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## Book Reviews

*Representation, Identity and Multiculturalism in Sarawak*, by Zawawi Ibrahim (ed.), Kuching, Sarawak and Kajang, Selangor: Dayak Cultural Foundation and Malaysian Social Science Association, 2008, 311 pp.

The heterogeneity of people and cultures held by a single geo-political boundary is common around the world. Such a geo-political setting presents a rich and dynamic mix of cultural practices, religious beliefs and political interests, which shapes the representation and identity of ethnic societies. In the same vein, one cannot rule out the effects of external influence, which seemingly distorts and largely reconfigures ethnic representation and identity of multicultural societies. While all these factors could not go unnoticed, the editor of the book, Zawawi Ibrahim, rather sets in motion a critical discourse on Malaysian multiculturalism based on a multiplicity of legitimate cultural cores and centres of Sarawak. The book literally sets out to advance a series of discourses on Sarawak society and culture in the context of a broader Malaysian governance landscape, with its attendant cultural contestations of alternative representations and reconstructions of identities from the margins of society and the nation-state.

The book is organized in three parts, comprising fifteen chapters structured under three main themes. In his introduction, Zawawi Ibrahim highlights the book's main objective – to problematize multiculturalism in the context of Sarawak's experience – and provides a detailed summary of the book in the context of representation, identity and multiculturalism in Sarawak. Part 1 is themed “anthropological representations”. It begins with Robert Winzeler's critical review of Tom Harrisson's archeological and ethnological efforts in light of a whole mass of controversies, debates, discrepancies and critiques on a wide range of issues that saturate Harrisson's anthropological credibility and contributions to multiculturalism in Sarawak. In chapter two the focus is on the remarkable contributions of William Geddes' iconic books, which are perceived to have captured a complete and well meaning picture of the social organization of the Bidayuh of Sarawak. In contrast here, Pamela Lindell like most academics chose to scar Gedde's contributions by highlighting the flaws inherent in some of his anthropological analyses. In chapter three, Fiona Harris examines gender representation in Sarawak and presents empirical arguments to show sharp gender asymmetries,

with women relegated in the different socio-cultural, religious, economic and political activities in Sarawak. Zawawi Ibrahim in chapter four, narrates the dilemmas of the Penans, who apparently have lost their sovereignty to external institutions due to modernization, and portrays their angst over increased marginalization and control of their lands.

Part 2 is themed 'problematizing multiculturalism'. It proceeds with chapter five by Welyne Jeffrey Jehom, who described ethnic pluralism and relations in Sarawak in historical, contemporary and future contexts. Ethnic relations are significantly maligned in the historical, marked by tolerance and concessions in the contemporary, and viewed as benign and cohesive in the future contexts respectively. Chapter six reflects Yongjin Kim's analyses of Sarawak Cultural Village (SCV), which was conceived to represent the real traditional cultures of all ethnic groups in Sarawak. However, this objective was a far cry as the SCV inclines to economic gains from tourism and hence, merely integrates a façade of various cultural traits to serve as an emblem of harmonious national culture. In chapter seven, Voo Jan Chan moves on to explore how multiculturalism enhanced Chinese thinking and integration in Sarawak so much so that the cohesion between the Chinese, Malays and other indigenous populations laid the foundation for Sarawak's independence. Chapters eight and nine by Poline Bala and Ramy Bulan respectively, shed light on the Kelabit whose relatively small size and religion makes their influence within the Malaysian nation peripheral, but distinct and exemplary in light of their remarkable and modest approach to resolving conflicts. Lin How Kee in chapter ten explores the nature of research in a multicultural society like Sarawak, and submits that research in such context ought to reflect the diversity and multiplicity of the experiences of the people.

