost sounds very musical to my ears. If there is an opportunity [for] living back in Kampong Ayer, I think I would.

Another local respondent further echoed the sense of belonging:

> I was born here, and I've lived here for 60 something years. I lived inland for a brief period of time, but it was completely different. My heart is in this place. I did apply for the housing scheme on land, but I was rejected. Instead, I got a placement in one of the new housing [schemes] in Kampong Ayer. I think it is a sign from God that I am meant stay in this place all my life. *Alhamdulilah.*

Data suggest that the general sentiment among local residents towards Kampong Ayer was one of affection. However, when asked about recent developments in Kampong Ayer, several of them compared it to 'living in a refugee camp that you see in the news every day'. One respondent added:

> I feel like the condition of Kampong Ayer then and now is a little bit like a ghetto. You would see a lot of kids involved in shady practices. Drug trades in Kampong Ayer are quite the problem. Kids were used as runners for their drug dealing friends or family. *Syabu* [crystal methamphetamine] is a real problem just as much as glue sniffing is. When I was in my schooldays, fights would break out almost every day. And the stenches are just unbearable at times, especially during low tide.

There were also mixed sentiments expressed by local residents about the influx of migrant workers into Kampong Ayer. Several respondents were generally positive about Indonesian migrants, while some were more cautious, and others took a negative view. However, those local respondents still living in Kampong Ayer were generally cordial with Indonesians. As one local respondent noted:

> What if your relative from Limbang [in Sarawak] came to Brunei and wanted to move into Kampong Ayer, would you stop them? Then there's your answer. Nationality does not matter in living. We as a Bruneian should show them the way of life of people in Brunei: live as a family, live in harmony. It should not apply differently when migrants want to live here, because here is better for them.

In contrast, Bruneians who have left Kampong Ayer were generally more cautious or negative towards the Indonesian migrants. One former resident reflected on this caution:

> There's nothing wrong with migrants living in Kampong Ayer. Of course, at first, we were quite suspicious of them. We really do not know what to expect from them. So we were a bit cautious with how we interacted with them. Only after they settled down, and came to ceremonies, religious events and social gatherings and made themselves known to us that they weren't a threat where we started to warm up to them. It also helps that they started coming to the mosque on a regular basis. In our eyes, they weren't a threat as soon as they adopt the Bruneian lifestyle. Though in Kampong Setia, they are very hostile to migrants selling stuff [in] their *kampong*. They want people to buy their products, rather than outsiders.

Another former resident expressed concern that migrants were undermining Kampong Ayer's identity:

> For me, I find the idea of non-Bruneians living in Kampong Ayer to be absolutely inappropriate. I am in a state of unease in the presence of these migrants. Not because I hate Indonesians or anything, but to allow them to come in and live here is like fundamentally changing the identity of Kampong Ayer itself. They should live on land and make a living for themselves. It is just absurd for them to live there [referring to Kampong Ayer].

During group discussions, issues of how people adapted on land were heated. Respondents became emotional about the way the mainland population view them. Our own positionality of not having roots in Kampong Ayer was also called into question. As a courtesy, this necessitated a shift in discussion to other less contentious issues before asking respondents to summarise how they feel about Kampong Ayer and also settling elsewhere. Two responses encapsulated a range of emotions associated with belonging and unbelonging, stereotyping and defiance:

> Some of the Kampong Ayer people are very ashamed of their roots. We don't. We are very proud of the fact that we come from Kampong Ayer. Kampong Ayer has made us the way we are. There were a lot of instances when people straight up insulted us, and that has led to some fights. When we play football, you can hear a lot of whispers saying, 'Oh, they are from Kampong Ayer', of course they are this and that. It is as if our behaviour is being looked at and then generalised to every Kampong Ayer resident currently living on land. But, whatever.

> I mean, there wasn't anything we did differently. Of course, we had to tone down everything that we did. From our reaction, the way we speak, the way we dress. But that's about it. People on land view us in a negative manner because they have this perception that people from Kampong Ayer are unruly, uncivilised, low class and *poklen*.[1] That is really unfair on a lot of us. *Poklen* doesn't really represent us in anyway. You see *poklen* originating from land also, but because we are from Kampong Ayer, suddenly it is expected of us to behave that way.

