



Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts

**A DIRECTORIAL CONCEPT: AN INTERPRETATION OF
SHAKESPEARE'S *ROMEO AND JULIET* USING
THE CONCEPT OF MAY 13TH 1969**

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Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honours

(Drama and Theatre)

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NURUL HANNANI BINTI MUHAMMAD REZEL

This project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Bachelor of Applied Arts with Honors
(Drama and Theatre)

Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts
UNIVERSITI MALAYSIA SARAWAK
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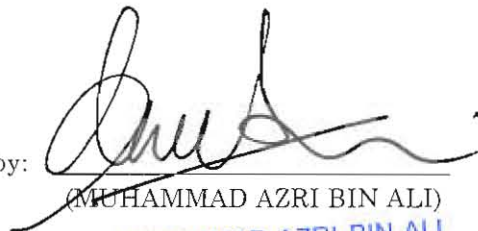
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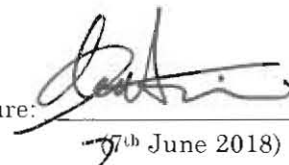
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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABBREVIATIONS

DAP	:	Democratic Action Party
FRU	:	Federal Reserve Unit
ICERD	:	International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination
KOMAS	:	<i>Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat</i>
MAGERAN	:	Majlis Gerakan Negara 1969
MCP	:	Malayan Communist Party
MPAJA	:	Malayan People's Anti- Japanese Party
NUCC	:	National Unity Consultative Council
TN50	:	The National Transformation 2050
YDPA	:	<i>Yang di-Pertuan Agong</i>

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini bertujuan untuk mengaplikasikan idea 13 Mei 1969 dalam konsep pengarah *Romeo Dan Juliet*. Kajian ini dilakukan untuk mengetengahkan isu-isu diskriminasi yang semakin membimbangkan di Malaysia seperti yang telah dinyatakan dalam *Laporan Diskriminasi Kebangsaan* pada 2016 dan 2017. Kajian ini merupakan sebuah kajian kualitatif di mana pengkaji mentafsir karya klasik Shakespeare dengan merangka sebuah konsep pengarah. Kaedah yang digunakan untuk merangka konsep pengarah ini adalah melalui analisis kandungan, analisis skrip dan analisis mise en scene. Melalui kajian ini, pengkaji ingin mengetengahkan kepentingan teater sebagai alat untuk membincangkan isu sosial.

ABSTRACT

This research focuses on applying the idea of May 13th, 1969 in a directorial concept to adapt the story of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. This study is done to address the rising issues of discrimination which is at an alarming state in Malaysia as stated in the *National Discrimination Report* in 2016 and 2017. This research is a qualitative research. It is an interpretation of Shakespeare's classic play through the development of a directorial concept. The method used to construct the directorial concept is through content analysis, script analysis and analysis of mise en scene. It is to highlight the importance of theatre as a tool to discuss social issues.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.0 Introduction of Chapter

This research focuses on the directorial concept of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Julie* based on the setting of Malaysia's Historical event, May 13th 1969. The main reason the researcher uses the idea of May 13th 1969 is because of the alarming state of discriminations and racism in 2015 and 2016 according to the *National Discrimination Report* in 2016 and 2017 by *Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat KOMAS*; A Malaysian Human Right Organisation established in 1993. This research is applying theatre as a tool to discuss on current social issue.

Besides that, the resonance of the text with the historical enactment have also stimulated the researcher to experiment adapting the story of *Romeo and Juliet*, brought forth in time during the May 13th, racial crisis in Malaysia. There is connection on the theme and moral values which is greed, mutiny among two parties, and on the importance of upholding peace in a society which can be highlighted in the directorial concept. This thesis is a qualitative research which uses script analysis and also content analysis to gain insights on the script and also the historical fact of the event. From the data collected a directorial concept is made to address on the choices made to bring forth *Romeo and Juliet* into the setting of May 13th 1969.

