



**A DISCOURSE ANALYSIS OF THE SABAH SARAWAK
UNION (SSU), 2011-2015**

BY

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ABSTRACT

16 September, 1963 is an important date for Malaysia as it marks the beginning of its existence. On this very date, an agreement was made between United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Federation of Malaya (Peninsular Malaysia), North Borneo (Sabah), Sarawak and Singapore allowing all these states to merge and exist as one sovereign state. Focusing on Sabah and Sarawak, a memorandum which is known as the 20 Points Agreement for Sabah and 18 Points for Sarawak was established as to protect the people's interest, rights and autonomy. The emergence of the Sabah Sarawak Union (SSU) in 2011, which claims that the Federal Government has failed to observe these agreements has caused controversy and has become a talking point in the Malaysian political sphere. In the context of this polemic, the SSU has pursued a call for the independence of Sabah and Sarawak from the Federation of Malaysia. This study examines the significance of the existence of the SSU, in the context of its work to realise their political objectives. Also, this study analyses the response of the Government of Malaysia towards the SSU. From the framework of discourse analysis, this study illuminates how the call for independence by the SSU is articulated since its inception in 2011 until 2015. It shows that SSU's independence discourse has successfully drawn the Government's attention, compelling the latter to adopt confrontational engagement, which is explained through the idea of the *logic of difference*. Up until 2015, the Government and SSU have yet to achieve conciliation. As such, this study, by uncovering the discursive relationship between both sides, proposes ways through which the conflict can be managed better and ultimately be resolved.

ملخص البحث

يُعَدُّ ١٦ سبتمبر ١٩٦٣م، يوماً مهماً بالنسبة لماليزيا، حيثُ يمثّل بداية وجودها. وفي هذا التاريخ نفسه، عُقِدَت اتفاقية بينَ المملكة المتحدة (بريطانيا العظمى وإيرلندا الشماليّة، وبينَ اتحاد ماليزيا (شبه جزيرة الملايو) وبورنيو الشماليّة (صباح) وسراواك، وسنغافورة؛ بموجبها سمح لكل هذه الدول بالاندماج والوجود بوصفها دولة ذات سيادة. وبالتركيز على صباح وسراواك، تم إنشاء مذكرة تعرف باسم اتفاقية (٢٠) نقطة لصباح، و(١٨) نقطة لسراواك التي أنشئت لحماية مصلحة الشعب وحقوقه واستقلاله. وقد أدّى ظهور اتحاد صباح وسراواك في عام ٢٠١١م، الذي ادّعى أنّ الحكومة الاتحاديّة قد أخفقت في مراعاة هذه الاتفاقات، إلى إثارة الجدل وأصبح حديث الساعة في المجال السياسي الماليزي. وفي سياق هذا الجدل، سعى اتحاد صباح وسراواك إلى الدعوة لاستقلال صباح وسراواك عن اتحاد ماليزيا. تناولت هذه الدراسة أهمية وجود اتحاد صباح وسراواك، في سياق عملها لتحقيق أهدافه السياسية. أيضاً هذه الدراسة حللت استجابة حكومة ماليزيا تجاه اتحاد صباح وسراواك. وفي إطار تحليل الخطاب، تبرز هذه الدراسة كيف أنّ دعوة اتحاد صباح وسراواك للاستقلال قد تمّ توضيحها منذ أوائل عام ٢٠١١م حتى عام ٢٠١٥م، وهو ما يدلُّ على أنّ خطاب استقلال اتحاد صباح وسراواك (SSU)، قد نجح في جذب انتباه الحكومة؛ ممّا أجبر الأخيرة على تبني المناقشة وجهاً لوجه بين الأطراف؛ إذّ وضح من خلال فكرة منطلق الاختلاف. وحتى عام ٢٠١٥م، أنّ الحكومة الماليزية، واتحاد صباح وسراواك حتى الآن لم يتوصلا إلى الاتفاق. وعلى هذا النحو، تقترح هذه الدراسة، من خلال الكشف عن العلاقة الخطائية بين الجانبين، السبل التي يمكن من خلالها إدارة الصراع بشكل أفضل، وأخيراً يتم حله.

APPROVAL PAGE

I certify that I have supervised and read this study and that in my opinion; it conforms to acceptable standards of scholarly presentation and is fully adequate, in scope and quality, as a dissertation for the degree of Master of Human Sciences in Political Science.

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that this dissertation is the result of my own investigation, except where otherwise stated. I also declare that it has not been previously or concurrently submitted as a whole for any other degrees at IIUM or other institutions.

