

# 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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The second point of view is to disagree with the establishment and to contest or negotiate with it persistently. This notion is frequently associated with the new generation of Malaysian filmmakers, also known as independent filmmakers. They claim that Malaysian national cinema fails to portray unity and depicts an authentic multicultural society. As a result, independent filmmakers have been able to provide a different perspective on Malaysians. To represent a multicultural society, most independent filmmakers produced films depicting 'other' ethnic groups and languages commonly practised in Malaysia, such as English, Cantonese, Mandarin, Hokkien, and Tamil (Khoo, 2007). Aside from that, South East Asian independent filmmakers were prominent in highlighting sensitive or prohibited issues in their own country. These issues covered various topics, including political, economic, and social issues (Baumgärtel, 2011).

As a result, the government considers Malaysian national cinema to be a critical issue. This situation is not unique to Malaysia; similar events have occurred in countries with well-established national identities such as Thailand, the Philippines, and Singapore. These countries have a similarly hostile reaction to any notion of contesting national sovereignty (Baumgärtel, 2011). In Malaysia, the government frequently responds by censoring films or prohibiting them from being screened in public. Films that do not adhere to the country's rules and regulations are regarded as undermining the administration's inspiration and aspirations (WM et al., 2009). Furthermore, censorship is frequently justified to protect citizens, particularly the young generation, from potentially harmful content (Rao, 2013). Therefore, films that deviate from mainstream cinema conventions have been labeled as 'other'. The film, which was produced by an independent director, contrasts sharply with the approved national content requirement, which is thought to be at odds with the government's goal of utilising cinema to foster national unity. Furthermore, the independent filmmaker was subjected to censorship and was barred from exhibiting their film due to these circumstances (Mahyuddin, Lee, & Wang, 2017). Authorities, on the other hand, have been far more sympathetic with this group of filmmakers (Sarji, 2006). Overall, the constant contestation or negotiation between established national cinema and others significantly affects self-identification in a multiracial society. National identity is intended to foster unity and prevent her society from descending into tribalism. Minority societies, on the other hand, are concerned that national identity assimilation will jeopardise their culture (Shariff, Sualman, & Irawan, 2013).

Academics such as Asiah Sarji advised caution when contesting or negotiating the concept of Malaysian national cinema. In light of globalisation, Malaysians should approach the topic of national cinema with logic. This is because the influence of foreign culture is unstoppable and can result in drastic changes in the country. It is critical to conduct a re-evaluation to gain a better perspective without compromising national identity (Sarji, 2006). However, this does not diminish the efforts of Sabah's indigenous people to preserve their identity and ensure its survival for future generations. Furthermore, the Sabah indigenous perceived the rapid assimilation or 'malaynisation' as an attempt to replace their identity to align more with Malaysia's dominant ethnic group (Chin, 2019).

Sabah indigenous filmmakers are essentially a group of filmmakers who are often unheard of at the national level, even though indigenous have been producing film/telemovies since the early 2000s. This is due to their 'captive' market, which exists only in the state of Sabah (Sibangan, Personal Communication 8 December 2018). However, in 2020, the production of 'Avakas' by Marc Abbas was able to secure the opportunity to be screened in cinemas/cineplexes nationwide. As a result, 'Avakas' is the only Kadazandusun film in recent memory that can find a market outside Sabah. Surprisingly, the majority, if not all, of the films produced by Sabah's indigenous were exclusively showcasing an 'indigenous' content with a focus on indigenous community involvement. This means that they prioritised highlighting their indigenous identity over their national identity by displaying their indigenous language, tradition, and culture. As a result, this paper employs Alfred Ujin's 'Kobilangan 2' and 'Kobilangan 3' to highlight Sabah indigenous films that fully present Kadazandusun content that reflects the identity associated with them.

