

On the other hand, while analysing many unilateral steps taken by Israel in support of their policy toward Palestine, Cohen sees three options available for Israel none of which are easy to adopt: 1) maintaining the status quo—Israeli control in all of ‘greater Jerusalem’; 2) unilateral disengagement from the Arab neighbourhood while strengthening Jewish control on the holy basin, which is against the goal of their “greater Jerusalem”; and 3) joint ‘peaceful’ management of the Old city and its holy places by Israel and Palestine (p. 135).

Apart from having some arguable statements, the book, offers an absorbing, interesting, and informative insight on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The volume is a well-researched study focusing on the political activities of East Jerusalem, and the Palestinian armed struggle. It is a timely must-read for all those concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

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**Domination and contestation: Muslim *Bumiputera* politics in Sarawak.** By Faisal S. Hazis. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2012, pp. 346. ISBN: 978-981-4311-58-8.

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Two reasons may be advanced for an interest in a book such as the one under review. The first is the submission of a letter of resignation in February, 2014, of Tan Sri Abdul Taib Mahmud, the Chief Minister of Sarawak since May, 1981. This signalled an end to a colourful and often controversial chapter in the history of politics not only of Sarawak but perhaps also of other parts of Malaysia. Taib Mahmud, however, remains the President of Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu (PBB) and Chairman of the State Barisan Nasional (BN), thus making sure he continues to be at the centre of Sarawak’s political scene. The second reason for an interest in *Domination and contestation: Muslim Bumiputera politics in Sarawak* would perhaps be to appreciate and understand the changing nature of politics in Sabah and Sarawak within the context of federal politics of Malaysia. This book is an

important contribution to a better understanding of the evolution of politics in Sarawak during the 1970-2006 period. The volume explains the rise and consolidation of Muslim leadership of politics in Sarawak. It also highlights their contributions towards making the BN the dominant political force in Malaysia for a very long time. The results of the 2008 and 2013 General Elections (GE) in Malaysia have clearly demonstrated that both Sarawak and Sabah have become a new battleground for both the BN and the *Parti Keadilan Rakyat* (PKR). Thus, it is important to understand the nature of politics in Sarawak for a better appreciation of politics at the federal level in Malaysia. This book is a brave analysis of this dynamic.

The book under review is a slightly revised and updated version of the author's doctoral thesis. In his well-researched and well-written study, Faisal S. Hazis offers an in-depth analysis of the evolution of political changes starting with the narratives of Sarawak's history during the times of Brookes, the Japanese occupation and the British colonial rule. His discussions hit the climax when he began to focus on the main issue of the study, namely, the personal history of the two leading Melanau strongman-politicians, Rahman Yakub and his nephew Taib Mahmud, who have dominated and maintained their hold over Sarawak politics for decades.

The author provides an excellent chronicle of the strongman style of leadership, the involvement of family in power transition, and the practice of corruption with electoral vote buying via various development projects in Sarawak. Furthermore, he leads the readers to a number of issues and discussions among the political parties, political alliances, broken agreements and empty promises made by the ruling party leading to a slow-down in the development of Sarawak.

The study showed that the process of formation of Malaysia in 1963 contributed towards the restructuring of the traditional socio-economic system of the people in Sarawak and increased their political consciousness. The formation of Malaysia brought institutional changes in Sarawak through the establishment of various federal government offices. In addition, policies and programmes, collectively known as state-led modernisation, aimed at generating social and political changes within Sarawak were implemented by the ruling government. The

new political culture of “developmentalism” is practiced throughout Sarawak.

The era of Muslim *bumiputera* leadership in Sarawak began in 1970. The federal government has helped Sarawak in many ways which used to be administered by a weak ruling party led by the Iban leaders. According to the author, without strong grassroots support and high political aptitude, the Iban leaders failed to adopt the right strategy to bring order and stability, which led to long-running crisis in the ruling party and spread of anti-government dissatisfaction among the masses. The post-1970 elections were considered momentous because it shifted the balance of power in Sarawak from the non-Muslim *bumiputera* leadership to the Muslim *bumiputera*.

What is particularly fascinating about the *Domination and Contestation: Muslim Bumiputera Politics in Sarawak* is the way the work is well-managed in chronological categorisation of issues. A Chief Minister plays a vital role as a representative of a central state that aims at realising the central state’s agenda of extending Malay political dominance. The appointment of Rahman Yakub as Sarawak’s third Chief Minister introduced sweeping changes not only within the ruling party but also among Sarawak’s multi-ethnic society. Political stability is a key measurement to ensure uninterrupted economic growth in the economy. Therefore, the role of Chief Minister is crucial where he has to play a comprehensive responsibility towards a central state’s ambitions and to meet the needs of society.

The federal government’s main expectation from Rahman Yakub when he became the Chief Minister of Sarawak in 1970 was to protect Kuala Lumpur’s interest in Sarawak. In order to ensure continued political and economic support from the federal government, Rahman did not disappoint the federal government and was successful in strengthening the ruling party’s domination of the Muslim *bumiputera* in Sarawak. In 1981, Rahman passed the baton to his nephew, Abdul Talib Mahmud, who proved to be a more powerful and influential strongman-politician compared to his uncle.

Like Rahman, Taib was also required to play the role of the federal government’s representative by fulfilling five of its core demands. Those five core demands are (1) to safeguard national interest, (2) to maintain Malay political dominance, (3) to ensure the BN’s continued dominance

in the *negeri* and parliamentary elections, (4) to maintain the state's control over petroleum and gas, and (5) to provide political stability. In order to ensure that the federal government's interest in Sarawak was protected, he allowed the federal state to extend Malay dominance in the *negeri*. As explained by the author, Taib adopted two strategies: (1) appoint Muslim *bumiputera* leaders to important positions in the state government, and (2) to implement Malay/Islamic initiatives in Sarawak. The strategy of using Islam as a medium to consolidate the society seems to have played an important role in maintaining BN's electoral support in Sarawak. In order to achieve the goal, the ruling government introduced a comprehensive system of *Shari'ah* laws and streamlined the administration of Islamic affairs in Sarawak.

The author indicates that the structure of "old politics" in Sarawak is still relevant as the "new politics" that emerged in the Peninsula after the 1999 election did not entirely affect Sarawak's political landscape. Three features of Sarawak's "old politics" are (1) racial politics, (2) regional politics, and (3) development politics. These had become the sources of consolidation and contestation among the populace in Sarawak.

The book is well-organised as it makes it easy for the readers to study the political history of Sarawak in different points of history. Although the book offers the readers solid analysis, some discrepancies may be pointed out here. An extensive and detailed literature review on political and personal stories was given a wide space in this book which could have been shortened and edited in a more effective manner. Besides, readers may easily become overwhelmed by the sheer number of detailed tables and appendices. Additionally, the extensive use of acronyms can prove rather confusing.

This book manages to successfully cover, as its title suggests, the politics of domination and contestation in Sarawak. It is an excellent source for students, educators and researchers. Most certainly, the author of this book, Faisal S. Hazis, deserves positive appreciation for providing us with a detailed analysis of the nature of politics in Sarawak.

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