

Malaysian Hybridity: Issues of Kinship Practices and Identity Crisis

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the issues of hybridity and its impacts and bearing to identity crisis in relation to kinship practices among the Euro-Asian families in Malaysia. To demonstrate the empirical and scientific nature of this study, qualitative methods were used whereby respondents were interviewed either face to face interview or through audio interviews. Furthermore, focus Group Discussion and empirical observation were fully utilized to obtain and analyzed for both quality and logical conclusion. Indeed, the data from the field demonstrate that the offspring of mixed marriages had either conscious identity crisis, unconscious or denied identity crisis or no identity crisis due to factors such as religion, socializing, education, and exposure by parents. Thus, the majority of the research respondents identified themselves based on “Others” but there are complexities to this when it comes to formal and informal identification.

Keywords: Family, hybridity, identity crisis, kinship, mixed-marriages

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INTRODUCTION

The idea of intermarriage is no doubt exogamous where one marries out of their own community to another of a completely different culture, customs, traditions and law. Different kinship systems, and kinship roles come with different cultures of different communities. Hence, when two individuals marry into different kinship systems, it may or may not clash with one another. Kinship according to Scheffler in Holy (1996), talks about how kinship and descent, describes one’s egocentric system of social identity and status in their kinship system or descent system. Generally, in Malaysia, the notion of inter-kinship marriage is not frowned upon, nor, is it a social vice or issue. Malaysia (formerly known as, *Tanah Malaya*) as a country has been colonized by several countries. These include Portuguese, the Dutch, the Great Britain and Japanese; with the British colonization the longest, lasting up to a total of 120 years.

Returning to the idea of marriage between different kins, intermarriage has appealed to many young couples in Malaysia, hence an era of hybrid children. Regardless of this, the hybridity of kinship practices has not been widely studied in Asia. With only a handful theoretical studies done, and several others carried out in places like Australia, America and Jamaica. These studies were mostly consisting of studies on hybridity and kinship practices of the Chinese society, and intermarriage in the context of American kinship systems. Thus, the aim of this study is to explore the impact of hybridity in relation to identity crisis vis-à-vis kinship practices among Euro-Asian families in Malaysia.

In the context of Malaysia, the idea of inter-kinship marriages is very common, and words such as Pan-Asian (Pacific-Asian / Asian Americans), Eurasians (European Asians), Kristang (Portuguese Malaysians) or even local terms such as Mamak (Indian-Malay), Chindians (Chinese-Indians), Baba Nyonya (Chinese-Malay) and so forth has been created solely to distinguish inter-kinship marriages and their offspring. Yet, despite having these specific labels from each ethnic group, there is constantly problems regarding official recognition of children of mixed-marriages. For example, government official documents usual provides ticking boxes for “ethnic identification” in forms for Malay, Chinese, Indians and Others. Unfortunately, most of times, children born of mixed marriages often have to tick this ‘Others’ box or the “ethnic” that they like depending on their mood of the day. Similar misrepresentation of identity is common in many American states. For example, Graham cited in Stewart and Goldfard (2007) criticized the U.S Census Bureau’s “check on” racial and ethnic classifications to which she completely rejects saying that it is solely for “nice demography”. Goldfard noted how this practise is discriminatory in nature when she argues, “it is a form of discrimination towards those who are born of parents of different race”. This writer’s constructive argument and other similar debates on the ticking of ‘one box’, the 2000