## **2.2 Introduction to the state of Sabah**

Sabah is one of Malaysia's 16 states, excluding three federal territories, and has a distinctive race and culture. Sabah is Malaysia's second-largest state after Sarawak. Malaysia has a population of 28 million people, of which 3.2 million live in Sabah, according to the 2010 Malaysian census. As a result, Sabah accounts for 11.4% of Malaysia's total population (Department of Statistics Malaysia, 2010). Sabah is a landmass that occupies the northern side of the island of Borneo and covers an area of 75 000 square kilometres. According to Jaqueline Pugh Kitingan, Sabah comprises over 50 ethnic groups, each with their language, of which thirty-two are indigenous Dusunic, Murut, and Paitanic speakers from the Austronesian language family (Pugh-Kitingan, 2015).

## **2.3 Introduction of Alfred Ujin, the Kadazandusun filmmaker**

Alfred Ujin was born in Tambunan in 1978. He and his wife have lived in Keningau since their marriage and continue to do so to this day. He previously worked in the tourism industry before becoming involved in the film industry.

Alfred Ujin gained his first filmmaking experience as an actor in the early 2000s when he participated in the telemovie 'Proton Saga Kelabu' production.

Alfred Ujin eventually produced his first telemovie '*Kobilangan*' in 2009 and gained valuable experience producing indigenous films on his own. '*Kobilangan*' was produced on a shoestring budget of RM5,000 and released on VCD (Sibangan, Personal Communication, 29 December 2018). Despite this, '*Kobilangan*' was a commercial success in the local market, which aided Alfred Ujin's career as an indigenous filmmaker.

'*Kobilangan*''s success enabled him to receive funding from Sky-Laser Enterprise (a recording and distribution company) and produce the sequels '*Kobilangan 2*' and '*Kobilangan 3*'. Alfred Ujin created the '*Kobilangan*' telemovie series based on his research on Kadazandusun warriors in the Keningau District. Although the stories in '*Kobilangan 2*' and '*Kobilangan 3*' are made up, Alfred Ujin remains committed to portraying the Indigenous Kadazandusun warrior and surrounding culture as authentically as possible within the constraints of the available resources. As a result, he exercised some creative licence to create the costume to save money while adhering to the standards of Malaysian film censorship. The telemovies were entirely created in Dusun, with Bahasa Melayu subtitles. '*Kobilangan 2*' cost RM 10,000 to produce, while '*Kobilangan 3*' cost RM 30,000. (Personal communication, 29 December 2018). '*Kobilangan 2*' was released on VCD, while '*Kobilangan 3*' was released on DVD.

## **2.4 The Brief Story of *Kobilangan 2* and *3***

The main theme of '*Kobilangan 2*' is redemption. As a result, the plot follows Gumburod, a bandit who causes much pain to others. Gumburod trespassed into another village and was confronted by Andasak and his warriors at the beginning of the film. Gumburod fought them and lost because Andasak's men outnumbered him; the warrior wanted to decapitate his head but was stopped by a female elder who ordered them to throw Gumburod into the river. The film made a montage of flashbacks of Gumburod and his gang of bandits' wrongdoing following the fight scene. One of them was the rape scene of a woman named Lindai, who was Balang's sister. Lindai has felt a great deal of guilt and shame as a consequence of the rape. As a result, she decided to commit suicide. After successfully defeating Gumburod, Andasak and his warriors gained confidence in their abilities. With Andasak's order, they began preparing for war to gain more power by conquering the neighbouring land. Therefore, they worked hard in their martial arts and even used black magic with the help of the *Bobolian* (Shaman) to improve their abilities. '*Kobilangan 2*' concludes with Gumburod having a change of heart after realising that killing was pointless. Instead, he persuaded the locals to band together and lived in peace. Gumburod now lives in the village that he once terrorised, and the film concludes with Balang deciding to embark on a journey far from his village. His parents bid him farewell, and the credit rolls began. This scene served as a foreshadowing for the upcoming '*Kobilangan*'.

