



Using Malaysian Independent Film *Gadoh* as a Pedagogical Tool to Shift Ethnic Boundaries

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ABSTRACT

This paper investigates the use of a Malaysian independent film as a pedagogical tool to facilitate the shifting of ethnic boundaries among selected Malaysian university students. The concept of ethnic boundaries by Mansor (2012) has been applied to evaluate the shifting ethnic boundaries. There are two research objectives for this study which are, firstly, to explore the perceptions of the students on the use of Malaysian Independent film, *Gadoh* as a pedagogical tool to discuss sensitive issues relating to interethnic relations in Malaysia and secondly, to evaluate the changes in the shifting of their ethnic boundaries based on their perceptions of the film. Five participants have been purposively selected from different ethnic backgrounds and fields of studies to participate in a focus group discussion. The findings suggests that *Gadoh* is perceived as a potential pedagogical tool for experiential learning, critical awareness on the issues of ethnic relations and lastly, as a platform to explore conflict and reconciliation suggestions provided by the film. Participants were able to thin and dissolve their ethnic boundaries due to being exposed to different standpoints beyond one's ethnic boundaries.

Contribution/Originality: This study is one of very few studies which have investigated the use of a controversial independent Malaysian film as a critical pedagogical tool for Malaysian youths.

1. Introduction

As a social science educator in Malaysia, teaching subjects such as Sociology, Cultural Studies and Intercultural Communication can be challenging particularly when discussing sensitive issues related to interethnic relations. Therefore, how does the educator even begin to engage the students in a critical discourse pertaining to Malaysia's ethnic relations? Personally, I have been utilizing Malaysian independent

films as a pedagogical tool to facilitate in the shifting of ethnic boundaries among Malaysian university students.

When dealing with the human imagination and active envisioning of one's nation, the medium of film offers a unique social integration platform where one can experience and imagine beyond the physical and psychological ethnic boundaries that has limited our individual experiences as Malaysian citizens. Films can depict the struggles of everyday life, often overlooked and not experienced by the audiences who have limited opportunity to experience interethnic social interactions (Pillai, 2017; Vasanthan et al., 2019).

When compared with mainstream filmmakers in Malaysia, Hassan (2013) stated that *"the independent digital filmmakers were not only showcasing issues and problems related to the Malays, but also of other ethnicities as well"* (Hassan, 2013; p. 163). Wan Zawawi (2007) has also observed that the new generation of filmmakers was set to explore a more pluralist and fluid notion of Malaysian identity beyond the Malay realm. The independent filmmakers offer an alternative aesthetic or style and a different socio-political vision which is deemed significant and nuanced in their films' content and context (Khuo, 2014). Malaysian independent filmmakers tend to focus on stories about individuals that have universal appeal therefore, the content of such films appeal not to a particular ethnicity but are relevant for all Malaysians to get a glimpse of the characters' life and gain critical awareness on the social systems that perpetuate inequalities, racism and segregation.

Some noteworthy examples of selected films which are focused on issues of interethnic relations between Malays and non-Malays are Yasmin Ahmad's films, Namewee's *Nasi Lemak 2.0* and Namron's *Gadoh*. To put these Independent Malaysian films into context, they existed during rapid socio-political changes particularly due to the 12th general election and the continuous contestations of ethnic and religious issues ever since. These films are perceived to be controversial due to the social and political themes that they grapple with and the fact that these films were critically acclaimed, because they have competed in local and international film festivals (Amir, 2009; Yuen, 2010; Hassan, 2013). Some of the issues that these filmmakers deal with were deemed seditious by law and taboo to be openly discussed and debated are contesting issues of the status of Bumiputera, Islam, and the national language (Sumit, 2004; Charanjit, 2017). Most importantly, these films continue to spark public discussions about interethnic relations in Malaysia during significant turn of social and political events such as the advent of the digital wave of filmmaking in Malaysia at the turn of the new millennium (Khuo, 2007).