Part 3 presents the remaining five chapters of the book, with focus on 'ethnicity and identity'. In chapter eleven, John Postill explores how the Iban of Sarawak propagated and safeguarded their linguistic distinctiveness and ethnic literature to consolidate their national identity. Clare Boulanger in chapter twelve captures the dilemmas of the Ibans, caused by many decades of monstrous practices of headhunting. She further analyses the gains of repentance and the future of their traditional custom. In chapter thirteen, Kelvin Egay sheds light on the blurred identity of the Penan Belangan community, heralded by incessant migration, and further captures their renewed struggle towards retaining their identity. Finally, chapters fourteen and fifteen by Noboru Ishikawa and Faisal Hazis respectively, revisited the chemistry of the Sarawak Malays, depicting the disparities between the aristocratic Malays and coastal rural Malays with particular emphasis on the four dominant markers of Malay identity – Islam, loyalty to *parentah*, Sarawak Malay dialect and *adat*, all of which either makes

identity formation or definition of Malayness to be fluid and flexible or rigid and often abstract. The book also has a robust index, which is presented in the last-seven pages.

Overall, the book presents a rich description of Sarawak's diverse multicultural heritage, and the challenges of representation and identity that haunts many ethnic societies, particularly the minority ethnic groups that are caught within a larger dominant ethnic and religious group, or disadvantaged and influenced by external institutions. Such scenario eventually brings about the struggle for representation and preservation of identity. It could be adduced from the book that ethnic groups exercise a considerable degree of tolerance, which I strongly believe is essential for the continuity and peaceful co-existence of multicultural societies. This argument is in line with the increasing ethno-religious tensions and conflicts, which are most synonymous with many multicultural societies around the world, where tolerance is rather substituted for suspicion and antagonism.

The lucidity of the book, in addition to its coherent connection of chapters makes for interesting reading. Given the detailed combination of intellectual monographs, the book is indeed one that captures extensively the internal and external dynamics of Sarawak's multicultural society. However, there are some inconsistencies within the book. For instance, some chapters have introductory headings while others do not and importantly, there is a glaring error on page 193, where 'part three' was substituted for 'part four'. Similarly, chapter 12 was presented in a prose-like format, with no sub-level headings throughout the chapter. It should have been presented in two sub-level headings at least, for consistency and ease of comprehension. Also, it is obvious that very few examples of multicultural societies elsewhere were given to enhance synthesis. Using examples like the loss of identity and the dilemmas of the Native American Indians in the US, as well as the frequent ethno-religious contestations heralded by issues of representation common among many multicultural societies, particularly in Africa, would serve to aptly inform the reader of multicultural nuances in light of multiculturalism in Sarawak.

In spite of my comments, Zawawi Ibrahim deserves huge credit for a job well done in putting together a clear picture of multiculturalism in Sarawak and equipping readers with an arsenal of anthropological knowledge. In addition, his ability to unveil areas that require further research is highly commendable, notably on ethnic relations in urban settings, politics of identity in relation to tourism development and, on ethnic groups that have received scant anthropological research, like the Malays and the Bidayus. In doing so, Zawawi Ibrahim has made it relatively easy for anthropologists and researchers to extend the course of ethnological research even beyond Sarawak's borders.

Just as I have been massively enlightened by the book even as an outsider, the gains of reading the book are enormous, particularly for students of development studies, political, economic and social historians, anthropologists and all individuals who care to understand the trajectory of ethnic representation and identity.

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*The Return of Depression Economics and the Crisis of 2008* by Paul Krugman, New York: Norton, 2009, 191 pp.

Paul Krugman, winner of the 2008 Alfred Nobel Prize in Economics, has produced several bestsellers on a wide ranging set of economics issues. Albeit highly controversial, his famous works include strategic trade policy (Krugman, 1986), the fall and rise of development economics (Krugman, 1994a), an attempt to throw cold water on the growth experience of East Asia by equating East Asian growth with Stalinist Russia and hence, attributing it to perspiration rather than inspiration (Krugman, 1994b), and economic geography (Krugman, 1995). In this more recent book Krugman discusses the causes of the 2008 global financial crisis by drawing on a series of financial crises in history. Despite their dissimilarities, Krugman argues that the immediate causes of the financial crises are fundamentally identical. It is worth reviewing this book because of the importance of the issues examined, as well as the authority the author carries.