The main theme of '*Kobilangan 3*' is recovery. The plot is told through the eyes of Balang, a minor character who witnessed traumatic events in the previous telemovie. His road to recovery began with a journey deep into the jungle to learn martial arts from a powerful master. At the same time, a *Bobolian* (Shaman) was practising his magic, which led to him being possessed by a *Rogon* (evil spirit). As a result, the *Bobolian* infiltrated Gumburod's village and spread a strange illness among the villagers. They recognised the illness, who explained that the cure could only be obtained from the summit of Kinabalu Mountain. Gumburod and his fellow villagers were worried because they knew the journey to Mount Kinabalu was dangerous. Balang volunteered to find the cure and left as soon as possible. Andasak, the antagonist from the previous telemovie, believes Gumburod has the cure for the curse.

Consequently, he allied with Murut warrior and attacked Gumburod's village. The attack resulted in a massacre in the village, killing many people, including Gumburod's wife. The overwhelming number of Andasak and Murut warriors forced Gumburod to flee into the forest with his newborn son in order to save him. After the attack and no cure was found, Andasak was confronted by his former disciple, who denied Andasak's wrongdoing. Andasak died as a result of a fight. When Balang arrived at his village with the cure, he immediately applied it to the injured and sick villagers. As a result, the people were healed, and the telemovie came to an end.

**Figure 1:** Pictures of the disc cover for 'Kobilangan 2' and 'Kobilangan 3'



## 2.2 Conceptual Framework

Benedict Anderson's imagined communities were introduced in 1983 to provide a systematic approach to understanding national identity formation. Anderson's theory has received both criticism and praise since its inception. Academics have addressed the limitation in imagined communities in that they are only applicable on a local scale and not on a global scale. The 'imagined' in nation-building is less important than mutual economic agreement because common bonds are formed naturally (Robertson, 2011). However, academics worldwide continue to use imagined communities as a critical conceptual framework for approaching the subject of national identity. Imagined communities can help to reassess and reassure local identities in the face of the relentless pressures of globalisation (Calhoun, 2016). Furthermore, this occurred due to Anderson's presentation of an approachable conceptual framework for academics to study the absent hegemonic society in a sovereign nation and the sub-imagined identity within it.

Anderson defines a nation as an imagined community that is both limited and sovereign (Sari & Krisnawati, 2017). The term "imagined" is important because it is derived from the "state of mind" of all citizens, regardless of race, religion, or language, to associate with one another and create a sense of identity and belonging (Baumgärtel, 2011). This indicates that despite never meeting one other, members of a nation agreed to be a part of a community.

According to Benedict Anderson, adopting an administrative vernacular (national language) in order to construct a network of communication inside a nation enables the development of national identity (Robertson, 2011). Print capitalism (print media) in newspapers and books assisted significantly in the growth of administrative vernacular. Print media, such as newspapers, enables readers worldwide to understand about their country's present status (Calhoun, 2016), while also supporting in the propagation and practise of national language to the country's farthest reaches. Print capitalism (print media) in newspapers and books assisted significantly in the growth of administrative vernacular. Print media, such as newspapers, enables readers worldwide to understand about their country's present status (Calhoun, 2016), while also supporting in the propagation and practise of national language to the country's farthest reaches. As a result, according to Benedict Anderson, such events might create affinity among individuals, so promoting the assimilation process into an unified national identity (Harnita, Hergianasari, Ahmad, & Sari, 2019).

However, Benedict Anderson also addressed the issue of national language limitations. This is due to the geographical situation and the tendency of society to associate itself with local familiarity. Anderson explained the slow factors for creating a national identity to conceive a 'cousin' from the administrative vernacular. This version is a dialect, but it will always be placed lower because it lacks the printing power of the previous version. This also resulted in limited usage due to the suppression of current sitting power (Anderson, 2006).

It is also important to emphasise the relevance of Benedict Anderson's conceptual framework in the current era. He laid the groundwork for the imagined communities by establishing a network made possible by print media. However, the world is rapidly transitioning to digital technology, and printing is becoming somewhat obsolescent. In contrast, studies such as *The Spread of Nationalism Using Social Media*, published in 2017 by Dewi Kartika Sari and Ester Krisnawati from Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana, were able to apply the conceptual framework to contemporary settings. The studies focused on the communication network formed by social media platforms between ethnic groups such as Papua, Maluku, Batak, and Kalimantan. Social media were used to disseminate information about maintaining one's identity within a small imagined community for the aforementioned ethnic groups and a larger imagined community as an Indonesian (Sari & Krisnawati, 2017).