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Firstly, it is my utmost pleasure to dedicate this work to my dear parents, my family and friends, who granted me the gift of their unwavering belief in my ability to accomplish this goal: thank you for your support and patience.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMANAHA:	National Trust Party (Parti Amanah Negara)
BN:	Barisan Nasional (National Front)
CDA:	Critical Discourse Analysis
DAP:	Democratic Action Party (Parti Tindakan Demokratik)
DN:	Dewan Negara (Senate)
DSKP:	Dokumen Standard Kurikulum Dan Pentaksiran (Standard Curriculum Document and Assessment)
DR:	Dewan Rakyat (House of Representatives)
EPU:	Economic Planning Unit
ESSCOM:	Eastern Sabah Security Command
GDP:	Growth Domestic Product
GE:	General Election
GST:	Goods and Services Tax
IC:	Identity Card
ICU:	Implementation Coordination Unit
IGC:	Inter-Governmental Committee
INTERPOL:	International Police Organization
ISA:	Internal Security Act
KTM:	Keretapi Tanah Melayu (Malayan Railways Limited)
LDP:	Liberal Democratic Party
LRT:	Light Rail Transit
MA63:	Malaysia Agreement 1963
MCA:	Malaysian Chinese Association
MILF:	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MP:	Members of Parliament
MRT:	Mass Rapid Transit
MSCC:	Malaysian Solidarity Consultative Committee
NATO:	<i>North Atlantic Treaty Organization</i>
NGO:	Non-Governmental Organization
PAS:	Parti Islam Se-Malaysia (Pan-Malaysian Islamic Party)
PATI:	Pendatang Asing Tanpa Izin (Illegal Immigrants)
PBB:	Parti Pesaka Bumiputera Bersatu
PBS:	United Sabah Party
PEJASA:	Pertubuhan Kebajikan and Warisan Islamiah Sarawak
PFI:	Private Finance Initiatives
PGA:	Pasukan Gerakan Am (General Operations Force)
PGK:	Pendapatan Garis Kemiskinan (Incidence of Poverty)
PH:	Pakatan Harapan
PKR:	Parti Keadilan Rakyat (People's Justice Party)
PPBM:	Parti Pribumi Bersatu Malaysia
PRU:	Pilihan Raya Umum (General Election)
PULO:	Pattani United Liberation Organization
RADK:	Rakan Anti Dadah Kuching
RCI:	Royal Commission of Inquiry
RM:	Ringgit Malaysia

SAPP:	Sabah Progressive Party
SJKC:	Sekolah Jenis Kebangsaan Cina (Chinese National-Type Schools)
SNP:	Scottish National Party
SSU:	Sabah Sarawak Union
SSKM:	Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia
SUPP	Sarawak United People's Party
S4S:	Sarawak for Sarawakian
UK:	United Kingdom
UMNO:	United Malays National Organisation
UN:	United Nations
UNKO:	United National Kadazan Organisation
UPKO:	United Posokmomogun Kadazan Organization
USNO:	United Sabah National Organization
USNO:	United Sabah National Organisation
WANGO:	The World Association of Non-Governmental Organizations
WARISAN:	Sabah Heritage Development Party

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

During the formation of Malaysia in 1963, in the case of Sabah and Sarawak, the unification was agreed based on specific rulings which were discussed in multiple meetings such as Malaysian Solidarity Consultative Committee (MSCC), The Cobbold Commission, and Inter-Governmental Committee (IGC) or Lansdowne Committee (Mathews et al., 2013). These meetings were held in order to persuade both North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak to favour the plan of Greater Malaya (Mathews et al., 2013). Consequent to all these meetings, several agreements were made in order to protect the interests of both the people of North Borneo (Sabah) and Sarawak. This is where the arguments for the 20-point and 18-point demands for Sabah and Sarawak respectively were articulated.

After several meetings, in February 1963, the IGC finally came out with a report which comprises these points (Mathews et al., 2013). The main aim of the points is actually to safeguard the special interests of the people. They have come into effect since 1963. Sarawak's Council Negri implemented it on March 8 and The North Borneo Legislative Council adopted it on March 13 (Mathews et al., 2013). These points comprise multiple interests that are related to issues such as official language, religion, devolution of government and others.

However, on August 9, 2011, a movement known as Sabah Sarawak Union (SSU), or Sabah Sarawak Keluar Malaysia (SSKM), had established itself as a separatist movement with the vision to separate Sabah and Sarawak from Peninsular

Malaysia (SSKM-SSU(UK), 2011). SSU also wants the United Kingdom and United Nations to officially recognise its mission (SSKM-SSU(UK), 2011).