1.1 Research Scope and Limitation

The limitation faced during this research is on getting the information about the historical events; May 13th 1969, which happened forty nine years ago. In order to collect data on the chronology and visual reports of the event, the researcher focusses on secondary sources such as books, newspaper articles and national archive that wrote about the event. Through this published and printed resources, the researcher uses it as source of information rather than using interviewing method which data could have been extrapolated and may contain biasness.

Besides that, qualitative research does not have scientific explanations or measurements. It is a research done through qualitative reading of resources. It is mainly on the interpretation and vision of the researcher about the play with data references from books and visual research. In this research, the researcher focuses on implementing the concept of May 13th 1969 to unite all the designing process on the overall look of the play *Romeo and Juliet*. The story is adapted into the forbidden love between two quarreling races the Malay and the Chinese in the context of 1960's, Malaysia and depicts the social crisis faced by Malaysians in 1969 during the third General Election (GE) week. This directorial concept of adapting *Romeo and Juliet* within the setting of May 13th is an experimental approach, therefore an idea is arbitrary and could be revised in other from other perspective in future researches.

1.1.1 Background of May 13th 1969

The incidences of May 13th 1969 are about racial crisis between the Malays and the non-Malays due to provocative act of political parties during the 1969 general election (Mardiana Nordin & Hasnah Husiin, 2011). From the book

Pengajian Malaysia Edisi Ke-4 by Mardiana Nordin & Hasnah Husiin, the sequence of events actually began during the election campaign which raises racial issues and questioning the rights of the Malay. The opposition party at that time which is Parti Tindakan Rakyat (DAP) and Gerakan, gained high supports on the 10th May 1969 and held a victory parade on the 11th and 12th May. Due to some irresponsible fanatic followers, racial issues were raised as they paraded which raises dissatisfaction to the Malay community. The United Malays National Organisation, UMNO, which was later challenged, also held a procession for their success. The UMNO parade was led by Datuk Harun Idrus, Chief Minister of Selangor at that time. Both those processions were found to have ignited the communal spirit and raise racial sentiments which led to the riot. The riot happened in Kuala Lumpur and affected some other parts of Selangor, yet the impact it made affected the whole nation.

As the result of the riot, Tunku Abdul Rahman and the entire minister appealed to the *Yang di-Pertuan Agong* (YDPA) to declare a state emergency. The declaration was made on the very same day when the riot happened. The people were under curfew and they had restricted information from the media. The foremost action done when the riot happened was to detain the figures whom were supporting the riot. One of the figures was V. David from the Gerakan who was detained for two months and Lim Kit Siang from DAP for a year and a half. Besides that, curfews was implemented, the news from radios and television was under close surveillance, there were censorships over the publication of newspapers and forbid journals published by political parties, as well as forbidding elections campaigns. On a bigger level, after the incident happened, Majlis Gerakan Negara 1969, MAGERAN was formed

which functions as the peace restoration by the government to put more efforts to unite Malaysians together. MAGERAN was found to have returned security to the country and the parliamentary was operating as usual on 23rd of February 1971.

1.1.2 Background of *Romeo and Juliet*

For over 400 years, *Romeo and Juliet* is among Shakespeare's most popular plays and is still being recognised internationally as one of the most beautiful and tragic love stories of all time. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy written by William Shakespeare which was officially published in 1595. It is about two young star-crossed lovers whose deaths ultimately reconcile their feuding families.

The play is set in Verona and Mantua, Northern Italy during the Italian renaissance. The story is about two feuding families: the Capulet and the Montague, which has a long standing grudge against each other. The member of each opposing house despises each other and they cannot stop brawling and getting into fights whenever they meet.