In this paper, the imagined community framework is applied to film analysis in order to approach the subject of Kadazandusun indigenous identity in Malaysia. The film is a medium that functions as a container for accumulating layers of information. According to TilmanBaumgärtel, this is a natural topic of discussion because cinema and television have largely replaced print media (Baumgärtel, 2011).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

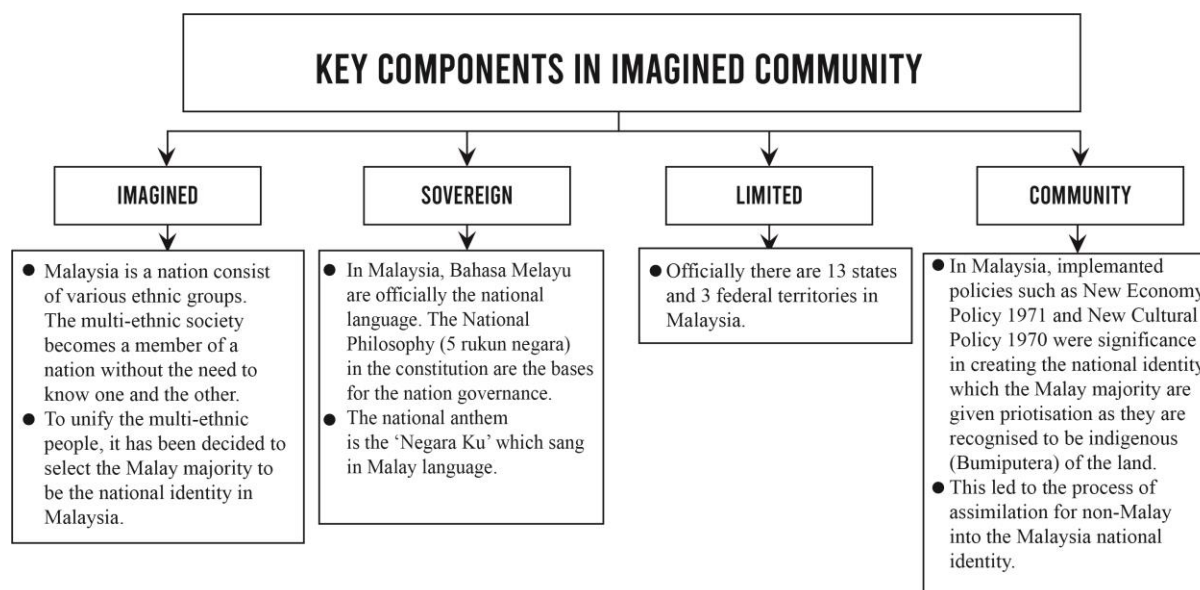
#### 3. *Imagined Community conceptual framework*

According to PratiwiCristinHarnita, PutriHergianasari, Jamilah Ahmad and Dewi Kartika Sari, the imagined community can be categorised into four key components. These consist of Imagined, Sovereign, Limited and Community (Harnita et al., 2019).

1. **Imagined** encompassed the imagined national community are structure and dwells in the consciousness of the people. Anderson asserted that the imagined are horizontal, inherently both limited and sovereign. It is horizontal because the idea of nationalism transcends race, religion and culture. This means the idea of a nation was shared by many without knowing one and the other.
2. **Sovereign** is the construction of national ideology through the national instrument to create a nationalistic spirit among their citizen.
3. **Limited** refers to the territories and demographics that are divided into states.
4. **Community** is regarding the attachment of a community, and every individual attachment towards a community through a symbol (culture) that can structure kinship or comradeship among people.