A considerable amount of studies in Malaysia have highlighted the important role of the education system in providing creative strategies to increase social interaction among different ethnic groups. Innovative approaches that provide the opportunity for interethnic dialogues and meaningful social interaction with the objective to create deeper understanding and appreciation of each others' diversity has been suggested (Ramlee et al., 2009; Khalim & Norshidah, 2010; Abdul Talib et al., 2015; Yasmin et al., 2018). In addition discussions on the contested history of the 13th May 1969 riot is also considered a challenging topic to be openly discussed thus rendering the issue of interethnic conflict to remain unresolved (Ramlee et al., 2009; Kua, 2007). These studies indicate a clear gap in the pedagogical strategies to provide opportunities for meaningful cross-ethnic relations among Malaysians. Thus, this research explores the use of Malaysian independent films specifically *Gadoh* as a pedagogical tool in providing

cinematic representations of critical issues in Malaysian interethnic relations in the context of education.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Envisioning the nation through films

The efforts of envisioning the nation can be seen in Malaysian literature, art and the media such as music, theatre and films. Mandal (2004) have observed that the transethnic solidarities of Malaysian independent filmmakers and cultural activists, collaborate on each other's film projects and represent stories about characters of other ethnic backgrounds by rejecting the primordial notions of ethnicity. For countries that have gone through colonization, films are perceived to be a significant cultural artefact that represents and portrays visual imaginings of a post-colonial society with the hopes of erasing its colonial past for a different imaginings of their nation (Mahyuddin, 2011). In Malaysia's case, after Malaya achieved independence in 1957, "a state was born but not necessarily as a nation" (Abdul Rahman, 2000, p. 26). This notion also continued when Malaysia was officially formed by including Sabah and Sarawak in 1963 (Abdul Rahman, 2000). Thus, a clear national identity in its political and ideological sense is yet to be formed, which can be perceived by its fragmented visions of a nation.

In Malaysia, Shamsul (1996) have observed that there are many "nations-of-intent" and they are continuously being contested and negotiated among the multiethnic and multireligious people of Malaysia, resulting in the diverse views of Malaysia's collective imaginations of a nation. Shamsul (1996) also compared the applicability of his nation-of-intent concept with Benedict Anderson's "imagined community" in analyzing the nation-state. He asserted that the nation-of-intent is a similar concept to the concept of imagined community in terms of how the people socially construct the image of their community in their minds. The notion of the imagined community was a result of the print-capitalism, which allowed for the possibility for the rapidly growing numbers of readers, "to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others in profoundly new ways" (Anderson, 2006, p.36). However, this notion of an imagined community indicates a single imagined community due to the homogeneous ethnic background of the society as well as a homogeneous source of the print capitalism is dissimilar to the context of Malaysia's diversity. As for the concept of nations-of-intent, it captures and acknowledges the plural notion of imagining the nation due to Malaysia's complex history and diverse population. Below is a description of the concept of nation-of-intent,

It is an idea of a nation that still needs to be constructed or reconstructed. It is a more or less precisely defined idea of the form of the nation and that the idea must be shared by a number of people who perceive themselves to be members of that nation and who feel that it unites them...and that it can be inclusive or exclusive (Shamsul, 1996, p.328).

Although Shamsul (1996) views the nations-of-intent as a positive and progressive process of articulating one's intended visions of the nation be it from the authority defined or everyday defined, the conflicting nations of intent are still unresolved. Other scholars have observed that the notion of "imagined" put forth by Anderson (2006) is perceived to be a passive endeavor (Milner, 1995, cited in Abdul Rahman, 2015). In the context of Malayan history, "the bangsa (nation) is conceptualized rather than imagined"

(Milner, 1995, cited in Abdul Rahman, 2015, p. 10). He observed this intellectual effort as an active endeavor instead in the construction of a new form of community. As for the contemporary historical discourse in Malaysia, Abdul Rahman (2015) has combined the "imagined and the conceptualized and termed "envisioning of the nation" (p.5) to emphasize the concerted effort of going against the colonial powers and envisioning the nation post colonialism.

In the case of Malaysian cinema, there were many debates and discourses surrounding the issue of defining what a national cinema is due to the lack of a clear national identity or agreed upon notions with regards to the "nations-of -intent". However, Hatta Azad Khan (1997) provided a clear definition for Malaysia's national cinema, that is, "*a cinema which is the product of a particular nation, portraying the life and conflicts of its people, speaking in their own language and using their own country as the background*" (Hatta, 1997 cited in Badrul, 2012, p.56). In conclusion, this notion has been contested among film academics and practitioners, since the formation of Malaysia's National Cultural Policy (NCP) which is deemed to be formative of the country's much debated national identity.

