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New Malaysia cinema and alternative imaginings of national identity and culture.

Abstract:

This paper is an attempt to critically engage with the Malaysian nation-state's bounded notion of 'national identity' and 'national culture' in the context of cultural globalisation, in which, according to Appadurai, via the growth of media technology, the "imagination" has become "the basis of the plurality of imagined worlds" and "staging ground for action". This presentation seeks to explore the possibilities of 'agency' in the context of identity-making in Malaysia through the cinematic medium, especially the alternative imaginings towards a more fluid notion of 'national identity' and 'national culture', as expressed in the new Malaysian cinema, especially through the works of indie film makers . The paper attempts to explore via case studies the contents of these new imaginings of 'identity' which move beyond the confines of ethnicity and fixity as outlined in the 1971 National Cultural Policy, a document which has since been the 'authority-definer' of 'nation' and cultural identity in Malaysia.

Speaker's profile:

ZAWAWI IBRAHIM (PhD, Monash) is a social anthropologist, currently professor, Sociology and Anthropology programme and Institute of Asian Studies, Universiti Brunei Darussalam. Formerly held positions as Chairman, Development Studies, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Penang; Deputy Director, Institute of Malay World and Civilisation, National University Malaysia; Dean, Faculty of Applied and Creative Arts, and Deputy Dean, Faculty of Social Sciences, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak (Unimas). Zawawi is lead researcher for the popular culture track at IAS. He has researched and published on Malay peasantry and plantation labour, indigenous communities of Orang Asli, Penans and Kadazandusuns, AIDS, Multiculturalism in Sarawak, new media, and the new Malaysian cinema. His current research is on contemporary Islamic cinema in Indonesia and Malaysia, and Brunei Kg Ayer postmodernist ethnography. His book publications include : *Regional Development in Malaysia and the 'Tribal Question'* (Hull Centre for Southeast Asian Studies, 1995), *The Malay Labourer* (ISEAS, 1998); *Cultural Contestations* (Asean University Press, 1998); *Hidden Voices* (Malaysian Aids Council, 1999), *Blogging and Democratisation in Malaysia* (SIRD, 2008); *Voices from the Crocker Range Indigenous Communities, Sabah* (Institute of East Asian Studies, Unimas); *Representation, Identity and Multiculturalism in Sarawak* (Association of Malaysian Social Science (PSSM) & Dayak Cultural Foundation, 2008); *Social Science and Knowledge in a Globalising World* (PSSM & SIRD, 2012); and *Masyarakat Penan dan Impian Pembangunan* (SIRD, 2012). He has also published articles in *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, *Bulletin of Concerned Asian Scholars (Critical Asian Studies)*, *Modern Asian Studies*, *Asian Studies Review*, *Suomen Antropologi*, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, *Spectator*, *Asian Journal of Social Science*, *South East Asian Studies (Tonan Ajia Kenkyu)*, *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, *Senri Ethnological Studies*, *Journal of Malaysian and Comparative Law*, *Prisma*, *JMBRAS*, *Kajian Malaysia*, *Akademika*, and *Sarawak Museum Journal*.