The following characteristic of the imagined community aligned to be appropriated with the context of Malaysia national identity.

**Table 1:** Anderson's imagined community framework with Malaysia national attributes



### 4. FINDINGS

#### 4.1 *Imagined*

The Kadazandusun identity and the surrounding community are imagined in '*Kobilangan*' telemovies. In '*Kobilangan 2*', the character Gumburodcan persuade the warring factions that he should be the protector rather than the destroyer. He calls for an end to the violence and for everyone to work together to protect indigenous people. This evoked the image of a group of people with disparate allegiances coming together to agree and associate themselves with the concept of indigenous kinship.



**Figure 2:** Pictures to seek out peace among the warring indigenous groups in 'Kobilangan 2' (Produced and directed by Seah & Ujin, 2011).

*Subtitle translation*

*Left picture: It does not matter if we belong to the Dusun or Murut.*

*Right picture: we should unify our strength to defend our people.*



#### 4.2 Sovereign

In terms of Kadazandusun sovereignty, it is a complex issue because there is no overarching ideology for building a Kadazandusun nation at the moment. However, on 31 August 1963, Sabah gained independence from the British government. Sabah was a new nation with its flag and colours (Ken, 2015). However, the new nation only lasted 16 days before dissolving on 16 September 1963. Sabah, Sarawak, and Singapore have federated with Malaya. This demonstrates that the previous generation of Sabah indigenous peoples desired their nation and self-government. As a result, the understanding between the peninsular and Sabah, which is embodied in the Malaysia Agreements 1963 (MA63), is a significant memorandum regarding the status of the indigenous Sabah people to be recognised as an equal partner.

#### 4.3 Limited

The limited is due to the geographical location of Sabah and the Malaya Peninsular. The South China Sea separates Borneo from the Peninsular. Because of the 'uneven terrain' between the Peninsular and Borneo island. The indigenous people of Sabah have experienced a limited spread of nationalism.

#### 4.4 Community

The community attachment in the 'Kobilangan' telemovies comes in the form of language, culture, and tradition, all of which contributed to the formation of Kadazandusun identity. The main language spoken in 'Kobilangan' 2 and 3 is Dusun. This language gave the character and the surrounding community identities (Sibangan, Lee, Siang, Abdullah, & Jali, 2019). Aside from that, the display of tradition can be seen in Ujin's telemovie with the assertion of self-defence as an essential skill for male Kadazandusun, and it is their tradition. According to Noviatin Syarifuddin and Mimi Hamida Abdul Mutalib, warriors are usually led into battle by a Huguan Siou (brave patriarchal leader) who had extraordinary prowess (Syarifuddin & Mutalib, 2017). In Alfred Ujin's 'Kobilangan' 2 and 3, he depicted that young boys learn to fight, and the person who oversees the training is the village chief such as Gumburod in 'Kobilangan' 3.

**Figure 3:** Gumburod explained why boys need to learn to fight (Produced and directed by Seah & Ujin, 2013).

*Subtitle translation*

*That is right; young male children must learn to fight. That is the heritage from our ancestor*



In terms of culture, Bobolian (Shaman) is the spiritual leader of the Kadazandusun community. The Bobolian (Shaman) plays an important role in early Kadazandusun culture because of their ability to connect and communicate with the spiritual world (Shafiia, Ishakb, Hassanc, Ghouse, & Beguma, 2016). Alfred Ujin's depiction of the Bobolian in 'Kobilangan' 2 and 3 represented the previous Kadazandusun's system of belief and their understanding of the cosmos and the existence of life after death.