It is undeniable that the existence of separatist movements within a state actually has come with different push and pulls factors. For example, the existence of Pattani United Liberation Organization (PULO) in Thailand and Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) in Philippines are defined by struggles of religious identity. The Scottish National Party (SNP) in Scotland and Parti Quebecois in Quebec, on the other hand, are focusing more on nationalistic struggles. In the case of SSU, its main concern is related to the 20 and 18 point agreements. The SSU believe that the Federal Government of Malaysia has failed to enforce the 20 and 18 points that were initially agreed to protect the interest of the people of Sabah and Sarawak. Due to this, the people of both states have ended up in ‘political slavery’ (SSKM-SSU(UK), 2011). Multiple arguments have been raised by political leaders, intellectuals and activists regarding this matter. However, it is unjust to say who is right and wrong if the historical facts are not observed.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The SSU was initially led by Doris Jones, a Sabahan residing in the United Kingdom. She is known as the founder of SSU. Other than Jones, Zurainee Tehek, a Sarawakian nationalist, is seen as the co-founder of SSU (SSKM-SSU(UK), 2011). The SSU was officially established on August 9, 2011, the same day on which their Facebook official page was established. It declared itself as a non-partisan group, with no affiliations to political parties (SSKM-SSU(UK), 2011). In addition, the group is only restricted for Sabahan and Sarawakian only. Other than a Facebook account, SSU also has a blog which is known as SSKM - SSU(UK). SSU comes with a motto known as

‘Pergo EtPerago - Dum Spiro Spero’ or ‘In Sovereignty We Breathe, In Unity We Believe’. Officially, this movement comes with the main goal of claiming Sabah and Sarawak’s sovereignty from Malaya. Specifically, the mission, vision, and objective’s of SSU are (SSKM-SSU(UK), 2011):

Mission

To receive an Official Declaration from The United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) & the United Nations (UN) that Sabah (formerly known as North Borneo) and Sarawak (formerly known as The Kingdom of Sarawak) are no longer interested to continue and to be a part of The Federation of Malaysia, thus becoming true Independent and Sovereign Countries in South East Asia which shall be known by the name of "The Republic of North Borneo" and "Republic of Sarawak".

Vision

To revitalize the status of Independence for Sabah and Sarawak which was granted by The British before the formation of Malaysia in 1963. Thus will be able to truly develop these countries to become among the well established countries in South East Asia.

Objective

1. To educate the people of Sabah and Sarawak about the truth behind the history of the Formation of Malaysia 1963, and The Rights of Sabahan and Sarawakian according to 18/20 Points Memorandum.
2. To raise awareness and the sense of patriotism among Sabahans and Sarawakians towards their countries (Sabah and Sarawak). Thus, sparking the spirit of Nationalism towards their Countries that has been long been under the oppression and manipulation of the Malayan Government and corrupted local leaders.
3. To collect 300,000 signature of Sabahan and Sarawakian to be forwarded to the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK) & United Nation (UN) that Sabah and Sarawak are no longer interested to continue being on a part of the Federation of Malaysia with Malaya.

The establishment of SSU as a non-governmental organization is obviously controversial within the context of Malaysia’s socio-politics, as it aims at separating Sabah and Sarawak from Malaysia. The act of promoting secessionism according to Malaysia’s Law falls under the Sedition Act. The SSU can be defined as – as per the definition of separatism - a group of people who are aiming to “reduce the political and other powers of the central government of state over a particular territory and to transfer those powers to the population or elites representing the population of the territory in question” (Pavkovic & Cabestan, 2013, p. 1). Also, they are commonly

struggling to achieve liberty from perceived colonial oppression (Stein, 2006). One of the major concerns of SSU is regarding the 20 and 18 points that have been agreed by IGC in 1963, as according to SSU's activists, the Federal Government has neglected these points since it is not being fully enforced (SSKM-SSU(UK), 2011). In order to grasp a deeper understanding about this movement, this study therefore is focusing on understanding the circumstances and conditions which have made possible for the establishment of SSU, to study SSU's objectives, strategies, and targets and finally to understand government responses towards SSU's existence.

1.3 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is actually aiming at providing better understanding over the scope of 'Separatist Movement' that has taken place in Sabah and Sarawak. It is vital to know the reason behind its existence as the after effect of this movement can be severe. By looking at the root causes of the SSU's emergence, this study hopes to provide a better understanding of why this movement itself has come into existence. It is also important to clarify the relevance of the movement's activities with their mission and vision in the context of present-day political realities in Malaysia, as this could help to pave the way for the creation of a basis on which compromise can be established between the government and SSU. Significantly, this study also wants to justify the importance of studying and understanding separatism and separatist movements such as the SSU, as it can help develop better understanding of conflict management, which would lead towards the achievement of peaceful solutions.