The key action of the story is about Romeo, a Montague who fell in love with Juliet, the Capulet's daughter. The lover then got married and it was officiated by Friar Lawrence; Romeo's acquaintance. On the other hand, Count Capulet intended to marry his daughter to the prince Kinsman; Paris, but she refuses. As Romeo returns from his wedding he was approached by Tybalt, which was subsequently killed afterwards because Tybalt had killed Mercutio; one of Romeo's friends, in the sword fight. For the crime, Romeo is then banished from Verona to Mantua, hence made Juliet very sad and asks for Friar Lawrence's help. She was given a sleeping potion which stops her heart for forty-two hours and appeared dead. She was entomb

and mourned. Friar John, who was expected to deliver the written letter explaining about their plan to Romeo, was too late which resulted in Romeo's suicide. He drank the poison which he bought from the apothecary because he was devastated by Juliet's death. Juliet then stabs herself minutes after she woke up and saw Romeo, breathless by her side. The Montague and the Capulet reconciled after their child death but it was too late. The grudge they held on, took their heir to the legacy and a lot of blood were shed for them to realise that.

In conclusion, the play *Romeo and Juliet* conveys the message on the importance of unity. Due to the hatred between the two families, they experienced a miserable loss and misfortune. This, message is important and the researcher would like to highlight it for both the play and the historical event that peace could be achieved and enjoyed together if we tolerated.

1.2 Research Problems

On 23rd April 2016, aligned with the worldwide celebration of Shakespeare's 400th death in Stratford-upon-Avon in England, people were celebrating his life and work around the world. His poems and sonnets were recited in the celebrations worldwide and there were many creative adaptations of his work and *Romeo and Juliet* in particular was adapted into various cultures which interest the researcher to do an adaptation based on Malaysia historical event. Considering the issues in the play which is two feuding groups, the researcher is interested to adapt the story within the May 13th 1969 which was also having a crisis between two groups of people.

In addition, last year in 2017 many press groups covered on the topic racial discrimination. Due to that, there was a rise in newspaper article about racial issues. This newspaper articles were compiled in the publication of *Racial Discrimination Report 2016* by *Pusat Komunikasi Masyarakat (KOMAS)*. From the report, it is reported that incidences of racial discrimination in Malaysia continues to be quite high in 2016. According to the report, discrimination based on ethnicity in education, healthcare, finance, workforce and welfare continued on an upward trend. In 2016, incidences of racial discrimination were most prominent during elections due to use of racial elements during the political election which touches on the sentiments of religious belief and races which had huge effect on the nation. They use race and religion to gain supporters.

According to the *News Straits Time* edited by ArfaYunus, on March 22nd 2017, *The Racial Discrimination Report* prepared by non-profit social outfit and a forum was released. The forum touches on the issue of racism and featured former Law Minister Datuk Zaid Ibrahim, G25 leader Datuk Noor Farida Arifin and former MCA vice-president Gan Ping Sieu, among others. In the forum, the KOMAS community suggested for the government to sign and ratify the International Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (ICERD) under the United Nations. From the report it was stated that in 2013 the Malaysian government, recognizing the seriousness of racial discrimination, initiated the setting up of the National Unity Consultative Council (NUCC).

In addition, during last year's Budget 2017, the former prime minister had also announced the country's 30-year transformation plan, the National Transformation (TN50). Among the agendas of TN50 as announced by former Prime

Minister Dato Sri Najib Tun Razak includes raising awareness among Malaysians on racism. Therefore, in accordance to this matter this play is foremost a step on uplifting the agendas mentioned on supporting racial unity using theatre.

There are a few research problems which lead to the idea to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* using the May 13, historical enactment. The list of research problem is as follows;

1. *Romeo and Juliet* have not been adapted into the setting of May 13th 1969.
2. There are resemblances between the play and the historical enactment which could be highlighted through designs in the directorial concept.
3. The directorial choices to adapt *Romeo and Juliet* within the setting or May 13th, 1969.

1.3 Research Questions

Based on the research problems which were formed through readings on the background of *Romeo and Juliet*, the racial crisis of May 13th 1969 and also the issue of racism in Malaysia, the researcher came up with three research questions.

1. How to adapt the story of *Romeo and Juliet* into the setting of the historical event of May 13th 1969?
2. What are the resemblances in the story of *Romeo and Juliet* with the May 13th 1969 which can be highlighted through the directorial concept?
3. What are the artistic choices made in the interpretation of *Romeo and Juliet* into the setting of May 13th?