**Figure 4: Bobolian doing a chant to communicate with the spirit realm in "'Kobilangan'2 (Produced and directed by Seah&Ujin, 2011).**



## 5. DISCUSSION

National identity encompassed the critical body to structure unity among a country's diverse society. The spread of national entities allows for communication and negotiation between various people despite the ongoing national assimilation process. As evidenced by studies of five Indonesian ethnic groups, namely West Papua, Batak, Bali Salatiga, Ambon, and the indigenous of central Kalimantan, society will eventually associate itself with the group to which they belong (Sari & Krisnawati, 2017). This is similar to the Kadazandusun of Sabah, as the 'limited' effect was applied due to the geographical location between the island of Borneo and the Malaysian Peninsular. Because of the uneven terrain, the slow spread of national language created a space for indigenous people to define and prioritise their own identity and culture. In other words, Sabah's indigenous peoples can maintain their cultural autonomy amid national integration. The national language eventually makes its way to Sabah, but it has resulted in the development of a sub-language in a dialect that the indigenous peoples mostly understand. Anderson believes this is the result of a minority attempting to establish their language. It is, however, of a regional nature because it lacks the printing power of the national language (Anderson, 2006).

In terms of sociopolitics, the process of national integration is commonly perceived as federal government intervention in the Sabah state affair (Ken, 2015). Furthermore, indigenous Sabahans frequently believe that the Malay agenda influence the assimilation process. Malaysia's political system is based primarily on 'Malay supremacy' and 'Islamic supremacy.' This model has been deemed unsuitable for the people of Sabah and Sarawak due to their distinct demography, history, and culture since the 1969 ethnic riot (Chin, 2019). This circumstance explains further the separation and prioritisation of identity between Kadazandusun and national identity. According to Faye Ginsburg, indigenous peoples have used the media to "talk back" to the ruling class to assert their self-representation and cultural autonomy (Ginsburg, 2016). Similarly, the Kadazandusun of Sabah could use film to express their indigenous identity.

Furthermore, the dynamic relationship between Sabah's indigenous people and the federal government can be explained more fully by the rapid 'malaynisation' process that has already occurred in recent decades. According to Trixie Tangit, the massive influx and naturalisation of illegal immigrants have created a schism between the Christian and Islamic populations. This has caused concern among Sabah's indigenous Christians about the state's shifting dominance between Christianity and Islam (Tangit, 2017).

The malaynisation process would be impossible to carry out without the support of Sabah's leadership. Tun Mustapa was the chief minister of Sabah at the time in the 1970s. He has implemented his 'one language, one culture, and one religion' policies. Therefore, Islam was recognised as the official religion of Sabah in 1973. As a result of multiple expulsions of missionaries from the state, this era is often regarded as a dark period for indigenous Christians. However, many indigenous Christians in Sabah later saw the events as a blessing in disguise because the prosecution forced them to unite and affirm their indigenous identity and faith (Reid, 1997).

The topic of indigenous rights has recently gained popularity among the indigenous peoples of Sabah and Sarawak. The indigenous ethnic group demands that the federal government uphold and respect the Malaysia Agreement 1963 (MA63). As Malaysia's new Prime Minister in 2021, Ismail Sabri promises to keep the MA63 on his agenda. Maximus

Ongkili (Minister of Sabah and Sarawak Affairs) and himself agree that Sabah and Sarawak will reclaim their status as peninsular partners (Chan, 2021). However, the amendment has been postponed, and the outcome of this effort remains to be seen (Tan, Rahim, & Calvaho, 2021).

This has been a long-standing issue for Sabah indigenous, classified as '*bumiputera*' in Malaysia. However, indigenous Sabah claimed that the New Economic Policy (NEP) enacted in 1971 did not provide them with the same benefits as their peninsular counterparts. As a result, without significant changes to Sabah's indigenous status, the '*bumiputera*' category for indigenous Sabah is merely ornamental (Ongkili, 2003).

Previously, the Sabah political system was viewed as a "fixed deposit" due to the federal government's dominance (Puyok & Sukhani, 2020). This essentially means that the ruling parties at the time (the Barisan Nasional coalition) could confidently secure several Sabah parliamentary seats, ensuring their power remained intact. As a result, local politics in Sabah are frequently influenced by the federal administration's interests rather than the native peoples. Therefore, indigenous peoples were rendered 'voiceless,' as local leaders were powerless to challenge the federal government.