It is important to note that most separatist movements ended up with secessionism. Separatism here is defined as "an attempt that seeks some degree of self-government short of total independence for a minority in conflict with the existing

state” (Samarasinghe, 1990, p. 2). On the other hand, secession is “an attempt to establish separate sovereign state” (Samarasinghe, 1990, p. 2). As the SSU is very keen to promote the alleged injustices that have been committed by the Federal Government, the search for common ground may be vital, towards solving this problem. Thus, this study can help in identifying the dependent and independent variables that influence the occurrence of this problem by clearly articulating the claims made by both the SSU and the government on the issue of the status of Sabah and Sarawak. The states therefore will be able to undergo a peaceful political transition.

Finally, it is vital to acknowledge that the after effect of separatism and secessionism is severe. If both sides fail to achieve resolution, civil wars such as in India, Sudan, Indonesia, Turkey, Philippines, and Burma could take place in Malaysia. These civil wars were caused by separatist nationalism, and they have “caused considerable loss of life, massive refugee crises, economic devastation, considerable strains on great power relations and important international institutions such as NATO and the United Nations, and a significant risk of nuclear war in Southeast Asia” (Licklider & Bloom, 2007, p. 256). In this regard, as a separatist movement, it is possible that the SSU would resort to extreme methods in attempting to realize their demands. SSU is now still at a nascent stage, at the level of peacefully attempting to achieve their demands, mostly by using social media such Facebook and Blog, spreading flyers, and collecting petition to spread its ideology. The Federal Government must make an attempt to solve this problem before it is getting worse as ignorance may cause SSU’s activist to act aggressively. More broadly, this study hopes to contribute towards creating better understanding of the issue of separatism and conflict management within a state.

1.4 RESEARCH OBJECTIVE / QUESTIONS

The main objective of this dissertation is to get a deep understanding about the SSU itself. Besides, this study also clarifies the push and pulls factors for the existence of SSU. Thus, the central focuses of this study are:

- a) To explain the circumstances and conditions which have made possible for the establishment of SSU.
- b) To study SSU's objectives, strategies, and targets.
- c) To explain government responses towards SSU's existence.

Specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

- a) What are the conditions which allowed for the emergence of SSU?
- b) What are the aims and methods of SSU's political struggle?
- c) How has the government responded towards SSU's demands?

1.5 LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review for this study is divided into three different sections. The first part of the literature provides a brief concept of separatism and secessionism. The second part is covering about multiple separatist or secessionist movements that have existed in the past. This section provides a brief history about the push and pulls factors that cause for the emergence of the movements and how the conflict is being settled. On the other hand, the next section provides multiple literature reviews on SSU and the possible causes for its emergence.

1.5.1 Separatism and Secessionism

There are abundant amount of literature that covers about separatism and secessionism and some also do provide a distinguish definition between the two. To Cabestan and

Pavkovic in their book titled *Secessionism and Separatism in Europe and Asia: To Have a State of One's Own*, they believe that separatism is developed based on a “political objective that aims to reduce the political and other powers of a central government of a state over a particular territory and to transfer those powers to the population or elites representing the population of the territory in question” (2013, p. 1). In contrast, secessionism is being defined as the next level of separatism in which the activist is aiming at removing “not some powers but all the powers, including sovereign powers, from the central government” (Cabestan & Pavkovic, 2013, p. 2). Despite the distinct definition, Cabestan and Pavkovic (2013) do acknowledge that separatism and secessionism have been use interchangeably.

Besides that, Kohen (2006) in his edited book titled *Secessionism: International Law Perspectives*, he comes out with an argument that phenomenon of secession comes with two different perceptions which are from legal and political. Kohen (2006) furthermore stated that separation of a state which comes with the consent of the former alliance is known as devolution rather than secession as no conflict taken place. In addition, states are somehow proof to be ‘allergic’ towards secession. Moreover, he also stated that states are not even willing to allow any consideration for international law to govern secession (Kohen, 2006). Eventhough in the past, some new states such Namibia, East Timor, Micronesia and Palau come into existence with the engagement of International Law, however Kohen concerned about the ‘status’ of the state itself. Separation may pass easily if the territory has an “international status such as former mandates, trusteeships, non-self-governing territories or territories having been placed under sovereignty of an existing state by an international organization” (Kohen, 2006, p. 5).