The book is organized into ten chapters with a separate introduction, which states its aims as being to explain how the 2008 crisis happened, how its victims can recover and how such a crisis can be avoided in future. The first chapter puts into perspective postulations and predictions by eminent economists such as Lucas and Bernanke, that the world had learnt so much that major crises were no longer possible. Chapter two discusses problems that caused the Latin American crisis, which were ignored. Japan's rigid interventionist state framework is presented in chapter three as the cause of its long slump. The East Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998 is examined in chapter four, followed by a discussion of contradictory exchange rate and other financial policies in chapter five. The role of hedge funds is screened in chapter six. Greenspan's policies are critically evaluated in chapter seven, while chapter eight offers a brief assessment of banking history and bank

regulation. Chapter nine explains the causes of the 2008 global financial crisis, arguing that it is arguably the most severe with all the eruptions happening at the same time. Chapter ten discusses the return of depression economics.

Krugman offers a masterful account of the causes of the 2008 crisis, drawing from the issues Keynes (1936) had first discussed and explaining how the bubble economy grew in the United States on the back of rising property prices over more than a decade. This trend had deceived economic agents – both the benign and the conniving – into dragging initially the merchant, then the investment and subsequently the commercial banks to participate in fragile sub-prime housing stocks. In the process he discusses how the nature of relationships between the financial firms and the rating firms overwhelmingly tilted to support inflated expectations of unworthy stocks. The proliferation of such badly rated and untenable financial instruments asymmetrically against the real economy complicated the capacity to detect *ex post* and cure the real economy, to deflate the bubble while minimizing the damage being done to the real economy.

Krugman also expertly dismisses in the book the claim of crony capitalism having derailed the Asian economies in the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis. Indeed, cronyism had existed in the East Asian economies over many decades of rapid growth. However, the original credit for this goes to Akyuz (2002), Stiglitz (2003) and other experts (see Jomo, 2000; Rasiah, 2000) who not only identified the exposure the countries were subjecting themselves to through liberalization but also noted the asymmetries small countries face in such transactions. In addition, Singh and Zammit (2006) had argued that there was no evidence of the performance of such ‘crony-based’ firms being lower than those of the so called Anglo-Saxon firms of the United States. Also, Krugman’s position in the book is in stark contrast to his earlier claim that the East Asian economies had grown through perspiration rather than inspiration and in the process equating them to Stalinist Russia (see Krugman, 1994b). Some elements of this appear tautological in his critique of the Japanese stagnation in chapter three.

I would like to address five issues that I believe the book could have covered better. The first relates to a lack of discussion on the interface between the real economy and the financial economy in East Asian and Latin American countries. Whereas the East Asian economies enjoyed carefully crafted industrial policies with superb macro-micro coordination to insulate firms from destabilizing externally arising crises, most Latin American economies lacked such coordination to drive technological catch up in high tech firms. Hence, whereas a massive number of Latin American firms folded under the siege of liberalizing currents each time there was either deregulation of tariffs or exchange rate devaluations, firms in East Asia enjoyed safety insulations to avoid such destabilizing crises. The exceptions include Embraer and

Petrobrass in Brazil, both of which managed to achieve comparable success through internalizing strategies that helped these firms overcome the daunting currents of competition. These firms are worth discussing as their paths are different from those taken by successful Korean and Taiwanese firms.

The second issue refers to Krugman's paradoxical and somewhat tautological attempt to explain economic stagnation in Japan since 1980. He correctly observed that the Asian financial crisis cannot simply be explained by cronyism, which was already present throughout the rapid growth years. However, he uses this argument along with one regarding rigid governance structures, as the problem that precipitated such a chronic crisis in Japan. In so doing he takes on a typical neoclassical view of the failure of big government. Yet, Japan's rapid ascendance economically cannot be explained without looking at industrial policy (Johnson, 1982). Japan had actually liberalized considerably by 1971 when all foreign ownership controls were removed in the manufacturing sector. I would argue instead that two major drawbacks debilitated Japanese growth. The first was the sudden increase in punitive pressures on Japanese exports which led to the relocation of major Japanese firms into the United States and Europe. Johnson had discussed such pressures from the United States' and European governments emerging since the 1960s, but the imposition of quotas and tariffs began only from the 1980s as the trade surpluses of Japan against these countries began to mount. Also, Japan (and Korea, Taiwan and Singapore) was (were) forced to float the Yen (won, New Taiwan dollar and the Singaporean dollar) following the Plaza Accord in 1985 (see Rasiah, 1988). The massive relocation of Japanese investment to North America and Europe caused serious hollowing out problems in Japan. As with Korea, forced liberalization caused Japan to lose its capacity to undertake the macro-micro coordination necessary to ensure that growth and structural change were continued.