The malaynisation is visible not only in Sabah local politics but also in the representation of Sabah indigenous culture in film. According to Tony Francis Gitom (a Sabah indigenous filmmaker), the film '*Pengazou*' produced by Astro (Malaysia satellite television and IPTV provider) in 2012 depicted a different version of Sabah indigenous culture tailored to align with accepted national identity rather than the indigenous identity itself.

The Dusun warrior or Dusun warlord culture was depicted in the film '*Pengazou*' (Astro) did, however, tailor it to fit the Malay culture (Sibangan, Personal Communication 8 December 2018).

Alfred Ujin expressed similar dissatisfaction due to the misrepresentation in another Astro produced film titled '*Tombiruo*' in 2017.

The negative aspect of a non-indigenous filmmaker making a Sabah indigenous film is the carelessness with which the native people are depicted. Mount Kinabalu is not located in Keningau. Aside from that, the depiction of Bobolian (Shaman) in terms of dialect was incorrect. They (Astro) used a combination of Kadazan and Dusun Tindal, which is a dialect that the people in Keningau are unfamiliar with (Sibangan, Personal Communication 29 December 2018).

According to Tony Francis Gitom and Alfred Ujin's statements, non-indigenous filmmakers' intentions when producing Sabah indigenous content are made for the mainstream audience rather than the Sabah indigenous. This means that films like '*Pengazou*' and '*Tombiruo*' did not prioritise their content to appeal to the indigenous population but rather to the Malay majority. This is one of the reasons why the Sabah indigenous filmmaker felt obligated to preserve the culture with which they were associated. In addition to ensuring that the film tells the indigenous story, it was produced primarily for the indigenous themselves.

Referring back to Craig Calhoun's remarks about Benedict Anderson's imagined community, he asserted that the conceptual framework is useful in locating and confirming a person's identity within a national context. As a result, by referring to the accumulated information about the Malaysian national identity and the Kadazan Dusun identity and their differences. The preceding discussion demonstrates the federal government's intervention and influence over indigenous identity because of the rapid process of national assimilation. As Malay and English become more important, fewer Kadazan Dusun households speak their native language (Reid, 1997). This is especially evident among the indigenous youth, as the two mentioned languages are used in official correspondence and are an important tool for them to climb the social ladder in Malaysian society. For the indigenous people of Sabah, forgetting their native language is undoubtedly a negative effect. As a result, precautions must be taken because a similar incident occurred with greater impact among other indigenous ethnic groups. This can refer to the indigenous Ainu people who live in northern Japan. Joseph DeChicchis made the following statement in his 1995 journal article *The Current State of the Ainu Language*:

Although there is no longer any community where Ainu serves as the primary medium of spoken expression and interaction, and although it may be thus fairly said that there is no present-day vernacular Ainu speech community (DeChicchis, 1995).

There is no doubt that Sabah's indigenous people are dedicated to preserving their cultural identity. However, to be a member of Malaysian society, they must constantly negotiate their indigenous identity with the national identity. The collision and balancing of two distinct identities undoubtedly influenced indigenous peoples. They must continue to do so to sustain and reclaim their own identity and avoid unfavourable consequences, particularly disunity among our people.



## 6. CONCLUSION

The film by Kadazadusun has cultural significance for indigenous peoples because it allows them to express and gain recognition for their way of life. This means that the Kadazadusun prioritise their own identity over recognising themselves as Malaysians. Furthermore, as a result, their film was classified as 'other,' alongside the independent filmmaker. Nonetheless, an ethnic can imagine belonging to a small community while also agreeing to belong to a larger imagined community (Sari & Krisnawati, 2017). Whether the Kadazadusun filmmaker is contesting or negotiating, their main goal is to highlight the indigenous minority's voices to preserve and conserve their culture (Sibangan, Lee, & Siang, 2019). Furthermore, the Kadazadusun filmmaker, like the independent filmmaker, plays an important role in enriching Malaysian cinema by representing multiculturalism and multiracial society in film. Perhaps this will help Malaysian cinema to be more inclusive and authentic.

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