2.2. Using films as a pedagogical tool

A body of literature has explored how films have been used to teach social science subjects such as sociology, cultural studies and intercultural education (Champoux, 1999; Moskovich & Sharf, 2012; Pandey & Ardichvili, 2012). With regards to intercultural education, films have been used to positively impact ethnic identity development, specifically in the areas of students' sense of belonging and in ethnic identity exploration (Rorrer & Furr, 2009) while other studies suggest that films have the potential to be used as a tool for experiential learning (Greene, et al., 2014). Students are able to critically analyze and reflect on the various social issues in their life pertaining to the multifaceted dimensions of ethnic relations which may pose a challenging issue to teach and learn due to the perception that they are sensitive topics to discuss. In the field of Media Psychology, Oliver and Hartmann (2010) have explored how *eudaimonic* motivation assumes that in addition to *hedonic* motivations, media use such as watching films can also be motivated by individuals' search for deeper insight, meaning, and purpose in life. Thus, the medium of films has the potential to be a unique pedagogical tool for its user.

An emerging body of research on the content of the films with themes of interethnic engagement and the socio-political context has been critically discussed and analyzed (Khoo, 2007; Khoo, 2014; Mahyuddin, 2011; Yuen, 2010; Wong, Ong & Pillai, 2018). However, there has been limited research conducted in Malaysia exploring the use of Malaysian films as a pedagogical tool in the education context. Limited studies within the academia included studies by Pillai (2017) who discussed a classic Malaysian film written and directed by the late P. Ramlee with the title *Gerimis* to teach concepts and theories of intercultural communication. The film depicted themes of interracial marriage and national unity. Pillai (2017) described positive outcomes in her study where students were able to reflect and gain a deeper understanding on the issues affecting interracial marriage; among the many themes highlighted in the subject of intercultural communication. The film is also suggested to be an important space for interethnic dialogue of various issues that are deemed sensitive in Malaysia such as religion, ethnicity and class (Wong, Ong, & Pillai, 2018). Scenes of interethnic dialogue

from the film also provide audiences an opportunity to visually experience these dialogues and the opportunity to watch the social interactions on screen.

Apart from the film *Gerimis*, another learning activity via films was conducted by using the film *Sepet* for a Roundtable Cinema Activity (RTCA) discussion (Swami et al., 2020). This study explored the effectiveness of using the film *Sepet* to facilitate interethnic understanding and empathy among the students. Their findings suggested that the RTCA was successful at promoting intergroup dialogue and exchange of ideas as well as serving as a useful tool to promote interethnic harmony in Malaysia. However, their study did not address the issue of ethnic boundary shifting among Malaysian students and did not utilize the film *Gadoh* as their RTCA. Thus, this paper attempts to explore the use of Malaysian indie films, specifically the film *Gadoh* as a pedagogical tool in evaluating the thinning of ethnic boundaries to facilitate interethnic dialogue.

2.3. Brief background of the film

Gadoh is an independent film because it was funded by a non-governmental organization from the Community Communication Center (KOMAS) and is not profit driven. KOMAS is an institution that focuses on human rights advocacy and education, thus the film is also part of an educational film to provide Malaysians with a discourse on interethnic relations. In conjunction with the Freedom Film Festival Malaysia in 2009, KOMAS gave the filmmakers Namron and Brenda Danker, the theme of “*Bangsa Malaysia*” which is part of the KOMAS’s Malaysian nation campaign series. However, this film was not screened in cinemas because it was made for online platforms such as vimeo and youtube with a specific aim in educating the audience for social change. According to Yuen (2010) *Gadoh* was perceived to be a... “*third Space that forces Malaysians to comprehend that racism in Malaysia has become a problem*” (Yuen, 2010; p.4). This notion was also supported by Mahyuddin (2011) which suggested that *Gadoh* is a reflection of the society on the issues of ethnic tensions in Malaysia and it invites us to reexamine the role of Malaysia’s education system and other social systems that has sustained the unresolved interethnic tensions in Malaysia.

Apart from online platforms, it was also previewed in certain places such as film appreciation activities and forums in public and private universities. However, *Gadoh* was not allowed to be screened in other universities as its screening was restricted and limited because the authorities considered the content of the film to be too sensitive. This is because the atmosphere of ethnic relations in Malaysia has been quite tense as various ethnic conflicts have occurred since the year 2000 until the film was screened at the Freedom Film Festival. On top of that, Malaysia had experienced the 12th General election in 2008 in which Pepinsky (2009) pointed the evidence to the non-Malay voters who rejected the current Barisan Nasional regime for the first time ever since 1969. Although this is an indicator that ethnic preferences are thinning when it comes to choosing political parties, this has created the tense but stable ethnic relations in Malaysia when contesting issues of education, religion and economy arise (Mansor, 2012).