Separatism is not a current issue instead, it is a continuous concern. The causes for separatism come from wide range of variables. Ranging from race conflict, dissatisfaction over state's management, tribalism, religious conflict and many other reasons which eventually pushing separatism to become a global issue which somehow may or may not lead to the involvement of International Law. There are abundant of researches which have been done in making an in depth understanding about separatism. However, the best solution for separatism has just yet been discovered.

1.5.2 Literature on Separatism and Secessionism

The struggle for independence of separatist and secessionist movement definitely caused by different push and pull factors. Separatist issue in Yugoslavia, Soviet Union and Czechoslovakia in 1991 is based on Ethnic conflict (Ayres & Saideman, 2000). Besides that, in Thailand, Pattani United Liberation Front (PULO) is more to religious conflict as it is aiming at liberalizing Muslim community from the Government of Thailand. Oxford University has identified PULO as a religious separatist movement as it is initiated by the Muslims in order to create an independent Islamic state that composed of Pattani, Narathiwat, Yala and Satun (Oxford Islamic Studies, 2016). Instead of looking at PULO's religious motivation, Suresh Kumar (2014) adding that PULO can also be identified as a nationalist separatist group.

Gideon Rachman, a chief foreign affairs commentator in Financial Times highlighted about separatism in his writing with the title "Scotland can be a model for how to handle separatism". The title of this article is a statement supported through the fact that the willingness of United Kingdom's government in letting go Scotland without any conflict (Financial Times, 2014). It is globally known that United

Kingdom did allow the Scottish National Party to hold an open vote in September 18, 2014 for this separation which is indeed peaceful and democratic. This is what Rachman acknowledged as a situation where nations breaking up in a civilized way (Financial Times, 2014). This peaceful approach adopted by United Kingdom would 'probably because the government in Westminster recognizes that the UK is a union of separate nations with historically distinct identities: morally and practically it can only be kept together on the basis of consent' (Financial Times, 2014, para. 7). In contrast with Malaysia, Sabah and Sarawak however does not own any liability to secede as Point 7 within the 20 Points does not allow the state to secede.

Global difference such culture, political system, religion and others are vital aspects which must be put into consideration in justifying the best solution for separatism. Not all country may adopt United Kingdom's approach in handling Scotland. However, open voting can be considered as a democratic action which recognizes the role of the people within the state. In some countries like Thailand with its Pattani United Liberation Front (PULO) and Philippines with their Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), their conflicts on separatism have yet come to an end. The pros and cons in separating may be different from state to state. This is where the argument of economy, currency, state's tangible and intangible sources, security and others come into concern.

In a book titled *Secessionism and Separatism in Europe and Asia: To Have a State of One's Own* by Cabestan and Pavković, it is mentioned that "after the end of Cold War, states in Europe and North America have shown a more relaxed or tolerant attitude to secession than have states in Asia" (2013, p. 4). In comparison, as what we can see nowadays that states in Asia have yet able to handle and face the challenge of separatism or secessionism. This statement can be proven by looking at the case of

MILF as this conflict has started since 1997. Continuous discourses over agreements and treaties have yet open for peaceful settlement for their separatism issue. In addition, as what Habyarimana and others said that “when state and ethnic-group boundaries do not coincide, politics is apt to remain ugly” (2008, p. 138). Thus, from this statement we can conclude the significance of unity among the people in ensuring the state tranquillity and stability.

There are abundant of works that have been done in revising separatist cases. A state must understand and get the knowledge over why a separatist movement come into exist in the first place in order to understand or finding the best way to solve the problem. Looking at the separation demanded by Scottish National Party, the very reasons why Scotland wanted to be separated from United Kingdom are because of “oil rights, divvying up public debt and currency arrangements” (The New York Times, 2014, September 9, para. 6).

Drawing out from a stable established country may cause big disadvantages towards the new established country (The New York Times, 2014, September 9). United Kingdom is already been classified as the First World country, in terms of economy and power, therefore considerably as a powerful state. For Sabah and Sarawak, these two states do provide great income to Malaysia especially in terms of oil and agricultural revenue. However, the critical question that must be pointed out here is whether these states able to exist independently without their alliance.

It is a fact that by forming an alliance will help in stabilizing a state especially when it comes to the level of power. However, this intellectual discourse does not necessarily able to influence separatist movement from existing. Furthermore, in contrast with the concept of globalization, Churchill argued that, the “mixture of populations [will] ... cause endless trouble” (Habyarimana et al., 2008, p. 138).