IN THE LENSE OF THE ODD: CONSTRUCTING THE OTHERNESS IN MALAYSIAN HISTORY

Norena Abdul Karim Zamri*

Faculty of Communication and Media Studies
Universiti Teknologi MARA, UiTM Kampus Alor Gajah, 78000, Melaka
Malaysia
norena@uitm.edu.my

Adam Abdul Karim Zamri

Astro Arena
Wisma Ali Bawal li, 46050, Petaling Jaya
Malaysia
adamabdulkarimzamri@gmail.com

**Corresponding author's Email: norena@uitm.edu.my*

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editor@readersinsight.net

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Abstract

This study provides an understanding of Otherness concept in contemporary social and cultural thought. It tries to delve on the many histories consumed by the Malaysian publics. It is based on the premise that historical knowledge of the nation is ethnicized. This study is aware that there is no official history of the nation. What has come to be known as the nation's history evolved over space and has been accepted currently as mainstream history. By combining the fields of postcolonial theory and culture studies, it uses a theoretical framework that attaches contemporary cultural debates regarding the representation discourse with the colonial stereotypes and racialized imageries. Through the application of qualitative content analysis and quantitative analysis, the study strives to make a theoretical contribution and adding to the body of the knowledge. This study deduce with a review of different types of racial otherness in Sarawak, by highlighting Orientalism as a form of persistent that has been maintained by colonial binaries throughout the history of Malaysia.

Research Highlights

1. New media also being described as a guidance to help the society to deeply understand the perceptions and judgement on 'others'. As being explained by Edward Said regarding the word 'orientalism', Howard Zinn, Franc Fanon and etc on the decolonialize knowledge and the related concepts, it gives a new consciousness especially on national history. The new media become the mediator in giving new insight and new consciousness amongst the society.
2. Society tends to make a judgement based on the story that they get from the new media. This collusion and dumping of information creates different taught amongst society. As a result, national history has been considered as 'less truth', 'bias to Islam', '*tak lengkap*' although in general respondents realize that the history published in new media has no credibility and trustworthiness.
3. The existence of new media breaks the power in composing national history. This phenomenon creates different version of national history. Some of the group that feels ethnic history, region or anything that their interest has been marginalized tend to come out with a new version of history based on their interpretation. This interpretation comes from the research process and some may not. Thus there are many versions of national history

Research Objectives

Otherness can be broadly defined as the "Other as object" where it has been created as binary to lowest the powerless subject by the most powerful that control the subject. Loomba (2008)

asserts that the Otherness have sustained for ages. Hence, this study delves into the many histories consumed by the Malaysian publics within the lenses of ‘othering’ and how this ‘othering’ breaks the power of national history.

Methodology

This study used both qualitative and quantitative approach to unveil the ‘othering’ discourse in Malaysia history. An approach proposed by (Cresswell & Plano Clark, 2007) was employed in this study which uses both qualitative and quantitative measures. An important component of the research is it adopted an exploratory sequential design based on mixed-methods design classifications. By using quantitative data, it was consistent with the sequential exploratory design, as it assist the interpretation of qualitative findings (Creswell et al., 2003).

Results

Stage 1: Focus Group Discussion

This study employed focus group to collect the views from two groups in Kuching and Miri. Different ethnic background including, education, gender and political views were selected as participants. Each session took place within one to two hours and the whole session was recorded.

The results show that the discourse of ethnic centrism, the binary discourse of ‘othering’ quite tense and emotional. It includes symbolic representations of each ethnic groups in Malaysia, signaling their contributions and rights, justice and injustice: the explicit language of the narratives makes those distinctions very clear. As time goes by, the kind of implicit construction of discourse becomes even more tangible when the discourse of power differences is combined with the discourse of ethnic-centrism. Putting all the discursive formation and looking the discourse from a wider perspective, constructing the historical discourse of Malaysia is shockingly still unresolved, even in the online sphere. This phenomenon creates polemic and challenge status quo.

The data collected showed that there are ‘multiple’ sense of history consciousness. There is an effort to revise the national history. Consequently, the writing of national history should be inclusive and fair to the Sarawak people. As a result, people tend to believe that their history has been subjugated and marginalized.

Second Stage: Survey

In general, there appeared to be a trend for the historical consciousness. Based on figure 1.0, 3.952 is the highest mean score which means, most of the people in Sarawak were conscious

about history. Meanwhile, 3.086 mean score shows the least toward online sources that related to the perspectives of people in Sarawak. The results of this analysis shown that the knowledge of Malaysia history is being marginalized and subjugated.

Findings

History is bias and been marginalized by some party. These issues are prolonged discussion in the world history discipline and this kind of history exists to fulfill community needs. At the same time, dominant discourses represented through history discourse is actually the reality. It is elucidating the important facts that seemingly important to the people in Sarawak. Hence, projecting the binary of 'Us' vs 'Them' and seeding 'othering' in the heart of Malaysian. Thus, the idea of an alternative contestation or better known as 'subjugated knowledge' contended by Foucault (1989) runs parallel to the urban based thinking of cosmopolitans and the idea of multiculturalism (Ang, 2010). This 'subjugated knowledge' should be emancipated, celebrated, and accepted in the open spirit.

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Author's Biography

Dr. Norena Abdul Karim Zamri is a senior lecturer at Faculty of Communication and Media Studies, Universiti Teknologi Mara (UiTM), Alor Gajah branch, Melaka. Her research interests are in New Media and History.

Adam Abdul Karim Zamri is a sports journalist at Astro Arena. He is currently pursuing his Master in Journalism at Universiti Teknologi Mara, UiTM Shah Alam.