2.4. Synopsis of the film

The film is about a group of high school students from a national school who kept getting involved in interethnic fights. These fights were always between the same groups which are the Malay group led by Khalil and the Chinese group led by Ah Heng. These fighting

incidents were reported by the media and have caused immense distress to the school principal due to being pressured by the [Ministry of Education \(2019\)](#) to quickly resolve the issue. Some of the teachers suggested that the students should be separated into their own “race” while some suggested that they organize religious motivational camps according to their own religious groups. When none of the teachers could agree on the suggestions to solve the issue at hand, a teacher called Teacher Anne suggested that the school can create a theatre club so that the students can learn to work together. This theatre club was to be conducted as an after class activity for the “problematic” students but the suggestion was scoffed at by all the teaching staff there. Lastly, the school principal approved of it but demanded that the students need to come out with a grand theatre show so that he can prove to the media and impress the education ministry that he was able to solve the interethnic fighting.

2.5. Conceptual framework

Since this paper analyzes the concept of ethnic boundary, the definition of ethnic boundary, ethnic and boundary needs to be defined. One of the pioneering scholars on the concept of ethnic boundary is Frederik Barth. Based on his observations on the making and unmaking of ethnic boundaries, he stated that it is “*the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff that it encloses*” ([Barth, 1969, p.15](#)). [Barth \(1969\)](#) argued that scholars should focus on the properties of the ethnic boundary and explain how these boundaries shift, maintain and change when relating with other individuals and ethnic groups. According to [Wimmer \(2008\)](#) “*the concept of ethnicity refers to a subjectively felt sense of belonging based on the belief in shared culture and common ancestry*” ([Wimmer, 2008; p.973](#)). As for the concept of boundary, [Wimmer \(2008\)](#) stated that boundary could display both categorical and social behavioral dimension. He further asserted that ...“*The concept of boundary does not imply closure and clarity...but varying degrees of boundedness*” ([Wimmer, 2008; p. 976](#)).

Taking into consideration both scholarly works by [Barth \(1969\)](#) and [Wimmer \(2008\)](#), [Mansor \(2012\)](#) is also of the opinion that one must understand the dynamic process and fluidity of the ethnic boundary. In his ethnic boundary concept, [Mansor \(2012\)](#) observes that when an individual or ethnic groups engage in a social interaction, their ethnic boundaries tend to thin, thicken or dissolve. This process can exist in a continuum but it can shift towards different “thickness” of ethnic boundaries. It is significant to note that this concept takes into account the fluidity of ethnic identities as opposed to a fixed or primordial notion of ethnic identities which often characterizes the plurality of ethnic identities in multiethnic countries such as Malaysia.

Firstly, the description of the thickening of ethnic boundaries describes the individual or ethnic group who are accustomed to the ethnic socialization experiences within their primary social groups such as family, religion, culture and language. Thus, due to the lack of social interaction beyond their primary ethnic social groups, their actions and perceptions of other ethnic groups would be affected by their limited worldview ([Mansor, 2012](#)). It has been observed in a longitudinal study that during times of political and economic crises, Malaysians tend to attribute and ethnicise any conflict hence thickening the ethnic boundaries ([Mansor, 1999; 2012](#)).

Secondly, the thinning of ethnic boundaries is indicated by the actors' interpersonal communication when they are “*able to discuss and share public opinions openly by putting their ethnic preferences secondary such as ethnic group demands*” ([Mansor, 1999,](#)

p.82). Even though the process of the thinning of ethnic boundaries has occurred, *“behavioral tendencies based on ethnic preferences may still be observed”* (Mansor, 2012, p. 31). The thinning of ethnic boundaries allows for the possibility of social bonding and the dissolution of ethnic boundaries.

In the last category that is the dissolution of ethnic boundaries, the dynamic ethnic dimensions make it challenging for the ethnic boundaries to be maintained due to the many layers of social dimensions and identities that an individual possesses. It has been observed that *“the civic preferences have the potential to transcend ethno-religious political agendas as these agendas are often ethnicized”* (Mansor, 2012, p. 43). Therefore, by exploring the dynamic process of the thickening, thinning and dissolution of ethnic boundaries among the participants who have engaged with the film the shifting of their ethnic boundaries can be observed and understood in an in depth manner.