1.4 Significance of Research

The significance of this research to be conducted is because of the rising minor racial incidence in Malaysia. After KOMAS, the civil society group that works for communal harmony released the journal *Malaysia Racial Discrimination Report 2016*, it was reported that interethnic discrimination continues to be 'quite high' despite Malaysia being an independent nation for 60 years. This prevents citizens from embracing a Bangsa Malaysia identity. It was the talk of the time which raises the initiative to do this adaptation which intended to raise awareness in relation to the social issue.

The second research significance is to use theatre as a tool to discuss on social issues. In this research, the researcher is highlighting on the issue of racism and the effect it made which had happened years ago during the 1969 racial crisis. The main intention of the researcher is to raise awareness that history should not be repeated and the society needs to appreciate the harmonious environment they are currently living. Tolerance is the key to many more years of peace in Malaysia. This research is accepting the notion by creating more of theatre for awareness in the form of entertainment.

Finally, this research is significant to show that the source of directorial concept is diverse. A director could choose concepts such as arcade, theme park, fantasies, period play and etc. A concept is important to unite all the ideas for the visual aspect such as properties, set, lighting, sound, costume, makeup and special effect to have cohesions. United designs will create unity and balance on stage.

1.5 Research Objectives

From the previous three research questions, the researcher aims to obtain this three research objectives which are as following:

1. To understand the historical context of the script *Romeo and Juliet* and the historical events of May 13th 1969.
2. To find the resonance between the racial crisis of 13th May 1969 with the play *Romeo and Juliet*.
3. To develop a directorial concept for the script *Romeo and Juliet* using the idea of May 13th 1969.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.0 Introduction

In continuation to the previous chapter, this is the compilation of literature review the researcher referred to for the research gaps. Literature review is important to provide an up-to-date understanding of the subject and its significance to this research. Therefore within this literature review, is a compilation of sources on the studies of *Romeo and Juliet*, the Malaysia's historical events and on theatre directing. In addition, through this literature review, the researcher could identify the various methods and decision directors made from past adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*. This is to gain ideas and information from the past works for the related fields of study.

2.1 Studies of *Romeo and Juliet*

There are numerous works on *Romeo and Juliet* from literary criticisms to adaptations. Particularly during the *World Shakespeare Festival* in 2012 and *Shakespeare 400th Anniversary* in 2016, there are notable adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet* produced. The celebration was accepted globally and many Shakespearean fans made their own adaptation of his play and some also inserted elements of their cultures. This shows that his works are accepted worldwide and contemporized. The researcher has compiled some of the articles written on the adaptations of *Romeo and Juliet*. This is to give insights on the current matters of this study and the various ways it has been adapted.

2.2 Past Production Content Analysis

Past production content analysis is used by the researcher to review on past production work of other directors on the play *Romeo and Juliet* by William Shakespeare. The researcher reviews the directorial concept of each director on their interpretation and adaptation on the script *Romeo and Juliet*. Secondary sources were used to collect the data which is from video recording and newspaper article about the past production. The list of production reviewed is *West Side Story-America* (1961), *Romeo and Juliet in Baghdad* (2012), *Ramleela; A Film Inspired by Romeo and Juliet* (2013) and *Lo Mio and Chiu Liet* (2016).

2.2.1 West Side Story-America (1961)

Shakespeare in performance: Romeo and Juliet by Levenson in 1987 is documentation on the series of notable production of *Romeo and Juliet* according to eras. The documentation ranges from the Elizabethan production, to the translation version of Franco Zeffirelli (1960-1968). Within this book the researcher read upon the *West Side Story*.

Before we go to the current modern adaptation of *Romeo and Juliet*, this film adaptation directed by Jerome Robbins and Robert Wise in 1961 is one of the successful adaptations of the play. In 1961 '*The West Side Story*' was the new adapted version of *Romeo and Juliet*. This award-winning musical adaptation of the classic romantic tragedy changed the Capulet and Montague; two feuding families into two warring New York City gangs – A Caucasian gang; The Jets and the Puerto Rican gang; The Sharks.