

REPRESENTATION OF 'OTHER' IN MALAYSIA FILM: KADAZANDUSUN IDENTITY IN SABAH INDIGENOUS TELEMOVIE

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ABSTRACT

Malaysia, as a multicultural society, is made up of various ethnic groups with diverse backgrounds. From a national perspective, the need for racial integration into a single national identity is critical in order to structure unity among Malaysians. Under the strict supervision of the local government, a film in Malaysia plays an important role in incorporating the diverse society by portraying the accepted Malaysian national identity. However, the concept of national identity is based on an 'imagined' assumption because Malaysian national cinema is dominated by and exclusively represents the Malay majority. As a result, there is a lack of representation in film for 'other' ethnic groups, particularly Sabah's indigenous people. Using Benedict Anderson's theoretical framework of "imagined communities," this paper attempts to situate Sabah indigenous film within the context of Malaysian national cinema and argue the distinction of self-identification possessed by the Sabah indigenous. This is accomplished by examining two Alfred Ujin-produced Kadazandusun telemovies. The paper concludes that indigenous ethnic groups in Sabah identified themselves independently of national identity. Indigenous filmmakers used film to express their identity by depicting indigenous language, culture, and values.

Keywords: Sabah filmmaking, Indigenous filmmaking, Kadazandusun identity, telemovie, film studies.

1. INTRODUCTION

The establishment of Malaysian national cinema plays an important role in instilling a sense of national identity among the country's diverse society. The concept of national cinema was interpreted in various ways; governments all over the world used it to assert and promote specific films to advance their national agenda. In general, national cinema is defined as a cinema established locally and using local assets, which helps to distinguish domestically produced films from imports(Sarji, 2006).

Malaysia is a country made up of people from various ethnic groups, each with its language, culture, and traditions. Previous research has defined the local society as a cultural "melting pot"(Muhamat, Don, Hamjah, Sham, Nasir, Ashaari, Tibek, Ismail, Endot, & Puteh, 2012), "ethnic salad bowl"(Yusof & Esmaeil, 2017) or a "polyglot"(Hasbullah, 2008). This situation makes it difficult to integrate Malaysia's various ethnic groups to form a hegemony society. This has also contributed to the complexity of 'imagined communities' among Malaysia's multiracial and multicultural Malaysians, as each prefers to associate with their own identity, particularly in film.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 *The approach to Malaysia Cinema*

When discussing Malaysian national cinema, it is important to note that there are two schools of thought. The first is acknowledging that the establishment plays an important role in integrating the diverse society, which is critical in creating unity and a sense of belonging. The New Cultural Policy of 1970 laid the groundwork for Malaysian national cinema(Sarji, 2006).The decision to choose the Malay as Malaysia's image was justified by this policy, as they are recognised as the country's indigenous ethnic group or *bumiputera*. This eventually influences the type of film produced in Malaysia to overwhelmingly represent the Malay majority, as it has become the accepted national identity (Aziz, Hashim, & Ibrahim, 2014).It is also important to emphasise another primary factor contributing to the formation of the current national identity. It is also intended to address the issue of preserving local identity in the face of western culture(Hasbullah, 2008).With the formation of national identity regarded as a critical issue in Malaysia, it is no surprise that a film is an important tool in sowing the seed of integration among society. Aside from that, the film is frequently viewed as an extension of the government to meet their needs(WM, Kee, & Aziz, 2009).

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