3. Methodology

A qualitative approach was chosen because the objective of the research is to explore the perceptions and attitudes of the participants in using films for learning purposes and to evaluate the shifting of their ethnic boundaries. Thus, the method of thematic analysis has been applied for identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set (Nowell et al., 2017). This method enables an exploration of rich data generated by the participants. In addition, this method provides a *“flexible approach that enables the researcher to modify when analyzing complex data that is usually found in qualitative data collection”* (Nowell et. al, 2017, p.2). A theme may be initially “generated inductively from the raw data or generated deductively from theory and prior research” (Boyatzis, 1998 cited in Nowell et. al, 2017, p. 8). Thus, the theme for the first research question was generated inductively and has been used to systematically organize the opinions of the participants into positive aspects and challenges of using Gadoh as a pedagogical tool.

Next, the theme for the last research question has been generated deductively by evaluating the thickness of their ethnic boundaries based on the ethnic boundary categories laid out by Mansor (2012). The units of analysis that will be evaluated are based on the constructs of the Ethnic Boundary theory which are the thinning, thickening and dissolution of ethnic boundaries. In terms of data collection, the decision to employ a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) as a data collection method is to generate deep, rich data and provide optimal opportunities for in-depth exploration of the issues (Neuman, 2006).

During the first phase of the research, a purposive sampling was carried out by choosing five focus group participants. Purposive sampling directs the collection and generation of data. Researchers purposely select participants that can answer the research question (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007). For this research, a total of five participants were identified due to their ethnic identity, education background and occupational experiences ranging from the ages of 21 to 26 years old. In terms of ethnic identity, the participants consisted of two Malay male participants, one Indian male participant, one Chinese female participant and one Chindian female participant who is a mixture of ethnic Indian and Chinese descent.

As for their education background, it was important for the researcher to purposively select the participants who are educated in the communications, film broadcasting and

sociology because they would be able to articulate their opinions in both Malay and English in answering the focus group questions that would discuss films, learning experiences at university and also willing to discuss social issues of ethnic relations and conflict. Thus, there is one participant in the communication field working as a journalist, three participants specializing in film broadcasting and one sociologist specializing in political activism for the youth. Their education and occupational background were equally important in discussing the aforementioned issues because they were able to relate their experiences to the discussion to provide credible and critical opinions on the use of the independent film as a pedagogical tool. Below is [Table 1](#) describing the participants' backgrounds:

Table 1: Participants' ethnicity, gender, age, education and occupational background

Participant	Ethnicity	Education	Occupation	Age
Participant 1	Chindian	University of Malaya, Bachelor of Arts Anthropology and Sociology	Political researcher and activist, sociologist and theatre practitioner	26
Participant 2	Chinese	University of Wollongong Malaysia (UOW Malaysia KDU) Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Journalism and Broadcasting	Student, theatre and media practitioner	23
Participant 3	Indian	University of Wollongong Malaysia (UOW Malaysia KDU) Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Journalism and Broadcasting	Filmmaker and scriptwriter	26
Participant 4	Malay, Bajau	University Technology of MARA, Bachelor of Communication (Hons) Journalism	Journalist for a national newspaper organization	26
Participant 5	Malay	Sunway University Bachelor of Arts (Hons) Digital film production	Student and filmmaker and scriptwriter	26

After purposely sampling the participants, they were given the Film *Gaduh* to watch. Prior to watching the movie, the researcher gave the participants reflective questions. The rationale for this step is to ensure that the participants understand the questions and are given a guideline to construct their answers before and after watching the film. This method of giving questions prior to the film reviewing is a practice that is widely utilized to gain in-depth data as seen in the works of [Oliver and Hartmann \(2010\)](#), [Bartsch \(2012\)](#) and [Pillai \(2017\)](#). The focus group discussion was conducted online via

the Zoom application. The rationale for using the Zoom application and not a face-to-face discussion was due to Malaysia's controlled movement order when the COVID-19 pandemic was on the rise.

4. Results

The first research question explored the opinions of the participants with regards to using *Gaduh* for learning purposes. From the discussion, the first theme that emerged was the evaluation of using films as an experiential learning tool for intercultural education. This evaluation is supported by the studies on using films as a pedagogical tool (Champoux, 1999; Moskovich & Sharf, 2012; Pandey & Ardichvili, 2012; Rorrer & Furr, 2009).