The third issue relates to accusing Mahathir of naively making damaging economic statements at a time when the Ringgit was vulnerable in 1997. While the stock and currency markets responded with a pounding each time Mahathir said something negative in 1997, evidence suggests that the shrewd former Prime Minister of Malaysia may have cleverly taken on such a belligerent approach because the acting Prime Minister then was Anwar Ibrahim. Considered the most industrious Prime Minister of Malaysia, Mahathir may have had political objectives to make those statements as his leadership after the sacking of Anwar transformed dramatically to contain the crisis swiftly. Not only was he correct in calling for the shielding of the economy from external volatilities, he also implemented drastic measures to re-liquefy the economy by directing *Danamodal* (capital-fund) and *Danaharta* (asset-fund) to acquire and sell the rapidly accumulating non-performing loans and forcing interest rates down to small and medium firms (see Jomo, 2000;

Rasiah, 2001). These Keynesian measures may have influenced a departure in the IMF's governance procedures as interest rates were also lowered in Korea, Thailand and Indonesia after that.

Fourth, the attempt to link Marxism with Leninism to explain the malaise that took place under Stalinist Russia robs the book of a crucial issue that the original Marx raised on accumulation and equity. Marx's (1853, 1970) articulation of the dynamism of capitalism in engendering the productive forces has no peers and even Schumpeter conceded subsequently to his influence on his writings. The focus on the real economy, but importantly on technology by Marx struck a chord with the technological catch up experiences of Japan and Korea that took account of the creative destruction effects of competition. In hindsight what happened in the Soviet Union was Lenin's (1965) version of revolution where the vanguard dominated politics, thereby denying freedom of expression to the masses that got worse during Stalin's rule. What is important here is to recognize the problems of capitalist societies that generate serious inequalities. Marx not only rejected the idea of a socialist revolution happening in rural Russia, he had actually addressed a fundamental problem liberation theologians have rightly fought for by seeking a classless alternative (see Freire, 2006). Marx's revolutionary alternatives may have come out seriously short, but unless capitalism pays serious attention to its inherent inability to exacerbate inequalities to provide access to basic needs by the poor, economic growth will remain distanced from economic development. Krugman's glorification of the leadership of Pinochet and Carlos Menem in Chile and Argentina respectively does not take account of the diabolic distribution consequences they brought to their respective countries. Indeed, the speculative bubbles may have been reduced if only the unequal distribution of wealth in the United States had been avoided (see Lim and Lim, 2010). Certainly there would have been less capital-chasing excessive consumption of luxury goods and speculation with the latter causing serious problems to the real economy during times of busts. By avoiding a discussion on this issue, the book failed to offer a significant alternative so as to make the world economy more resilient during such systemic crisis.

Finally, indeed the book seeks to offer useful alternatives to prevent the future occurrence of such crisis but does little to justify this claim. If the range of assessments is to be synthesized into a body of lessons, countries seeking to avoid such a crisis will not only face confusion from the tautological presentation, they will also not be able to address collective action issues that are essential to coordinating the critical micro-macro interactions that require inductive assessments from an evolutionary perspective (see Nelson, 2008). In addition, the book appears excellent in analyzing the causes of the United States-led global financial crisis of 2008, but offers little that countries can

use to avoid or insulate themselves from future crises. Others have attempted better alternatives that appear worthy of consideration by the global financial governance bodies such as the IMF (see Akyuz, 2010).

While the book is interesting as it brings to the fore past crises, and makes an attempt to capture the similarities and differences behind the more fundamental causes and discusses a number of critical issues that interested persons must read, I believe some of its arguments could have been strengthened if only its presentation had steered clear of ideological shortcomings and with the right sort of evidence. It is important that I put these arguments and evidence on record for interested readers to view even if Krugman may actually reject them.

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