Differently, an Indonesian migrant respondent expressed other concerns and the relativity of circumstance in their adaptation to Kampong Ayer:

> I don't have any problems with living in Kampong Ayer. In fact, I love it for the unique environment that I am not used to back in Indonesia. The people have been very welcoming of me. They would come to my house and hang out on my front porch and have a conversation. In one sense, Kampong Ayer is better than what I am used to in Indonesia. It is cheaper, my house is very near to where I work [a logging company] and it is convenient because it is near to retail stores. I don't really have to pay much because it is sponsored by my employers. The pay is also quite nice compared to that back in Indonesia. It is dangerous and exhausting but it pays the bills and pays for my family back home. I have a lot of mouths to feed especially after one of my sister's husband passed away a few years ago. She has two children and no means of providing a livelihood for her family. So, as a man, I have to provide for all my kin. I keep in contact with them through WhatsApp. I am very anxious at times, just because I don't really know how to swim. When I ride a boat, I sometimes can imagine that I would fall into the river and drown.
>
> The logging company that employs me also employs some of my friends back in Sulawesi. We have the exact arrangement: as in housing and bills provided. I worked with them [the Indonesians] and I feel very close to them because they are the only Indonesians living here. They helped me settle down in this country.

[1] *Poklen* is a derogatory term that implies one is dirty, uneducated, aggressive, uncultured and unsophisticated.

Interestingly, when one Indonesian respondent was asked, ‘Are you Indonesian?’ he replied, ‘Yes, I am Indon.’ This was unusual because the term ‘Indon’ is considered derogatory back in Indonesia. It is also used as form of insult by Malaysians towards Indonesian migrants. When asked why he referred to himself as ‘Indon’, he replied that it was normal in this society for Indonesians to be referred as such. He indicated that the negative connotation does not attach in the same way in Brunei as it does in Indonesia or Malaysia.

Respondent data indicate that the people of Kampong Ayer feel degrees of rootedness to the place, whether those who have remained, others who have left and the many more who can claim a migratory association with the place. But as Margaret Rodman (2003) cautions, we should be wary of ‘natives’ who assert their dominance by suggesting that they have a primordial connection or oneness with place. This is often accompanied by actions that are taken to guard carefully constructed identities and normalise social ordering hierarchies for migratory incomers.

Collected data suggest that interactions between migrants and local residents are largely guided by Bruneian culture and tradition. Indeed, the presence of ‘foreigners’ raises suspicion and disrupts the predictability of the lives of the local residents. Migrants are often racialised and regarded with suspicion and any transgressions they commit act as further proof that they do not belong in Kampong Ayer. The discourses of Kampong Ayer as ‘homeland’ of the Bruneian people also burden migrants with a sense of responsibility to fit into the pre-existing communities and recalibrate their identities accordingly. What is normal in a migrant’s homeland may not correspond in Kampong Ayer. As a result, the migrant desire to establish a level of everyday normalcy after the uprooting of their lives has often led them to accept and internalise their subordinate status in Kampong Ayer. In a sense, it is a social space stratified by race. For Indonesian respondents, having stability in their lives helped them survive in a new environment despite facing various iniquities. Their primary motivations were to provide for their families and interactions with locals were much more reserved. However, there is a disconnection between what is real and what is imagined. The image of Kampong Ayer inhabited by Brunei Malays is betrayed by the presence of large numbers of migrants. There are also differences in the ways Kampong Ayer émigrés make sense of the place they have left. While Indonesian migrants might accept their subordinate status, this differs greatly from the way émigrés negotiate their status. Many Bruneians who live on the mainland hold negative stereotypes of people from Kampong Ayer. Our local respondents displayed a defiant rejection of the imposition of such labels on their sense of self-worth and identity, and celebrated their roots as a source of pride.

10.6 Conclusion

As this chapter highlights, the evolution and status of Kampong Ayer are rather curious. It is, at one and the same time, a place of great historical and cultural importance but also unimportance. In the minds of many Bruneians, Kampong Ayer

represents a national treasure that persists even in diminished form. It is part of the national imaginary and heritage of the nation-state but also a migrant ghetto, a subaltern place largely avoided by broader society. Developmental forces and a modern lifestyle may have rendered Kampong Ayer a functionally unenviable place for locals to set up home, but, conversely, increased labour migration has also breathed new life into the place.

The chapter draws attention to how migration as an aspect of globalisation is changing the ways in which we conceptualise, use and understand space and place. It underscores how place changes people, and how people change place by detailing the various ways in which senses of place, identity and (un)belonging are being imagined, contested, negotiated and transformed in Kampong Ayer. Although our notions of place have become more fluid in an age of globalisation, place still exerts an ability to influence migrants and émigrés alike. A bit like gravity, you can't see it, but it exerts a pull, nonetheless.

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