

QUEER MALAY IDENTITY FORMATION

This article examines identity formation among queer Malays in the works of two Malaysian Malay writers, Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman. It begins with a brief discussion of Malay identity politics, followed by an analysis of identity creation processes among queer Malays who are featured in Karim and Dina's works. The analysis focuses on the various markers and strategies queer Malays in the said works used to construct their identity, as well as the tensions and conflicts they experience in creating and expressing a Malay Muslim identity marked by queerness. The findings here posit that non-normative sexualities, in addition to Malay culture and religion, are key to queer Malays' notions of being Malay in present-day Malaysia.

Keywords: identity politics, Malay identity, queer identity, queer Malay, Malaysia

Introduction

This article explores the complex processes of identity creation among queer Malays in the works of two contemporary Malaysian Malay writers, Karim Raslan and Dina Zaman. It begins with a brief discussion of the politics of Malay identity in Malaysia, followed by an analysis of identity formation among queer Malays who are featured in Karim's short stories 'Go east!' and 'Neighbours' from his book, *Heroes and other stories*, and Dina's non-fiction book, *I am Muslim*. It aims to find out how queer Malays in the said works create their own notions of being Malay, particularly the various markers and strategies they employ in constructing their identities, as well as the ways in which they reformulate Malay identity that is created and sustained through religious, gender and sexual normativities. The article also aims to examine the tensions and conflicts queer Malays in the above mentioned works experience in creating and articulating a sexually dissident Malay identity.

Before proceeding further, some clarifications regarding the terminology employed and the choice of using Karim and Dina's works are necessary. I use the term 'queer Malay' to refer to gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered Malays who are featured in the above mentioned works. It is important to note that there are no equivalent words for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer in Malay. A variety of terms either formed from Malay or borrowed from English have been used to address Malay sexual dissidents. These include *pondan* and *bapak* for effeminate Malay men; 'gay' and 'gay boy' for gay Malay men (*str8* for straightacting gay men and *gay lembut* for effeminate gay men); *bisek* for bisexual Malay men; *pengkid* and *tomboi* for butch