4.1. Experiential learning tool

The participants' evaluations were a mixture of both positive and negative opinions. The film was evaluated positively because the narrative of the story was able to provide an overview of the ethnic tension and conflict in Malaysia. The participants were also able to relate the film to basic concepts of stereotype, prejudice and discrimination. However, the negative views about the film were that the story seems to be too simple as it did not explore more complex ethnic identities. Participant 2 is making a comparison between the ethnic relations module which she finds very general in terms of content and approach to explore the complexities of Malaysian interethnic relations and conflict, compared with a subject such as intercultural communication which invites the students to explore such issues in an in-depth manner (Pillai, 2017). For example, participant 2 stated that,

...the movie is a good platform to learn about the stereotypes in Malaysia's race relations and interethnic conflict...but I feel it's a simplified summary of our problems into one sentence and I think the movie is suitable for a general studies subject like MPU (Mata pelajaran Umum) but not so much for a class looking at exploring complexities of Malaysian racial-culture such as how we have learnt in the intercultural communication subject (participant 2).

However, all of the participants including Participant 2 agreed that the film can be a platform to explore the themes of ethnic conflict further by providing different perspectives from the characters and the contexts that they are in. The film can be even more meaningful when the students are engaged and encouraged to discuss the themes and issues that are depicted by *Gaduh* thus it could serve as an experiential learning platform. Below are examples of quotes supporting the notion of experiential learning by participant 2 and 3,

Yes, of course! I think they play a really important role because that's the power of movies. It presents this different world to them, this different worldview. (Participant 2)

I watch all kinds of films. So nowadays, we are watching all kinds of films and we are adopting everything that we are watching. That's why I'm saying, films have that stronger potential breaking that bubble. (Participant 3)

From the opinions above, their discussion indicated that the film was able to thin and dissolve their ethnic boundaries altogether because their minds were more open and when given the opportunity to view the story, struggles and challenges of each character in the film. The behavior of appreciating other worldviews and perspectives through watching films could have potential in thinning one's ethnic boundaries. This behavior is in line with the concept of eudaimonic motivation where the individual watches films to seek meaning and reflect on life (Oliver & Raney, 2011). This is aligned with participant 3 who is a film student and has vast experience in viewing films in all languages which enabled him to expand his worldviews.

4.2. Ethnic representations and typifications

According to Yuen (2010) the cast of *Gadoh* represented the Malaysian social demographics with the three largest groups, the Malays, Chinese and Indians. An interesting observation made by participant 1 who has a background in Sociology and Anthropology suggested that the film meant to critique the social system in Malaysia particularly in terms of ethnic ratio in various social institutions particularly at national schools and universities. Thus the representations of ethnic ratio in the film would be perceived as unbalanced to reflect the social reality in Malaysia which is multiethnic but fragmented due to the existence of different education systems. The majority of teachers in the film were Malay-Muslims however the principal was Chinese. This context could also be one of the underlying reasons as to why the Malay groups felt like the Chinese students were violating their territory as stated by Zahir, the Malay character who hates the Chinese. They feel like the Chinese people have violated the Malay supremacy. Participant 1 perceptively observes the underlying tension and deep prejudice between the two groups.

The movie is a critique of our current social reality which does not scream multiculturalism. The setting of the school in the movie is also a form of critique whereby the majority of the students are Chinese, the headmaster is Chinese, so the Malay students may feel that their authority and territoriality has been questioned especially in terms of the Malay supremacy notion that the Malay students have been taught to highly value at all cost...and the majority of the teachers are Malay-Muslims. Talking about Raj, maybe the director wanted to show that the Indian community is left out...So that's a critique on the ethnic ratio that we have in Malaysian schools (Participant 1).

According to Mahyuddin (2011) the film used a "typification as a narrative strategy to highlight differences between ethnic groups that usually portray ethnic identification with negative connotations" (p.83). Reflecting on this notion, ethnic boundaries could thicken due to the typification of ethnic identities if the narrative were fixed on these typifications. However, these typifications are not necessarily far from the social reality as these typical elements do exist. According to Yuen (2010) the film highlighted the unresolved ethnic conflict created by the New Economic Policy (NEP) in *Gadoh*. As a result of the NEP the sentiment from the non Malays is that they are being treated like second class citizens and that the Malays are all privileged by the NEP. However, the sentiment from the Malays is that the Malays are deserving of such privilege because the non Malays particularly the Chinese are already rich and prosperous. Thus in *Gadoh*, the film tries to represent these ethnic groups by reflecting as groups who are equally struggling to survive and equally being prejudiced against one another resulting in a

sustained, strained and conflicting relationship. This can be observed from the quote below by participant 4 who is a trained journalist,

In this film, we can see the competition and conflicting relationship between the Malays and the Chinese. If we look at one of the government's national policies, the New Economic Policy to close the economic gap between ethnic groups. Each group is doing their best to achieve a better future. Malays have to look out for other Malays, they can't expect the Chinese to look out for the Malays because even the Chinese have to work harder as Heng's father said to his son, he has to make sure that the son works harder to have a better future too. So from the film, I see this as a realistic representation of the ethnic conflict between the Malays and Chinese (participant 4).

Participant 4 who is a Bajau was able to observe how Malaysians in the peninsular experienced interethnic competition as a realistic typification. However, participant 5 disagreed with the observation because he is of the opinion that the film is depicting a corrupted system with corrupted people managing the social system especially when it comes to money and power which perpetuates a system that continues to reinforce the status quo even further which has transcended ethnic boundaries. Participant 4 and all the other participants agreed with participant's 5 opinions. The quote from participant 5 can be seen below,

Sorry I have to disagree (with participant 4) When it comes to that scene (Khalil's father persuading the politician to give a business tender) actually they wanted to highlight corruption. It's like, it's not just the Chinese involved in corruption but Malays are also involved too. So it's like an insider's insight where the audience can see that oh my own people are not that good too. (Participant 5)

The last sentence which (participant 5) said, I agree with it. We can see the bad side of each race. That's what the film is trying to show actually (participant 4).

This opinion from participant 5 is deemed significant because he mentioned "insider's insight" where the film is portraying the standpoints of characters Khalil, Heng and Zahir who witnessed with their own eyes the corruption and wrong doings of "their own people". This insider's insight suggests that one is able to not only thin but also dissolve ethnic boundaries when it comes to understanding that the corruption and other negative stereotypes such as laziness and dishonesty should not be ethnicized. The critique of the NEP in Gadoh was highlighted by the FGD whereby the generalizations that all Chinese are rich and all Malays are privileged were not accurate. As a result, the participants did not attribute the negative typification to any ethnicity. Thus from the FGD, this film was able to dissolve the ethnic boundaries when the participants were given the opportunity to discuss together what the filmmaker was critiquing the consequences of the New Economic Policy through the representation and typification of the characters.

4.3. Conflation of Conflict and Reconciliation Efforts

Gadoh is an important film to consider as a pedagogical tool because it highlights both themes of conflict and reconciliation efforts. [Mahyuddin \(2011\)](#) observed that

mainstream media tends to highlight differences or emphasizing on conflicts and tensions instead of balancing it with solutions and reconciliations. This notion could also be observed in the film pertaining to the character of the [Ministry of Education \(2019\)](#) who represented the education system who were absent in providing effective solutions to resolve the issue. Thus, the efforts to resolve the conflict were taken up by the school administrators such as the teachers and the school principal where they utilized a segregative pedagogical approach in solving the interethnic tensions at school as a viable solution. In the earlier scenes after a theatre performance, the character Encik Azman stated that the “education system has failed in creating unity” ([Yuen, 2010, p. 5](#)). Since the film was created with *Bangsa Malaysia* in mind, the notion of *bangsa* or nation has also been contested and unresolved in determining it's nations-of-intent as suggested by [Shamsul \(1996\)](#) and it clearly describes how Malaysia is still a nation of ethnics ([Ong, 2007](#)). Thus from the FGD, this issue has been highlighted by participant 5 and agreed by all participants. Below is the quote,

But i think if there's one thing that could change everything is, the only thing that can solve this whole problem of multiracial is through education. Without education, you cannot appreciate movies. Without the ability to appreciate the film, the film won't be of any help (Participant 5).

It is widely understood that one of the key roles of education in multiethnic societies is to create greater social interaction among students from different ethnic backgrounds. Due to the segregated nature of the primary and secondary school system, this situation has affected the degree of ethnic integration because the students tend to engage in ethnic socialization among their own ethnic groups instead ([Tan & Santhiram, 2014](#)). This has resulted in the thickening of their ethnic boundaries which then tends to easily trigger conflicts as the audience could observe from the film. From the film, the characters of the Malay teachers were represented as efforts made by the government in handling ethnic conflicts at school. Below is an example of the quote,

The older characters, the teachers, are also criticized by the director because they try to reinforce segregation among the students to prevent more fights and gangsterism from happening but the idea of segregation was still deemed as something that is not favorable. So that is the critique that the movie tries to highlight (Participant 1).

This is where the film suggested to the audience that perhaps we can consider creating social integration platforms such as theatre clubs as a third space for different ethnic groups to come together ([Yuen, 2010](#)). When asked about the theatre club as a solution, many of the participants agreed that the solution is a positive effort. The theatre club can be a viable solution to the interethnic conflict because it allows the students to socialize with one another and have meaningful social interactions as they have been placed in that group for a certain amount of time. Due to their inability to escape one another during their time at the theatre club, it allowed for a deeper connection facilitated by the theatre club teacher-activist played by Azman. This opinion indicates the thinning of ethnic boundaries of the participant because they are able to watch the transformation of the conflicting groups to become a group of friends. Below are the quotes,

The theatre club allowed the students to socialize and understand one another as they have no way to escape each other (Participant 4).

The reason why that scene is very important is because it's the inner voice of a lot of people out there. So when Gadoh did that, it's something that a lot of people were thinking but they never say it (Participant 5).

Participant 5 highlighted the scene where everyone in the theatre club was able to express themselves with no holds barred. This scene is particularly unique and significant because it is direct, explicit and authentic in expressing the internalized prejudice that many Malaysians suppress. Participant 1 who has a background in theatre, shared with the other participants that this type of sharing session is a norm in theatre practices before embarking in training for their performance and ensuring the success of their performance goals. Below is the quote,

I went through theatre training with Namron. From what I see, Namron wants to highlight that theatre is there. It could be a solution. These are one of the common practices where theatre groups do to actually open up or give same level of playing field to all the actors to actually voice out what are in their mind (Participant 1).

This opinion from the participant echoes the observations made by [Mahyuddin \(2011\)](#) in which “*Gadoh points out the difficulties involved in resolving ethnic tensions and the intense soul searching that is required for each of us to confront the real*” ([Mahyuddin, 2011, p. 84](#)). The intense soul searching here refers to the scene where Azman desperately asked the students to look deep within themselves and sincerely express how they felt about each other. This particular scene has the potential to thin and dissolve the ethnic boundaries because the audiences are able to witness by providing a space for understanding of each other's standpoints.

5. Implications

There has been criticism that the film does not critically examine the notion of Bangsa Malaysia, thus the result of the film will not be able to affect real changes as it needs to engage in the structural changes of the political, economic and the social system. It is not enough to promote change “*over a series of dramatic imaginings*” ([Mahyuddin, 2011, p.86](#)). To a certain extent, this criticism has substance because previously Malaysians were segregated historically, politically and socially. However, by using this film as a pedagogical tool to shift ethnic boundaries, it can have a positive implication towards Malaysia's education system. This is because, it provides the missing interethnic education framework and a critical pedagogical approach for Malaysian youths to explore and deconstruct the issues of ethnic relations in Malaysia. Another implication that can be observed is the critical function of the independent film industry in Malaysia in their effort to highlight social deficits and provide suggestions for reconciliations. However, their critical function has been limited due to the censorship film board and authorities who deem such films as detrimental to Malaysia's stability and inducing unnecessary ethnic tensions. Lastly, the implications of this study for the Malaysian youths whom were the filmmaker's intended audience, it could provide them a independent resource and social integration platform for them to develop their critical awareness, collectively as Malaysian citizen thus thinning and dissolving their ethnic boundaries

6. Conclusion

This study has provided three emerging themes which suggests that as an independent film, *Gaduh* is a potential platform for experiential learning, deconstructing ethnic typifications and critical issues in ethnic relations and lastly, to explore conflict and reconciliation suggestions. The results shows that the participants were able to thin and dissolve their ethnic boundaries due to being exposed to different standpoints going beyond one's ethnic preferences. The results also suggested that they were able to develop critical awareness and able to deconstruct deeply held misconceptions and ingrained prejudices due to systemic issues of social institutions that have molded our imaginings of one another. Lastly and most importantly, the participants were able to discuss critical and sensitive issues together and openly in a civilized manner which is a manifestation of the dissolution of their ethnic boundaries. There were negative evaluations to the film as being too simple in its narrative and themes of conflict and the suggestion of creating a theatre club. These elements are needed to be filmed or narrated in a more effective way because it can thicken the ethnic boundaries if the participants view them to be unrealistic and unrelatable. Nevertheless, it is with such in-depth discussions via film appreciation events or even a classroom discussion that these social interactions will produce greater educational gains and civic values (Ramlee et al., 2009). Thus, according to the findings of this research on the use of an independent Malaysian film, *Gaduh* as a pedagogical tool and also a social integration platform for interethnic dialogue that is vastly missing in our education system.

Ethics Approval and Consent to Participate

The researchers used the research ethics provided by the Research Ethics Committee of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (RECUKM). All procedures performed in this study involving human participants were conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional research committee. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors reported no conflicts of interest for this work and declare that there is no potential conflict of interest with respect to the research, authorship, or publication of this article.

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